

## Acts 21:37–22:29

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[ 0 : 00 ] May I pray with us, for us, thy word, O God, is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. And so, by your spirit, with your word, would you illumine the road ahead? May you speak, and may we hear, and go forth to be encouraged, to be witnesses, to be heralds of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. What happens to a person when they meet Jesus?

What changes ought to occur in their life? How is the trajectory of life altered? Does it improve life's quality? Will it be a life of prosperity and ease? Please, I want to open up with a few sentences from a classic by Bishop J.C.

[ 1 : 20 ] Ryle. He served in England in the 19th century on his classic Holiness. And he writes about what, he has a beautiful chapter on the cost of being a Christian.

And he writes this. It does cost something to be a real Christian. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made in Egypt, to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, a race to be run.

Conversion is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict in which it costs much to win the victory.

It costs much to win the victory. The life of the Christian is an opposed life.

You will be opposed by the devil, opposed by the world, even opposed by your very own self. To save your life, somehow you must learn to lose it.

[ 2 : 41 ] And in losing it, you will somehow find it. This morning, we get a snapshot of what it looks like for a Christian to lose their life.

Not lose their life to death or martyrdom, at least not in this chapter. But lose their life, their rights, their comforts, their privileges, their preferences, their desires, their ambitions.

What does a converted life look like? Well, our passage this morning is actually configured quite symmetrically.

In the center, we have Paul's giant speech. From beginning in chapter 22, running through the, through beginning verse 1, running through verse 21.

It's sandwiched by two mistakes. Two mistakes. The Tribune makes two mistakes. He makes a mistake about Paul's identity.

[ 3 : 54 ] In verse, in chapter 21, verse 37. And he makes another mistake regarding his citizenship. In chapter 22, beginning in, you know, verse 26 and following.

So that's how our passage is broken down. Paul's speech, sandwiched by two mistakes. It's noteworthy that from this point on, Paul's defense speeches, which this is the first of a handful, and his incidental travels comprise nearly a quarter of the entire book.

It's very important to Luke, the writer. It's actually been noted by sheer number of verses that there are more verses attributed to Paul's defense than his missionary preaching of the gospel.

As to say that as much as he was a missionary to promote the propagation of the gospel, he was also a staunch defender of it. Well, to say Jerusalem was in an uproar would be both accurate and possibly an understatement.

Paul likely would have been dead already at this point if it were not for the Roman Tribune and the group of soldiers that preserved his very life. The crowd was so enraged and was beating Paul to death, according to chapter 132.

[ 5 : 23 ] If it were not for the soldiers that carried him through the crowd and back to the barracks, the church would have had another martyr. The situation is beyond tense.

The noise level is high. The Roman soldiers are fighting to push back the crowd. And in the middle of the chaos, Paul speaks. He speaks.

And he asks the Tribune, or the commander of the Roman cohort, probably up to a thousand soldiers, a question. He says, may I say something to you?  
Well, the Tribune is likely caught off guard. He's caught off guard because Paul speaks Greek. It turns out that the Tribune, so because Paul, he's caught off guard because Paul speaks Greek. And he asks, you actually speak Greek? And he identifies Paul and he says, oh, I know exactly who you are if you speak Greek. You're the revolutionary.  
[ 6 : 27 ] The Egyptian revolutionary. Known to be the leader of this revolution titled, made up of the assassins, literally translated dagger men.

And what this revolutionary group would do is during festivals and large gatherings, they would conceal daggers in their cloaks. And amongst the crowd, they would identify either Roman soldiers, Roman employees, or pro-Romans, and stab them to kill them and then disappear in the crowd. Josephus actually documents this. He says a few years prior, there was an Egyptian who claimed to be a prophet. And he assembled thousands of followers. And there they stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem.

He told them to wait for his word because once he announced his word, the walls of Jerusalem would topple and they would walk into the city and overtake the Romans. Of course, Rome caught wind of this, snuffed it out, killed many, only to be unable to capture the Egyptian leader. Well, the cult leader was despised by the Jews because he duped them into thinking he was some messianic figure. And of course, he was stopped by Rome for prosecution.

[ 7 : 46 ] So the tribune connects the dots and says, oh, you speak Greek. You're probably the Egyptian. And he's excited because if he had captured the revolutionary, Rome would be pleased.

However, the tribune mistook his identity. Paul dispels this misidentification. He says, as a matter of fact, I'm not an Egyptian.

I'm actually a Jew from the city of Tarsus, a citizen of the city. And Paul's correction gives way to a petition to speak to the crowd from the top of the barrack steps.

We're not sure why Paul earned the right to speak. It's unusual. One writer notes that Tarsus was a very well-known city.

It was quite prestigious in its day. Perhaps the tribune said, well, he's a citizen of Tarsus, a very intellectual city, and therefore deserves to say something.

[ 8 : 56 ] We're not sure why. But he's given the opportunity to speak. And it's noteworthy that Paul, when he begins to defend himself or defend the gospel message, they are often the outcome of misunderstandings.

So here, he's been misunderstood in a couple of ways. The Jews think he's anti-Judaism, anti-temple, anti-law, anti-Moses.

Here, the Romans probably think, oh, he's a revolutionary. He's anti-Rome. And Luke gives Paul the opportunity to speak for himself.

He's being accused of what he is not. And the defense that Paul gives will allow him to correct these misunderstandings and define himself. He wants to dispel the notion that he's anti-Judaism or anti-Semitic.

As a matter of fact, Paul's speech before the temple crowd was primarily aimed at establishing his full commitment to Judaism. He does this brilliantly in his speech from 22.1 to 21.

[ 10 : 07 ] It moves in this way. He establishes his credibility. Then recalls his conversion. And asserts his commissioning.

He establishes his credibility, recalls his conversion, and asserts his commissioning. His credibility. Paul's tact is evident.

Throughout his speech, he places Judaism in a positive light. He's a product of multiculturalism. He's able to move between cultures. He's speaking Greek to the Roman official. And all of a sudden, he switches languages, likely to Aramaic, to address the Jewish crowd.

And he calls them brothers and fathers, his kinsmen. At this point, the crowd has been silenced. And it grows even quieter.

And he bears witness to who he is. It's a three-fold formula which is common in the ancient world.

[ 11 : 11 ] The crowd is wondering three things. Where were you born? Where were you raised? And how were you educated? And so Paul anticipates.

He says, I was born in Tarsus. It's no ordinary city. Ancient inscriptions describe it as the first and greatest, most beautiful metropolis. But I was brought up in this very city, Jerusalem.

And I was educated and trained under Gamaliel. Gamaliel was most significant and probably the most influential Pharisaic educator in the early first century.

In other words, he not only came from a prestigious city, he was educated in a prestigious environment.

For those familiar with Gamaliel, this would have been enough. But then for those untrained in the law, he makes them aware that he was strictly educated in the law of our fathers.

[12:17] Jewish law. In other words, Paul excelled in study and the practice of Pharisaic teaching. Furthermore, he was as zealous for God as they were that very day.

The crowd was that very day. His zeal even led him to persecute followers of the way. Namely, Christians.

The verbs are very vivid. He bound them. He delivered them. He pursued them with the desire to punish them. His credibility and his credentials were thorough.

No one could draw the conclusion that he was there to undermine Judaism. Instead, his pedigree proved that he was a staunch defender of the purity of Judaism. His credentials, though impressive, we need to mention, were an obstacle for him in coming to faith.

It's interesting. It's interesting that Luke notes. Even in Paul's former zealous law-adhering life, he still needed, according to verse 16, his sins to be washed away.

[13:37] His former life was an indicator of his legitimacy. His former life was an upright and moral life.

His former life was a good life. You see, in the eyes of the world, there was nothing wrong with Paul.

He was born in the right country. Raised in the right city. His passport bore the correct emblem.

He was educated in the right institution. But in all of this, we will find Paul will lay that all aside.

You see, for Paul, coming to faith wasn't... The obstacle for him coming to faith was not his badness or his immorality or his heinous or detestable sins.

[14:40] It was actually his very goodness and his achievements. Perhaps that's some of us in this room.

Well, being I never went to prison. Listen, I'm not that bad. I'm not that dirty. I'm not that evil. I'm actually good.

I'm well-intentioned, well-mannered, well-motivated, sincere, morally upright, law-adhering.

Just like Paul. But you see, Paul's obstacle is not his badness. Paul's obstacle is his goodness. His goodness.

And for some of us, maybe like Paul. Hey, Bing, I'm sincere. Have you ever considered, like Paul, you may be sincerely wrong?

[15:49] Well, Paul renounces these things. And all of a sudden, there's a reversal of fortune in Paul's life.

He once was the one doing the binding. In that very moment, he was the one who was bound. He once was the foremost persecutor.

He has now become the persecuted. He was once empowered by the system. He obtained the papers to go chase down the Christians.

Now, he is powerless in that system. He was at one time the enforcer of religious purity. He was now its victim.

And how do we make all sense of this? Paul was going places. Reputable, recognizable, and highly regarded.

[16:50] All of a sudden, no one knows who he is. And he's the target of an angry mob. I wonder, back in Jerusalem, I wonder what his advisor thought.

Gamaliel, Paul, what have you done to yourself? I wonder what his classmates were thinking. Paul, really? I wonder what Paul himself thought.

His credentials lead way to his conversion. Beginning in verse 6, Paul recalls the significant day when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus.

Luke records this dramatic moment in Paul's life on three separate occasions. First in Acts chapter 9. It's told by Luke the narrator, so it's told in the third person. And then it's recounted two more times here in Acts 22, and again in Acts 26.

In the first person. There are large overlaps. There are notable differences and aspects that are absent from the others. Nevertheless, the core of Paul's recollection revolves around his being

confronted by Jesus.

[18:04] He was blinded and led into the city of Damascus. There, Ananias, a devout man according to the law, restores Paul's sight. Verse 14 highlights the core aspects of Paul's experience.

He says, The God of our fathers, or Ananias said to Paul, The God of our fathers, particularly the God of Israel, appointed Paul to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth.

To Paul was given special divine revelation. To Paul was given the physical voice of the Lord. To Paul was given the physical sight of the risen Jesus.

And because of his experience, he was deemed an apostle and a witness. For he both saw and heard the Lord. He rises and is baptized, emblematic of his identification with the Lord Jesus, recognizing him as the remover of sins.

The source of salvation for all who call on him. And the fulfillment of the promises of Israel. He's radically converted. He's not only converted, but then he's commissioned.

[19:18] His commissioning has been alluded to in verse 15 of chapter 22. That he would be a witness to everyone of what he has seen and heard.

But it again is reaffirmed in verses, beginning in verse 17. Paul re-enters Jerusalem. The timeline is debated, but I think most people think after three years, he's converted on the road to Damascus.

And for three years, he kind of hides out and he returns to Jerusalem. And there he finds himself in the temple and he's praying. He falls into a trance. And he's given direct and deliberate instructions to get out of the city.

According to verse 18, make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me, is what Jesus says to him. Jesus says, Paul, leave the city, because they will not receive the message of the gospel and its universal nature.

And Paul replies. He starts a conversation with Jesus. And he says, hey, Jesus, do you know who I am? I mean, I'm paraphrasing.

[20:39] Do you know who I am? They know me. They know my credentials. They know what I used to do. They know that I imprisoned those who used to...

I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. They know I stood on hand when Stephen died. I was giving approval to that.

I was watching over. I was holding the coats of those throwing the rocks. I can convince them. I can convert Jerusalem.

I can make them believe. Well, the Lord replies. Go.

Get out of here. I will send you far away to the Gentiles. The rejection of Jesus as the Messianic Savior was imminent.

[21:41] Jerusalem would not want Jesus. What is foretold in verse 18 comes true in verse 22. The crowd has had enough.

Up through verse 20. They were willing to listen. But when verse 21 is uttered, the crowd erupts in disgust, calling for Paul's death.

They're disgusted and angered because in their understanding, there was no salvation apart from Judaism. They were okay with Gentiles becoming Jews in order to have access to God.

But they were not okay with Jews and Gentiles being put on level footing before God.

How could God, they are saying, love an outsider as much as he loved his treasured Israel?

[22:43] Israel. The animosity against Paul is the same animosity that people had with Jesus.

Earlier in Luke's gospel, you might remember, Jesus is teaching in Luke 4.

And if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to turn back there. I'll just summarize it, largely summarize it. But he's in the synagogue. He gets a scroll.

He reads it. And he says, hey, today in your presence, this is fulfilled. Pretty much saying, bam, the kingdom of God is here. And the people are like, whoa, whoa, whoa. You're just Joseph's son. And Jesus speaks to them.

He says, hey, no prophet will be acceptable in his hometown, namely Nazareth. And he goes on and he illustrates it from two very well-known Old Testament places that every adherent of Judaism would know.

He says, don't you know, in Elijah's day, when the heavens were shut up and there was a great famine over all the land, Elijah was sent to none of Israel.

[ 23 : 56 ] Instead, he was sent to a foreigner, a widow, a woman, and Zarephath, in the land of Sidon. And don't you know, in Elisha's day, there were a lot of people who were diseased with leprosy.

But God's man didn't go to God's people. Instead, Elisha healed only Naaman, the Syrian. And the text tells us this.

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the edge of a hill which the town was built so they could throw Jesus off the cliff.

Paul is identifying with Jesus. In the same way, Jesus, Jesus' ministry, enlarged out from Israel, Paul is actually stepping into that mission.

It is the mission of God. God reconciling all of humanity with Himself. You see, Paul is actually, in this account, he's enacting for us what the Gospel does.

[ 25 : 22 ] It summons a life. It lays claim on it. It redeems it. And it commissions it. If you asked Paul in his days when he was a Pharisee whether he was pleasing to God, he would have replied, absolutely.

Yet his zeal was misplaced. His confidence was misguided. His hope was misinformed. It took an encounter with Jesus to reconfigure him and to reorient him to the true mission of God.

And you may ask, is Paul supposed to be an example for us? Yes and no. There's only one Apostle Paul. Our testimonies will not become sacred Scripture like his have become.

They are not authoritative. But the template of every Christian life has these accents, doesn't it? These are my credentials.

This was my confidence. These were my sins. These were my idols. And then I met Jesus. I didn't intend on meeting Jesus.

[ 26 : 26 ] He met me. And as a result, I've been reoriented and recommissioned. It's not a defense of myself or my reputation, asserting my rights or my privileges.

Rather, my defense and commissioning is to ensure that no one misunderstands this. that God's arms are wide-reaching to save all who call upon him.

When the moment comes for you to give a defense, make much of Christ. When the lab partner asks, you're a Christian, tell them.

I grew up here. I was raised here. I was educated here. And then while I was doing my thing, I met him or he met me.

And ever since that day, I've been reoriented and recommissioned. Make much of Christ. When the co-worker inquires, wait, what?

[ 27 : 47 ] You spent a few days of your vacation with who? With your church? Why? Make much of God in Christ.

When the neighbor acknowledges that you walk in and out of your house every Sunday morning and says, I can't believe, where do you go? What do you do with your time? Why is that important? Make much of Christ. Don't defend your reputation. Testify and assert, this is how Jesus saved me. And do you know what?

He's willing to save you as well. Well, the episode closes with the order by the Tribune to beat the confession out of Paul.

It wasn't going to be a civil or according to any due process. The Tribune, I'm thinking, he was inconvenienced that day. He's fluent in only Greek, maybe Latin, so he doesn't understand anything that Paul has just said.

[ 28 : 54 ] So he wants to get to the point. In his mind, a few lashes would have gotten Paul to speak quite quickly. The night would be done. Issue resolved. So he orders the centurion, according to verse 25, to stretch him out, strap him in, and flog him with a whip.

Once again, the Tribune, or the commander, has hastily made a mistake. He first had presumed Paul was this Egyptian revolutionary.

Here he presumes Paul is a slave or peasant possessing no due process of rights.

He's already said he's a citizen of Tarsus, which here in Jerusalem carries no value in these present circumstances. And it seems Paul would wait for the last second. And just before the centurion pulls back his arm, pulls out his, oh, oh, oh, wait, wait, wait, I have a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Knowing that it is unlawful to flog an uncondemned Roman citizen, Paul mentions by way of, oh, oh, incidentally, I'm a Roman citizen.

[ 30 : 15 ] As a matter of fact, Paul is a dual citizen. Actually, as a matter of fact, Paul is a citizen of three places, which we'll mention.

The tribune is caught on his heels again. Earlier, he was mistaken to presume that Paul's ability to speak Greek meant that he was the Egyptian revolutionary. Here, he presumes that there's no way this guy is a Roman citizen.

He actually questions Paul. And the centurion comes out, hey, hey, tribune, this guy says he's a Roman citizen. The tribune comes in and says, how are you a Roman citizen? I actually paid a ton of money to get my citizenship.

And Paul says, I was born one. I was born one. Well, the episode ends with quite a predicament. The Jews outside the barracks want Paul dead.

The Romans inside the barracks can't touch him, rather are obligated to protect him. The law was preserving Paul's very life. To draw from the show Survivor, Paul is not getting voted off the island tonight, and he has the immunity card.

[ 31 : 25 ] I'm not sure how Paul slept that night. He was well aware of the prophecies being fulfilled. It's already been foretold that he would be bound, and he was bound, once again in chains.

He has experienced great distress, heavy duress. He's been chased out of city after city. He's been threatened by religious authorities. Yet, at the same time, he's experienced these angelic jailbreaks. He's seen dead people rise. He's been supernaturally preserved. So I just imagine he sat down in his cell that night. I wonder what it's going to be tonight.

Are the angels coming? Will I awake for another day? Should I be scared? Should I be anxious? Well, God, you told me, don't be anxious, because as much as I worry, I can't add an hour to my life.

[ 32 : 37 ] You told me, Lord, don't be scared. Why shouldn't I be scared? I'm scared. Well, he knows the number of hairs on my head.

God, I lost a lot of hairs today. What's the number up to now? So in chains, he probably sat down. He laid down. I'm sure his mind is all over the place. And perhaps he would hum a tomb. Hum a tomb.

Perhaps he would see the soldiers assigned the task of preserving his life next to him. And his mouth would open and would inquire, well, hey, my day has been memorable.

How about yours? Actually, do you know today is that the most memorable day of my life? Can I tell you the most significant day of my life?

[ 33 : 44 ] You see, I was walking on the road to Damascus and I met someone. and there he is.

A life converted. A life obtained by the Lord Jesus Christ. A life altered and by the world's standards utter foolishness.

but if you asked Paul, he would say, this is a life worth having.

It's the paradox of Christianity that someone reputable, powerful would become insignificant and powerless so that the word of Jesus could go forward.

because in the great Christian paradox, we have an infinite God with infinite power emptying himself of that power in order to summon all of humanity to him.

[ 35 : 16 ] That all who call upon his name will be saved. What a grace. What a mystery. let us pray together.

Father, we come to you this morning. And here we follow your man into places many of us will never end up.

Probably none of us will end up. And there he is. Not making much of him. Rather, making much of the fact that Jesus saved sinners.

Not only Jewish sinners, but Gentile sinners. That he will save the entire world for all who call upon him. And here we have in the gospel, the call of God to all those inhabitants of the earth, a summons to follow you.

And so Father, for those of us in this room who hear that call, I pray that you empower them to cry out, whether in silence or aloud, to say, Father, forgive me.

[ 36 : 35 ] I am a sinner. Ransom my life. Redeem it. Reconfigure it. Reorient it. Repurpose it. Put me on mission. O Father, do so in your mercy for your son's sake.

Amen.