

ACTS 22 – Paul’s First Defense: To the Jewish Crowd

We are going to be in Acts Chapter 22. But I wanted to start off by asking you, having been in Acts now and studying Paul for several months, tell me something about Paul. What do you know about him? What are some things he did? What happened to him?

[Class response]

Paul, next to Jesus may be the most important human character in the Bible. He is pretty important and he made a huge difference in the world for Christianity. In our study so far, Paul has been on three missionary journeys, was well-traveled, and led hundreds, maybe even thousands of people to Christ. One source I referenced said that Paul personally started about 20 churches. Those churches then started other churches. Paul wrote letters to several of those churches.

So, here you have the Apostle Paul – he is this great man of God, carrying the Gospel to many people, and a lot of people are getting saved. How do think Satan felt about Paul’s ministry? He hated it. Why is that? Because he is against God and, therefore, he hates anything that gets people saved and into the kingdom of God. Satan wants to have a lot of people with him for an eternity in hell. He doesn’t like it when people get saved.

Here is a quote from John MacArthur about Satan: “Whenever you are struggling to deliver somebody from Satan’s domain, Satan will put up some kind of resistance.” [This is what Paul was doing – trying to get people from Satan’s domain by preaching the Gospel]. “The presentation of the Gospel has a positive power, but it is a positive power in the midst of a negative situation, because Satan will do everything he can to hold on.”

Satan was actively involved in countering Paul’s ministry. Satan did everything he could to hinder Paul’s missionary endeavors – beaten, stoned and left for dead, imprisoned, slandered, kicked out of the synagogue, run

out of town, ridiculed... people even tried to kill Paul! That was all Satanic opposition. Sure, it was people doing it, but it came from Satan's influence.

The book of Acts records five of Paul's "defenses." It is not that he did anything wrong and he was in a court of law defending his actions. He defends the Gospel, his preaching of the Gospel. That is what people hated him for and wanted to kill him for – what he was preaching and how he was affecting people's lives. So, he defends that to various groups. The first two defenses are to Jews (Ch 22 the crowd and Ch 23 the Sanhedrin). The last three defenses we will see are to Romans (Ch 24 Felix, Ch 25 Festus, Ch 26 Agrippa).

The first defense will be to this Jewish crowd. That is where we left off our study last time. There was this big disturbance in the temple. The crowd tried to kill Paul and he was rescued by the Roman soldiers. They took him into the barracks, the Antonian Fortress. And now Paul is standing on the steps of the Antonian Fortress and he motioned with his hand for them to be quiet. Once they quieted down, Paul began to address them in their native Hebrew language. This is what he says...

READ Acts 22:1-2

"A gentle answer turns away wrath..." (Proverbs 15:1). That is what Paul is doing here. He addresses the crowd gently and politely as "brothers and fathers." Paul knows this crowd is hostile (they tried to kill him), but he just wants for them to hear him out. So, he gets them to quiet down and he speaks to the people in their own language. People are more willing to listen to someone if they can speak to them in their own language and dialect. This connection secures their careful attention to what Paul is about to say.

So, Paul begins by introducing himself...

READ Acts 22:3

He begins by saying, "I am a Jew." He identifies himself with the Jewish people. Having been born in Tarsus, which is a Gentile city, would

understandably be a reason for Paul to be empathetic for the Gentiles. But Paul was actually raised in Jerusalem. That is what he is reminding them of. Here it is revealed for the first time in Scripture that, when he was younger, Paul had been a student under this man Gamaliel. We met Gamaliel before, back in Acts Chapter 5. Gamaliel was described in that chapter as "a Pharisee...a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people..." (Acts 5:34). So, we know about Gamaliel. But this is the first time that we realize that Paul was one of his students.

Paul's introduction here connects him with two of the major factions of Jews – the Hellenists (liberal moderates) and the Hebraists (fundamental conservatives). They had extreme differences in theology. But one of the things they agreed on was they both had a zeal for the law. So, what Paul does is he finds this common ground because he also had a zeal for the law at one time. And so, he connects with his audience. This is a classic example of Paul's ability to connect with a group that was hostile toward him. He begins to talk about his earlier years, before his Christian conversion. Remember that Paul was formerly known as Saul of Tarsus. So, what he is about to talk about was back in his Saul of Tarsus days. He had been a persecutor of the church. This is what he says...

READ Acts 22:4-5

So, he was serving as an agent for the Sanhedrin (the "council"). He had been sent to Damascus on a special mission. This was 20-plus years ago. It has been a while back. He was going to put an end to "this Way." If you recall this was the term used for the Christian movement back in its early days. The term "Christian" came later.

Paul's words here are a new revelation to the younger people in the crowd. Paul's point that he is trying to make is that nobody had been more zealous for the law than he had been. In his letter to the Philippians Paul would describe himself (back in these days) as "a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6).

In the Who's Who of Jewish Heroes his picture was right there first. But all that had been true of him 20 years ago. There are a lot of people here that are standing who do not remember the old Saul of Tarsus. So, he is basically reminding them who he was before he got saved.

But something happened that changed Paul from that old Saul back then that persecuted the church to make him the way he is now – a preacher of the Gospel. A complete change, 180 degrees. At this point he begins to share his personal testimony of how he got saved, what made that difference.

This passage we are about to get into is a repeat for us of what Paul's experience was back in Acts Chapter 9. We already looked at that. It's an amazing story and it is always worth hearing again. It is a rather long passage. Let me read the whole thing and then we'll talk about it. Keep in mind that most of the people in the crowd are hearing Paul's story for the very first time.

READ Acts 22:6-16

One great thing about sharing our own personal testimony is that nobody can argue with you about it – what YOU experienced, what YOU saw, what YOU heard, and what YOU felt. They cannot say it didn't happen the way you say that it did because they weren't there. You were. It is YOUR story.

READ Acts 22:17-18

This part of Paul's story is new to us. This was not a part of the Acts Chapter 9 account – that Jesus came to this newly-converted Saul in a vision and talked to him. What does Jesus say? He warns Saul that the Jews were not going to listen to him. They were going to reject his message. So, while Paul is telling this to the crowd, what do you suppose they are thinking in their minds as they are hearing this – Jesus saying these things about them? It is true. They did not listen to him. But they are not painted in a very good light, are they? So, as he is saying all this the

crowd is probably a little on edge. Paul is probably sensing a little agitation from the crowd.

READ Acts 22:19-20

When Jesus is talking to Paul originally, Paul is pushing back against the idea that the Jews will reject him. "Hey, I am one of them. They know who I am." It is almost like he is doubting that they are going to reject him.

I want to give you this quote from John Phillips in his commentary. He says that "He [Paul] is trying to get [his listeners, these Jerusalem Jews] to realize, knowing his [past] record... that he must have had some convincing reasons for changing his ways." And so, the obvious question is, "What caused that?" He is preparing them for what he is about to say... Jesus changed his life.

Everything is going along pretty well and then Paul says this...

READ Acts 22:21

No sooner does the word "Gentiles" come out of Paul's mouth, then the sparks begin to fly. Up to this word they listened to him.

READ Acts 22:22-23

Just the mention of the Gentiles to them, they get all riled up. This is the kind of hatred they have for the Gentiles. This incident here points out the primary problem that the Jews had with Paul. He had turned away from his own people, the Jews, and embraced what in their minds they viewed as godless barbarians, worthless people. It just made no sense at all to them. Why would Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel send Paul to be an apostle to the people whom the Jews considered to be dogs? Why on earth would God do that? They just couldn't grasp this whole idea, this concept.

READ Acts 22:24

The tribune sees the crowd in this uproar and he pulls Paul back into the safety of the Antonian Fortress. The commander has no idea what just

happened. From his vantage point he is standing there and watching Paul speak to these people and everything is going well. Then all of a sudden, the next thing you know, the whole situation spins out of control! What did Paul say to get them acting like this? So, he is going to try and beat it out of Paul – “What is it that you said?” Now, you have to remember that this Roman commander and his men do not speak Hebrew or Aramaic, or, if they do, they do not speak it very well. He does not know what Paul had said. Whatever it was, though, it must have been terrible. That is what is in his mind. He is determined to find out from Paul what he said to work the crowd up into such a frenzy.

You get the strong sense here that the commander is quite upset with Paul and that he blames him for inciting the crowd. He orders Paul to be flogged (or scourged). Now, this whip is no ordinary whip. This device that the Romans used to beat people, this scourge, is a device of torture. It had leather straps weighted with bits of iron and was bound to a handle. Being scourged was not a pleasant experience to say the least.

The reason why the Roman commander is so mad at Paul is probably that he is fearful of losing his job over this whole Paul incident. His primary duty is to keep peace in Jerusalem. And now this crowd is still out there. They are still riled up over what Paul said. He does not know what they are going to do. They could still go on a rampage throughout Jerusalem and burn the city and do all kinds of destruction. If that happens the commander knows that he will probably be demoted and reassigned. He does not want that to happen. So, that is why he is so upset with Paul. Well, they are getting ready to beat Paul...

Acts 22:25

So, here is the scourge and they are getting ready to whack Paul in the back with it. Paul at that point pulls out his trump card and says, “Oh, by the way, did I mention that I was a Roman citizen?” That is basically what happens here. This grabs the attention of the Roman centurion who is about to beat Paul. Roman law is clear on this point. To bind a Roman

citizen was serious enough. But then to flog him was totally illegal. And to do so to an uncondemned (he had not even been to court and been condemned yet) Roman citizen was a miscarriage of justice, unheard of.

Acts 22:26-29

Oops! Thankfully, Paul was not beaten on this particular day. Cooler heads prevailed.

We are told in v 29 that the Roman commander, the tribune, is "afraid." Not only are the streets of Jerusalem in an uproar, but now this prisoner, the guy he knows is responsible for that uproar, has been illegally bound and was almost beaten. So, he has some major things going on that are a problem for him. But the commander is determined to find out once and for all why the Jerusalem Jews are so angry at this guy Paul. He just cannot figure it out. He is completely baffled by the whole thing. He doesn't know what to do. He can't believe a thing Paul says because he does not really trust him. So, what does he do next? What is his next course of action to find the truth out?

READ Acts 22:30

The commander goes to the governing body of the Jews. He thinks that perhaps they can shed some light on the situation. He thinks that maybe the members of the Sanhedrin will be a more reliable source of information than Paul. He probably doesn't trust Paul. And so, Paul is brought before the Jewish court and is given another opportunity to make a defense of himself and of the Gospel that he preaches.

This will be Paul's second defense and that will be in Chapter 23 which we will get to next time.

There are some applications from today's lesson...

- When talking to others it is important to find common ground with them. This will go a long way toward getting people to be

more open and receptive to what you have to say. It applies to talking about the Gospel or anything else. You always want to find common ground. That is what Paul was good at.

- Paul could show grace and love toward a hostile crowd (one that wanted to kill him) because of the grace and love that Jesus had showed to him years before on the Damascus Road. Because of what Jesus did, Paul could show that same love, even toward people who did not like him.
- Our salvation is a gift that we can't keep to ourselves. It is the gift that keeps on giving. The best evangelism tool we have is our own story. Be prepared then to tell others what Jesus did for you and how Jesus changed your life. Always have your story ready to share with someone. You never know when that opportunity is going to come up.
- The best offering we can give God is **ourselves** – our willingness to be used by Him, however He leads, the remaining years of our life. Remember that your time, money, finances, health and resources all belong to HIM.