

# Paul's Defence Before the Mob

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, October 5th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. This morning, as you can see on the screen, we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World, this morning.

And we're continuing to dig into the history of the early church together to see what we can learn from the people and places and events that we study together. So we'll be pausing this series next Sunday because I'm going to be bringing a Thanksgiving message.

And I'm telling you, it sounds dorky as a pastor, but I'm a pastor, so what do you do? I am enjoying preparing this sermon to bring to you next week. I'm feeling inspired and encouraged and hopeful, and be here for that because I want to share that with you.

Last week, we learned about Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, and our passage ended with Acts 21, verse 40, which says, after receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd.

When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, colon, pause. Remember last week I said, oh, we're stopping right at Paul's speech, but we're continuing next week.

[ 1 : 16 ] So here we are with that. So our passage this morning is found in Acts 22, verses 1 to 21. So please turn in your Bibles to that passage.

Grab a Bible from the pew in front of you if you need to, or you can listen as I read it for us. Paul begins to speak. Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city.

I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this way to the death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all of the council can themselves testify.

I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. About noon, as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.

[ 2 : 29 ] I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord? I asked. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.

He replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. What shall I do, Lord? I asked. Get up, the Lord said, and go into Damascus.

There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do. My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. A man named Ananias came to see me.

He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very moment, I was able to see him.

Then he said, The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all the people of what you have seen and heard.

[ 3 : 37 ] And now, I love this part. What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name. When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me.

Quick, he said, leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me. Lord, I replied, these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you.

And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, shed, sorry, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then the Lord said to me, Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

And we know how that has gone so far, far away to the Gentiles. Last week, we learned that Paul had barely survived a beating at the hands of an angry mob.

He was seized by the commander of this large group of Roman soldiers who had come to see what all the commotion was about. Maybe you remember that. We learned last week as well that Paul appealed to this Roman commander who had saved him.

[ 4 : 51 ] He begged him for an opportunity to speak to the people, the mob who had gathered there. And the commander gave Paul the opportunity to address the crowd. We recognize that, right?

The mob had just attacked him, and yet he wanted to speak to them. And we read, we heard this morning, that he was able to quiet the crowd down with a motion of his hands.

And as we've also just heard, the mob quieted down even more when Paul began to speak to them in Aramaic. So the vast majority of this crowd, almost all of them likely, would have understood him speaking to them in Aramaic.

Our sermon this morning is titled, Paul's Defense Before the Mob. So we've been given a lot of info this morning about this passage so far, and Paul defends himself before this mob that has already beaten him, we recognize that, and clearly seem to want him killed, right?

They're not just annoyed, they want him stopped. They want his ministry to end, period. So I think it's important for us to spend a little bit of time, because as Paul brings his defense before this mob, he sets the stage.

[ 6 : 06 ] He tells his story. In the men's breakfast yesterday, we heard a testimony, and we've been talking as men in our church about the importance of that, right?

You can give somebody a theological explanation for why God is important, why God is real, why God is living and powerful, why God's word is true, but friends, if you give an example from your own life, who can refute that, right?

How can somebody say that your personal experience with Jesus is not true? That's the best example that we have, is to give a personal testimony of how God is at work in our lives, and so Paul begins there.

But he also begins by talking about his early days. He's setting the stage, and remember, Paul is a skilled debater, a skilled teacher, a skilled preacher, so he knows how to communicate best with the crowd.

So right away, he tells us that he was a Jew. He's born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and that was the principal city of the eastern Cilician plain, and that's located where Turkey is right now.

[ 7 : 14 ] So Tarsus, the city where Paul was born, had a reputation for being a center of culture and learning, and it was visited by historical figures over the centuries.

Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, they had all been in and to Tarsus. So it was a notable place.

But Paul then quickly says, while he was born there, he grew up in Jerusalem, right? He's giving us more context, more of his background. He goes on to say then, that he studied at the feet of a man named Gamaliel.

And I've had conversations with people over the last couple years, as we've been studying Acts, Paul in the connection to this man named Gamaliel. Well, not everybody knows who that is. So let's take a second here.

If you're not familiar with that name, Gamaliel was Saul's mentor and teacher before he was converted, right? Before he became Paul. Gamaliel was an influential Pharisee.

[ 8 : 21 ] He was an expert in the law and Jewish tradition during the days of the apostolic church. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin, and you probably know that name.

It was the highest Jewish council. So Paul was taught the importance of being a Pharisee. He was taught the importance of the law, which likely contributed then to his passion for serving God and defending the faith, right?

Paul can never be questioned for being anything but passionate in any phase of his life. So next, Paul goes on to describe how his passion led him to persecute the followers of this way, he says.

And we've talked about that a bit as well. That early term that we've recognized before was used to describe the followers of Jesus, the way. And as we know, not only did Paul fiercely persecute these early followers, he sought to have them thrown in prison or put to death, right?

He was an active participant in anything against the way and against the followers of Jesus. And what I love here is that Paul doesn't hide what he has done, right?

[ 9 : 37 ] It's so easy for us when we recognize how we've done something wrong or hurt someone to dismiss it. To sometimes we gaslight. Oh, I didn't hurt you.

Too bad you felt hurt. Have you ever heard that before? You felt hurt by someone and said, ouch. And they said, oh, I didn't hurt you. Oh, actually, from in here, I would say you did.

So we recognize that he was an active participant in persecuting the followers of Christ. But he doesn't hide, again, what he's done.

He doesn't blame anyone else. He doesn't point fingers or try to dodge responsibility here. He states the facts. He owns up to what he has done and who he was.

He even declares that the high priest and the Jewish council themselves could bear witness to the fact of what he did and who he was. He's making a case, in a way, against himself, right?

[ 10 : 41 ] He's owning up to his guilt and responsibility. So what about Paul's conversion? Then he goes on to talk about it. And then in our study of Acts, we've talked a lot about different dramatic stories of conversion.

People who change their ways and follow Jesus. But I think someone could argue this with me, but I think there's probably no more powerful story of conversion than Paul's.

I talked to somebody about it after the service last Sunday. So against Jesus. So against his message. So against God's plan for the world.

And then became the most fierce defender of the faith. The most passionate advocate for it. So Paul's talking about his conversion.

And he's talking about being on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. And this great light from heaven shone around him. So it's interesting to me to see Paul's faith on display next.

[ 11 : 43 ] He doesn't scratch his head, wondering what might be going on. Like, oh my, right? What's happening? What is happening? We read that Paul falls to the ground. Now, maybe he was shocked.

But I have a feeling he got a sense of what was going on. Maybe he was shocked at what he was witnessing. But maybe I think he had a sense that God was at work.

But he doesn't say, right? Certainly in this speech that he gives. But then he immediately hears a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

That removes all doubt of who this interaction is with, right? Paul answered still, though, who are you, Lord? Maybe he's just trying to confirm.

And then the voice answers. We read, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. And Paul says that his companions saw the light.

[ 12 : 42 ] Obviously, they didn't see it in the full way we might understand that expression. But they didn't understand, right? They saw this brilliant light. Or maybe they didn't hear the voice.

Again, it's not clear, but they don't get it, right? It could be that this conversation between Jesus and Paul was intended for Paul's ears only. Right?

Maybe Paul heard Jesus' voice and no one else did. So this conversation between Paul and Jesus continues. Paul says, what shall I do, Lord?

Lord, Jesus says, arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do. Paul tells the crowd how the light had blinded him, right?

So then he is led by the hand into Damascus. He is blinded and needs to be guided to where he needs to go. And then we read that he met a devout Jewish man named Ananias, who was respected by all the Jews in Damascus.

[ 13 : 44 ] And then Ananias restores Paul's sight. So, but we can see there, though, that God sent Ananias to Paul for more than just restoring his sight, right?

It wasn't just, yeah, restore his sight and your work is done. Ananias confirms to Paul that God has chosen him for a purpose. He also confirms that Paul will be a witness to others about what he has personally seen and heard.

He has a mission. And as I said, as I read the passage for us, I love this next part. Ananias gives Saul, Paul, a command saying, what are you waiting for?

Right? I have, I've restored your eyesight. I've given you your mission. Now, why are you still here? He directs him to get baptized, to have his sins washed away.

Directs him to call on the name of the Lord and essentially to get to work. He has a job to do. And so Ananias is not mincing words there. Next, Paul tells the crowd that as he returned to Jerusalem, he was praying in the temple and he fell into a trance and had a vision.

[ 14 : 59 ] In his vision, Jesus told Paul, Jesus is communicating directly to Paul again. He tells him to run from Jerusalem because the people there wouldn't believe his testimony about the Lord.

So at this point in Paul's defense, we get the sense in this passage that the mob is done. Right? You had your chance to make your case.

We are done listening to you. And then Paul has to be taken away by the Roman soldiers, we see. So we will be looking at what happens in two weeks as we continue in this story, what happens after that speech.

But for now, what can we learn from this? What can we learn from what we've heard this morning? I talked about this a bit last week and possibly the week before as well, that Paul's politeness under trying circumstances should stand out to us.

So we recognized his polite appeal to the Roman commander last week. And we've seen then this morning that he addressed a mob waiting to kill him.

[ 16 : 09 ] He starts out by saying brothers and fathers, right? He's addressing them as equals, as people whom he respects. So his actions here and his demeanor demonstrate what he later taught others.

I don't know if you can recognize that, but let's look at it a bit. So Paul says in Colossians 4 verse 6, Let your conversations be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul's saying here that it's always important to be gracious and respectful in the things that we say. To treat others, surprisingly, as we would like to be treated ourselves.

Sound familiar? So no matter how much we think our perspective on things that we might say makes sense, friends, we lose our credibility when we don't treat other people the way we want to be treated.

Paul teaches again in 2 Timothy verses 2, 23 and 24. He says, Don't have anything to do with foolish or stupid arguments.

[ 17 : 22 ] Now when I read that verse, I have to laugh because I think of my mother. The word stupid was banned in our house. So banned, banned, very, extremely, highly banned.

Frowned upon, discouraged, never punished for, but punished adjacent. So when I read Paul saying stupid, I gasp.

It's like he cursed. But he says, Don't have anything to do with foolish or stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel.

Instead, we must be kind to everyone. Able to teach and not resentful. Especially these days, I think. It can be too easy, all too easy, to disagree.

To see other people as the enemy. Rather than another human being. Someone who has value and significance just like we do. Paul reminds us here that we need to stay out of pointless arguments.

[ 18 : 34 ] Pointless arguments with other people that are ultimately just a waste of time and energy. And tend to, in the end, suck our joy. Our world is so argument prone these days.

There's suggestions more and more that people with different views or opinions are nothing better than our enemy. Is that God's will? I don't think it is.

So let's not let that toxic perspective and influence creep into our lives. Certainly it's not just our demeanor or attitude that will lead other people to Jesus.

Right? It's not just being a good person and saying, Have a good day. That will lead other people to Jesus. It will model care and compassion. But that won't do enough to convey the message of love and forgiveness that Christ represents.

The good news of Jesus can't just be suggested or implied. It must be shared. Boldly and without fear. As the most important part of our witness.

[ 19 : 44 ] And our defense of the faith. Friends, who Jesus was and is, what he has done and will do, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of everyone who declares him to be their Lord and follows him.

We must be people who care for others first. People who put others before ourselves. People who are humble and respectful.

People who are tender and teachable. That is a critical part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Let's ask God to help us be that kind of person in everything we say and everything we do.

Amen. Amen.