

A Transformed Witness for Jesus

Acts 21:40-22:29

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We are now in the section of Acts called Paul's trials, Acts 21-28. Although Paul's missionary journeys are over, everything that happens to him serves to advance the gospel. At every opportunity he gets, he is a witness. He is no longer officially designated as a "*missionary*." We will learn that he was a Roman citizen who was under arrest, and even in his trials and incarceration, he was a witness to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything Paul did as a Christian citizen of Rome served to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was how Paul looked at life.

The story is told about a man who lived in a village in England. One day, when he had gotten off of work, he decided to stop by the pub with his buddies and have a pint. He stayed later than he intended and knew his wife would be mad because he was going to be home late. So, to try to make up for lost time, he decided to take a shortcut through the cemetery. He didn't like walking through the cemetery in the daytime, much less at night, but in order to save time, he set out at a very fast pace. By the time he left the pub, it was dark and had begun to rain a little, and the cemetery had very few lights. As he wandered in the direction of where he thought the gate, he got off the path. Then to his great horror, he fell into an open grave. It had just been dug, and thank goodness it was empty. However, the hole was deep, and because it had been raining, the sides of the grave were slippery. He tried every way possible to get out, but he could not. He spent the next couple of hours calling out for help, but no one answered. Finally, he just gave up and decided he would have to wait until morning.

As it happened, another man was leaving the pub and trying to get home in a hurry. He, too, decided to cut through the cemetery. Like the first man, he had a few too many drinks and wandered off of the path. By chance, he fell into the same grave as the first man.

When the second man fell into the grave, it knocked him unconscious. The first man was glad to have a little company but also thought they might be able to work together to get out of the grave. After a few minutes, the second man regained his senses; he realized whatever had just happened was not good. He was wet, lying in a hole in the mud. It was so dark he could not see his hand in front of his face. Slowly it dawned on him that he was in trouble, and he said out loud, "*What in the world just happened?*" Then the first man, who was sitting at the opposite end of the grave, said, "*You fell into this grave with me.*"

Needless to say, the second man got out of the grave without any assistance. Do you know why the second man was able to get out of the grave when the first man was not? The second man was motivated! Hearing the voice of the first man transformed the drunk into a "*Go-Getter*."

Let's face it, often, when it comes to being a witness for Jesus, we often simply lack the motivation, don't we? Perhaps our transformation needs to be rekindled so we will make the most of every opportunity to be a witness and advance the gospel.

This morning we are going to pick up where we left off last Sunday in Acts 21. Paul had been beaten and arrested. They were preparing to haul him to jail when he asked to speak to the angry mob that had just beaten him. Then in Acts 21:40-22:29, we see Paul's first defense of his life and ministry.

Acts 21:40-22:29 breaks down into three sections: *converted, commissioned, and condemned*. Let's review this section of the narrative and then make some applications.

First, we hear Paul explain his *conversion* to Christ in Acts 21:40-22:11. After the Roman Centurion realized he was not the Egyptian assassin and was, in fact, fluent in Greek, he allowed him to address the angry mob.

Paul began by explaining who he was and what his life was like before he met Jesus (vv. 1-5). Then in vv. 6-11, he explained his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and was then taken by his friends into the city, where he waited to be told what to do.

Then in vv. 12-21, he explained how Jesus commissioned him. He said that Ananias, who was a devout Jew came to him to restore his sight and tell him what Jesus had said. Look in vv. 13-16:

Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour, I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ And he said, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Everything seemed to be fine up to this point. Then Paul explained how he had returned to Jerusalem and began to live out his life as a Christian. He was teaching about how Jesus came and fulfilled the law and the prophets.

At this point, we learn that while he was in the temple praying, he fell into a trance. Jesus told him to quickly get out of Jerusalem because the Jews would not welcome his testimony. The implication is that they would arrest him and try to kill him.

Paul did something we all probably try to do. We try to reason with Jesus about something he just told us to be obedient to. It's kind of funny because he explains things to Jesus as if Jesus does not know them. He explained his background as a Pharisee who persecuted Christians and even approved of the execution of Stephen. His point was that how could the Jews and Jewish leaders deny his transformation by the work of Jesus.

Then Jesus told him in v. 21:

Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

Up to this point, Paul's testimony was fine. However, when they heard that Jesus was sending him to the Gentiles, the Jews lost it.

Verses 22-29 concludes with their condemnation of his testimony. They wanted him dead at this point and called for him to be tried by flogging.

After they got him stretched out on the flogging table, Paul played his last card—his Roman citizenship. Look in v. 25:

“Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?”

At this point, the centurion realized he had made a big mistake because it was unlawful to flog a Roman citizen without a trial that resulted in condemnation. What the centurion discovered was that Paul was a citizen by birth. Even at this point, the centurion realized he had broken the law by binding Paul.

Verse 30 tells us that when Paul told them that he was a Roman citizen, it had the desired effect. The centurion unbound him. Then the centurion commanded the Jewish council to meet with Paul and have a civil conversation with him.

Let's pull together our first scene in Paul's trial. Here is our main point: *Transformed witnesses make the most of every opportunity to be a witness for Jesus.* Now let's apply the main point of the text.

1) A transformed witness for Jesus understands his own story (Acts 21:40-22:16). We had noted this before as we had moved through Acts and considered when Paul spoke to crowds. He knew his audience. He began by building a bridge to evangelism. He considered his audience and then began to construct a path to Jesus. In his address to the crowd, Paul covered three key points to move the conversation to Jesus.

1. What his life was like before Jesus (vv. 1-5)
2. How Jesus saved him (vv. 6-16)
3. What his life was like since he met Jesus (vv. 17-21)

In vv. 1-5, by covering what his life was like before he met Jesus, he was able to make connections to his fellow Jews. They remembered when Paul was Saul, the persecutor of the Way (church). He reminded them that he was from the key city of Tarsus and was trained by famed Pharisee Gamaliel.

Gamaliel was a very important Pharisee and was a key leader. Then he reminded them that he, like them, hated the *followers of Way*. He reminded them that he was commissioned by the high priest and the council of elders to search for those who followed Jesus, arrest them, and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment.

Then in vv. 6-16, he told them how Jesus saved him. In this part of his address, he recounts his trip to Damascus to arrest Christians. On the road there, Jesus appeared to him as he approached Damascus. He said that a great light from heaven shone all around him, and at that point, he fell to the ground. He could hear the voice of Jesus confronting him and telling him what to do. Look in vv. 7-11:

'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸ And I answered, *'Who are you, Lord?'* And he said to me, *'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'* ⁹ Now, those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, *'What shall I do, Lord?'* And the Lord said to me, *'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'* ¹¹ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

Here he told them that Jesus told him to go on into Damascus. Then Ananias, a devout Jew, would come to meet him. Ananias filled in the blanks of the gospel for Paul. He told him that Jesus was the *Righteous One* whom *God had sent to save His people* through his witness.

Then Ananias told Paul the proper response to the gospel. Look in v. 16:

Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

If you are not careful, you will read this text uncritically and think that baptism washes away your sins. This is not what this text teaches. If this was the only text we had on baptism and the washing away of sin, we might conclude this, but it is not. We know that works of the flesh do not save and that sin is not washed away through water baptism. Sins are forgiven by faith in the shed blood of Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

Ananias simply called Paul to rise and be baptized. Then he says:

Wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Wash away your sins; calling on his name is the same way of saying: *repent of your sin and believe in Jesus*. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin of salvation. By placing our faith in Jesus (calling on his name) as the One who died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin and that He was buried and rose again on the third day, we are, in essence, repenting of our sin and our sins are forgiven or washed away.

This was how Jesus saved Paul. So, you see, when we, as transformed people, make every opportunity to be a witness, it is not only important to understand our own story; we must also understand Jesus' story. I will come back to this in just a minute but let me bring it together with the last part of Paul's address.

He wrapped it up by talking about how his life changed when he met Jesus. Christ gave Paul a commission. He not only saved him, but his life was radically changed. He concluded by saying that Jesus told him that the Jews were not going to accept his testimony, so he was sending him to the Gentiles. At this point, his address was over. They had heard enough and would not listen to any more of his speech.

What we learn from Paul is helpful for us. His basic gospel presentation was: Explain what his life was like before he met Jesus. Then how he met Jesus and finally *concluded with what his life was like after he met Jesus*.

If you are a Christian and you want to share Christ with others, then Paul's gospel presentation here is very helpful for us. It will work with anyone. Just tell them what your life was like before you met Jesus, then how He saved you (this would be the circumstances that occurred in your life when you got saved), and conclude with what your life has been like since He saved you.

However, here is what we need to remember. As important as it is for us to understand our own story and be able to share that, the most important story we must understand is Jesus' story. This leads us to our second application principle that we briefly touched on earlier.

2) A transformed witness for Jesus understands Jesus' story (Acts 22:12-21). As interesting as how you came to faith in Jesus really is, it is not your story that saves anyone. We must understand how to tell Jesus' story.

Our story will help us connect with people or build bridges to evangelism. Our story may let them know who we are and where we are coming from, but our stories will not save them. Only Jesus' story, the gospel, is what saves. We must be able to tell Jesus' story and call people to repent and believe in Jesus. Jesus is the One who saves and transforms their lives.

Paul was able to share his story and also wove the gospel within his own story. Then Paul concluded his witness to the Jews with something that is also very important. He tells us how to respond to the gospel. He told them that he repented and believed in Jesus and then followed in baptism.

Paul was transformed. He was not the same man he used to be. He wanted his fellow Jews to believe in Jesus, so he made the most of his opportunity to share the gospel with them.

Paul knew that if Jesus could transform him that He could transform them. That's why he wrote what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

No one comes to Christ and wants to stay the same. Salvation means transformation, and that means we want to become like Jesus.

As powerful as our salvation stories might be, it is only Jesus' story that saves and transforms. *It is the gospel that changes everything.*

Two things to consider here: First, if you are not a Christian, then you need Jesus. You need to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin. He will save you and give you a new life in Him. You will be a new creation in Christ. Jesus is the Savior of Second Chances. It is His life that changes everything. Look to Jesus this morning.

Second, if you are a Christian, remember that it is not your story that saves; it is Jesus' story. *Give praise to God for your story.* Your story may be a simple one where you grew up in a Christian home and always heard about Jesus, so it was the most natural thing in the world was for you to trust Him. On the other hand, you may be one of those who went to hell and back before you gave up and humbled yourself and called on Jesus to save you. Both of these stories are powerful and blessings.

However, it is not your story that saves. Be sure that when you share with others about how you were saved that you most importantly tell Jesus' story. Tell them that He was the only Son of God. He stepped out of heaven and came to this earth. He never sinned by keeping God's Laws perfectly. Then tell them how He died on

the cross to pay for their penalty of sin against God because they had broken God's laws. Tell them how He rose from the dead on the third day to break that power of sin over them. Tell them that because Jesus rose from the dead that by their faith in Him, He gives them new life in Him. Then call them to faith in Christ and to follow Him in baptism in a local church. *This leads us to our final application principle.*

3) A transformed witness for Jesus understands that the results of being a witness are in Jesus' sovereign hands (Acts 22:22-29). Dr. Don Whitney, in his wonderful book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, asks the question: *What is success in evangelism?*

"What is success in evangelism? Is it when the person you witness to comes to Christ? Certainly, that's what we want to happen. But if this is success, are we failures whenever we share the gospel and people refuse to believe? Was Jesus an "evangelistic failure" when people like the rich young ruler turned away from Him and His message? Obviously not. Then neither are we when we present Christ and His message and they turn away in unbelief. We need to learn that sharing the gospel is successful evangelism. We ought to have an obsession for souls, and tearfully plead with God to see more people converted, but conversions are the fruit that God alone can give. In this regard we are like the postal service. Success is measured by the careful and accurate delivery of the message, not by the response of the recipient."¹

Paul was arrested and beaten after he shared the gospel with the Jews. Was Paul a failure? No, he was not.

Have you ever been beaten and arrested for sharing the gospel? Probably not. The point is that we share and leave the results in God's hands. Simply sharing the gospel is the goal. That is a huge win for any believer, and it is a win for those who hear.

Let's make it our aim to endeavor to share the gospel this week and make sure we share our story and then share Jesus' story.

I want to conclude with a point we have been making since we have been working through Acts. Everything that happens to Peter and Paul and the others has served to advance the gospel.

Our narrative concludes with Paul playing his Roman citizenship card in order to avoid being flogged. You need to realize that the type of flogging he was about to receive was one that would have most likely killed him. If he had not told them that he was a Roman citizen, then he would not have made it to Rome to be imprisoned there and preach at the government's expense.

I don't think Paul was afraid to die. He said he was prepared to die in Jerusalem, but he knew Jesus had called him to testify in Rome. His citizenship served to advance the gospel, so instead of dying in Jerusalem, he died in Rome. What we need to remember is that Paul reckoned himself as dead a long time ago, and that was how he lived his life. He didn't waste a moment but made the most of all of them.

Think about it this way. One of my favorite movies is *Braveheart*. I love the scene where they are about to go to battle, and they are outnumbered, and they have lost heart. They are about to turn and run away. The British King, Longshanks, offered them their lives, their families, and their land if they would not fight. It was actually a lie, but the army was about to believe it.

Then William Wallace tries to rally the troops. The army said to him, *"We want to go home to our wives and children; we want to live."*

Wallace responded by saying, *"Fight, and you may die. Run, and you'll live . . . but only for a while. But how many of you, laying on your death bed, would not give every day between this one and that one to come back on this battlefield and look at your enemies and say, 'You may take our lives, but you'll never take our freedom.'"*

¹ Don Whitney, *"Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,"* 103.

At that point, the whole army rallied behind him and put a beat down on the British. What happened? The whole army understood that they were as good as dead. When they reckoned themselves as dead, they went out and fought that way. They went out and laid their lives down for something that was greater than themselves.

Listen to me, people who have reckoned themselves as dead are dangerous people. The Apostle Paul calls us to reckon ourselves as dead and live transformed lives for Jesus. Galatians 2:20 says:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Then in Philippians 1:21, the Apostle Paul says:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Does everything in your life serve to advance the gospel? Let's be transformed witnesses for Christ who make the most of every opportunity to talk about Jesus. Let's reckon ourselves as dead and be dangerous witnesses for Jesus.