

Acts 22

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, why don't you turn with me to the book of Acts. That's what we're going to be studying this morning. Can everybody hear me okay? We're trying some new things with a microphone this morning because we have fans. So the options are I can hold this microphone like this or you can all sweat a lot by the end of the service.

So we're going to go with the microphone option, but can everyone hear me okay? Yeah, good. All right, great. We're in Acts 22 this morning. That's page 931 in the Pew Bible. If you want to turn there, we're actually going to start in chapter 21, verse 37.

And to kind of pick up a little bit of the context of this narrative that Luke wants to tell us about the Apostle Paul and his defense in Jerusalem. One of the things we see way back in the beginning of the book of Luke, actually, which is the first volume that sets up volume two, which is the book of Acts, is that Luke has written this two-volume work to give us certainty.

That's what he writes to his young friend Theophilus, that he's writing this long narrative about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and about the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel so that we might put down deep roots in the certainty of the things that we've been taught. In other words, that this message about Jesus might not just be more credible to us, but more beautiful too. So let's see how Luke does that in Acts 22.

[1 : 20] Again, we'll start at chapter 21, verse 37. Let me read this story for us. As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, May I say something to you?

And the tribune said, Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness? Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia, a citizen of Nobes, your city.

I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I make now before you.

And when they had heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said, I'm a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers.

Being zealous for God, as all of you are this day, I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priests and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

[2 : 39] From them, I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus about noon, a great light from heaven shone around me.

And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.

Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 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.

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. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who live there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And that very hour I received my sight and saw him 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.

[3 : 51] For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about me.

And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another, I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen, your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

And he said to me, go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. Upon this word, up to this word, they listened to him.

Then they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live. And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

[5 : 02] When they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, is it lawful for you to flog a man who was a Roman citizen and uncondemned? When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, what are you about to do?

This man is a Roman citizen. So the tribune came and said to him, tell me, are you a Roman citizen? And he said, yes. The tribune answered, I bought this citizenship for a large sum.

Paul said, but I am a citizen by birth. So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately. And the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

I recently read the story of an American tourist who is visiting a Greek Orthodox monastery on an island in the Aegean Sea in Greece. And, you know, these monasteries are places where you're supposed to be able to get away from it all and sort of spend some time in prayer and fasting and contemplation.

And this tourist, while he was there, happened upon a monk sort of quietly sitting in the monastery. And to this American tourist, this person looked to be very Greek and very Orthodox.

[6 : 18] He was dressed in all the sort of strange garb to him and he had sort of olive, suntanned complexion. So the visitor approached this man, this monk, and asked him one or two questions.

And then to his American surprise, this very exotic-looking monk spoke to him in perfect Oxford Queen's English. Not exactly what he was expecting from this very exotic-looking monk.

Well, it turns out that this monk was actually a guy named, well, as he came to be known, Bishop Callistus Ware. But his original name was actually Timothy. And he was born and bred in England. And Timothy Ware had converted to Eastern Orthodoxy as he was growing up. And he actually taught theology for a number of years at Oxford. And, of course, the American tourist, not knowing any of this, sort of blurts out in surprise, my, you do speak good English.

And the bishop, with sort of classic English humor, replies, well, one picks it up here and there. One picks it up here and there. Now, maybe you've been in a similar sort of situation, surprised at finding someone in an unlikely place that actually speaks your language or maybe knows something about something that you're very interested in, but, you know, you wouldn't have expected it coming from them.

[7 : 44] Someone who speaks your language. You know, I think that's the surprise, the sort of surprise that this Roman tribune, this military officer, must have felt when sort of grabbing him out of a crowd that was ready to rip him to pieces, Paul turns to him and speaks in perfect, eloquent Greek, ah, excuse me, sir, might I have a kind word with you?

And the tribune turns in shock because, according to the tribune, he was thinking that Paul was this sort of notorious criminal that sort of had been nicknamed the Egyptian, this sort of wild rebel leader who a few years prior had taken a whole band of assassins, as the tribune calls them, out to the Mount of Olives, prophesied that the walls of Jerusalem would fall, and then they would rush in and conquer the Romans.

This was the Egyptian, and we know from historical sources that the Romans killed off the entire band, and somehow this character named the Egyptian got away. So the tribune's thinking, well,

this is probably this guy who got away, causing up, stirring up trouble in Jerusalem once again. But of course, such a wily character wouldn't speak polished, perfect Greek, would he? The tribune is a bit shocked when Paul turns to him and says, can I have a word?

And of course, this tribune's going to be just as surprised at the end of our story, right? When Paul reveals his Roman citizenship, a citizenship that he says he was born with and hadn't procured through a petty bribe, which was a way that a lot of people got their citizenship back in the day, by bribing a sort of higher official to grant it to them, which it turns out that's how the tribune got his.

[9 : 31] That must have been a bit surprising. But you know, maybe the thing that surprised this Roman military officer the most was the fact that Paul, standing on the steps of the barracks, turns and actually tries to make a defense to this angry crowd.

Just seconds ago, last week we looked at this passage, Greg walked us through it, this crowd of worshipers in Jerusalem was ready to rip Paul limb from limb because they thought he was defiling the temple by bringing Gentiles into the inner courts.

They had heard rumors that he was teaching Jews not to keep the law of Moses. Surely this guy was no friend of the people. He was a traitor. He was a betrayer of Israel. And with mob mentality, they're ready to do away with him there and then.

But in the heat of the moment, Paul turns and gives, as he says in verse 1, his defense. And at that very word, we come to a new section in the book of Acts.

For the rest of the book, from this point forward, Paul is going to be under Roman arrest. You know, up till this point, Paul's been sort of roaming freely about the country, as Southwest Airlines likes to tell us.

[10 : 55] He's been going here, there, and everywhere in seemingly utter freedom and on the offensive for the kingdom of God. But now, he's imprisoned. And in the next five chapters, Paul is going to offer a defense five times.

And eventually, this imprisonment and defense is going to take him all the way from Jerusalem to Rome. And each defense speech that we're going to look at over the coming weeks offers us kind of something unique.

But with our particular speech here, I want us to see three things as Paul sort of defends himself before these angry crowds in Jerusalem.

And to sort of give our time together some points or some heads, we're going to just basically look through and see why Paul defends himself. We're going to see how he does it. And then lastly, we're just going to look at what his defense actually is.

Why, how, and what. And each of these things is going to be helpful to us, I think, as we think about sharing the good news about Jesus in our context. Now, you might be thinking, I've never faced a rabble crowd that wants to tear me limb from limb.

[12 : 05] I'm not really sure how this is going to apply to me. Well, you know, if you ever find yourself in that situation, here you go. No, but I mean, think about it. Don't we still today face frustration, anger, misunderstanding?

Isn't it not uncommon for new Christians to face family members who feel like they've been betrayed by their son or their daughter converting to Christianity?

You know, we live in a world where civil discourse isn't really easy to come by. It's a lot of hatred and anger and cynicism.

What does it look like to respond in a context like that? Well, let's look first at the why of Paul's defense here.

In other words, just the fact that Paul even turns to the crowd to speak to them is helpful for us to see. Now, imagine, here are angry crowds shouting off with his head and sharpening the guillotine.

[13 : 11] And in case you didn't realize it, angry mobs, enraged mobs, aren't really known for their openness to cool, detached reason and conversation, right? I mean, if I'm Paul, I'm thinking, thanks, I'll just take my spot in the Roman barracks.

That's probably the one safe place for me in all of Jerusalem, where they can't get at me and rip me apart. But Paul still turns and says to them, brothers and fathers, family members, let me reason with you.

Hear my defense. Now, why in the world would you do such a thing? Maybe there are a lot of reasons we could come up with, but I think at the end of the day, the only answer, the only thing that could really drive you to do that would be love.

As Paul looks out at the people before him, through the shouts and the anger, he sees people that he loves. He sees his own people, right?

Some of them there that day may have even been close relatives, uncles, cousins, friends, people he had lived with, studied with, worked with, shared a meal with, laughed with, worshiped with, hoped with.

[14:39] And through their angry eyes and through their violent shouts, he sees a people that he loves. And Paul sees something else too, doesn't he? He also sees in those squinting eyes and those raising voices, a picture of himself.

He sees that he was just like them, not so long ago. Zealous, angry, violent. And so Paul turns, turns into the teeth of the lion, raises his hand and says, brothers and sisters, hear my defense. And out of love, he's ready to be consumed. If only he might say one last thing that could reach them. Now consider what that means for us today.

First, maybe just kind of as an aside, you know, it's good for us to remember that this is the same Paul who wrote about half of the rest of the New Testament. So when you read a book like Romans or 1 Corinthians, you're reading the letters of a person who loved people deeply and who often risked his neck for them.

So, you know, when you come across things in the Bible that Paul wrote and when they seem confusing or hard, friends, don't imagine a petty little man wrinkled over with anger and bigotry trying to make everyone's life miserable.

[16:13] That is the picture you might get according to how some people would have us view Paul the Apostle today. Instead, friends, when you're reading those letters, see a man with tears in his eyes and a longing in his heart to see others come to know the love with which he has been loved.

And hear the voice of a man who has tasted the new creation and wants to do anything so that others can experience it too. In other words, read Paul's letters as if Paul actually wrote them.

The man who would turn and speak with an angry crowd because of love. But, you know, don't we also see something else here as Paul sort of turns and defends himself, the fact of his defense.

And don't we see this, that in the light of the gospel, no one, absolutely no one is too far gone. No one is beyond hope. Isn't that what Paul's actions are telling us here? Isn't that what we should seek to understand that even the person filled with generations of anger and prejudice and even violence, even that person is still a human being made in the image of God, is still a human being worthy of dignity and respect, that there are no lost causes, that there's no one who's beyond the pale.

[17:52] And furthermore, had not Paul lifted up his angry voice with that same crowd in Jerusalem? Had he not stood there while they gathered stones and executed Stephen with the same anger?

And was not Paul the one who was standing by approving of their actions with eyes filled with the same kind of hatred? And friends, isn't that the same with all of us?

Haven't we all felt that grip of self-righteous zeal and prejudice? Our circumstances were no doubt different.

But weren't our hearts the same? When someone threatens something that we hold dear, that props up our identity, aren't we quick to lash out?

You see, what Paul knew by experience and what we know as well as followers of Jesus is that we ourselves weren't beyond the reach of God's grace.

[19:00] even when we were angry and kicking tooth and nail against the truth. Friends, we weren't beyond the reach of God's grace and neither are they.

So we see the why of Paul's defense, that it's ultimately love. But second, take a look at the how of Paul's defense. And very importantly, Luke notes at the end of chapter 21 that Paul starts addressing them, as he says, in the Hebrew language, which is sort of Luke's way, a common way of referring to Aramaic, which was the language that most Jews in Jerusalem would have spoken at the time.

And you can even see the impact that this makes in verse 2 of chapter 22. When they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And in the rest of the speech, Paul is at pains to make the point that he too is a faithful Israelite.

Isn't he? Notice how often he points to his loyalty to his Jewish heritage. After all, isn't it Paul's loyalty to the traditions, to the people, to the temple that's brought him under fire?

Paul wants them to see in this speech that he hasn't forsaken the God of their fathers, that he'd been brought up right here in Jerusalem, that he'd sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the great teacher. And certainly his zeal for these traditions could not be questioned.

[20 : 33] Go ask the high priest, he says. Go ask the council. They're the ones who gave me their commission, their blessing to go round up Christians to bring them back to Jerusalem so that they could face the music.

Now you have to consider that's pretty impressive stuff. Very few in that crowd could have imagined rubbing elbows with the high priest. It's like a scientist sort of saying that she has a prestigious grant from the NIH to do her research and on top of that the president wrote her a letter saying that he's very excited to find out about her findings.

It's like a civil rights activist saying that they marched with Dr. King. Paul is an insider in ways that this crowd could not imagine. Faithful to Israel's God.

And notice what he says about Ananias as he continues with his story. Here's a devout man according to law. Well spoken of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus. In other words the very person who initiated Paul into the Christian community into the way was also a faithful Jew just like me just like you he's saying.

And then on top of it all where does Paul hear Jesus reaffirm his commission to go to the Gentiles? In the temple itself. In the very center of Jewish identity loyalty and loyalty.

[21 : 50] In that very place where Isaiah had his earth-shattering vision of the holiness of God there Paul too has a vision of the Lord the Lord Jesus telling him to go to the Gentiles.

Right in the temple. The very place that Paul is accused of dishonoring. You see Paul's very purposeful here isn't he? To speak their own language and to build many bridges of credibility and commonality and trust.

And none of it's fabricated none of it's put on he's telling the truth. But he's doing it so that this crowd before him will be able to listen and to hear and to understand and hopefully believe.

Now friends isn't that instructive for us today? If you think about your life I'm sure that none of us are sort of insiders to first century Judaism and the way Paul was.

If you are come meet me after the service I'd like to talk to you. But if you think about it each of us is an insider somewhere aren't we? Each of us knows how to speak a language if you will.

[23 : 03] Consider this morning what world are you inside? What language can you speak with ease? Is it the language of science?

Is that your world? Medicine? How about the language of the arts? Is that where God has put you and made you proficient and fluent?

What about business or education? Is that your native ground? Maybe it's sports the athletic field. Maybe friends you know the language of hard knocks and what it means to go through loss and hardship.

And you can speak with credibility to those who come from the same background. Whatever it is God has providentially put us somewhere and made us an insider to that world.

And it's not an accident. It's not an accident that you speak the language and that you have credibility there. it's part of your mission.

[24 : 13] Have you experimented with ways you can express the truth of the gospel in your native tongue as it will as it were? What do your colleagues or your classmates love and long for?

What are they really going for? You know when you think about your friends that you work with when you think about your neighbors what's driving them? What's getting them up in the morning?

What are their hopes and fears? You know you probably share a lot of them don't you?

You're from the same world. But friends how has Christ made himself known to you in that world?

How has his glory been revealed in its own particular way there so that others might see it too?

And how can you begin to speak in ways that they'll understand? Now I grant you that is not an easy thing to do. Easier said than done.

It's a lot easier to burn bridges than to build them isn't it? It's easy to post and forward that Facebook article that blasts the people you disagree with.

[25 : 15] It's a lot harder to speak in ways that those others will actually have a chance of hearing what you have to say. It's a lot easier to sort of build a huge wall around our own tribe than try to go out to the people that we share something with and try to help them see the beauty of Christ.

But friends for as hard as it is haven't you and I also been the recipients of someone speaking our language? Haven't you and I received the gift of that too?

Hasn't someone done that for us? Someone else took the time and the pains to share with us the good news in ways that we could hear. Not dumbing it down not taking out the depth of the teeth but singing it in a way that the melody actually beckoned to us.

And friends what those faithful bearers of the gospel did for us isn't that ultimately a picture of what Christ has done? Coming down to earth taking on our flesh speaking our language sharing our humanity so that it might bring us to God.

coming across to us so that he could bring us across to him so that we could at last know God.

Friends think of all the ways in which Christ has become an insider to our fallen and broken world for its redemption and doesn't that inspire you?

[26 : 47] Doesn't that empower you? Doesn't it encourage you to know that his Holy Spirit is in you to enable you to do the same thing? Consider also what we see in this how of Paul's defense.

You know you also have to realize that what Paul's doing here is a pretty costly risky move and not just because this crowd is very very angry but also because as soon as Paul starts speaking in Aramaic who has no idea what's going on?

The tribune. he might speak Greek okay but he has no idea about this Hebrew language or at least not enough of it to follow what in the world is going on. So as a result I mean imagine imagine someone's you arrest them they stand on the steps they start talking in a language you can't understand and then the crowd breaks out in double fury.

You must be thinking what has this guy just said to them? He's probably the problem right? Okay here's the plan guys bring him into the barracks and we're going to basically torture him until he tells us what's going on.

That's what that's what examination by flogging means. It was a whip with lots of pieces of metal and bone tied into it that they would just keep raking across your back until you hollered whatever it is they really wanted to tell you or you to tell them.

[28 : 17] And as Luke tells us Paul sort of barely escapes that one pulling out his Roman passport just in time and you know as you sort of see Paul kind of hung between the horns of these two groups of people you have to admit that Paul must have seemed a bit strange right?

I mean Luke is showing us here how Paul seemed to belong in both of these worlds the Jewish world and the Roman world how he was a verifiable card-carrying citizen of both Jerusalem and Rome and yet at the same time Paul seemed to belong to neither.

To his fellow Jews Paul seemed very odd in fact at times dangerous. He spent way too much time with the Gentiles his views about the law and the temple were constantly raising eyebrows at best and on top of it all he was a citizen of Rome.

Someone might ask well why did he wait to get into the barracks to sort of tell them that he was a citizen? Well not exactly something you want to flash before an angry mob who hates Romans right? I mean being a Roman citizen as a Jew is sort of like being a Jedi Knight with a standing welcome to stay at the Death Star whenever you wanted right?

There's a bed right next to Darth Vader it's all yours on the Emperor's dollar come get it. Not exactly someone who's maybe most loyal to the cause but you know to his fellow Roman citizens Paul probably seemed just as odd and maybe just as dangerous I mean think of Paul with his strict moral code Paul are you serious?

[29 : 58] No sex and no idols what am I going to do with my time when I become a Christian?

Come back for 1 Corinthians this fall we'll figure that one out so his strict morals and definitely what must have seemed very odd this talk about a man named Jesus who was crucified but now alive again and before whom apparently every knee would bow and through whom perfect justice would come upon the world and through whom sins could be forgiven Paul belonged everywhere and nowhere all at once the insider and the outsider at the same time and friend if you become a follower of Jesus it'll be the same for you all your progressive friends will find you odd no sex no idols really but all your conservative friends will probably think you're a bit weird too you see

Luke is writing acts to help his young friend Theophilus as I mentioned at the very beginning get a deeper grasp of what he's been taught and friend if you feel a tug between two worlds if you feel like you just don't belong anywhere Luke is saying yes that's sometimes how it feels to be a citizen not just of Jerusalem not just of Rome but a citizen of heaven a citizen of the kingdom of God that's exactly how it feels to be living in light of the new creation right in the midst of the old so Theophilus

so brothers and sisters don't give up even when your every worldly defense seems lost and you're standing on the steps with an angry mob in front of you and Roman chains behind you you're not alone even when no one is standing up for you you're not lost and doesn't that bring us to the last thing that we see here in

Paul's defense what does he talk about what's the what's the what of Paul's defense what's the substance what's the matter of all that he says and at the end of the day Paul's defense comes down to one and only one thing and it's not ultimately his good Jewish upbringing and it's not ultimately his great zeal for the law and it's not ultimately his Roman citizenship being from no obscure city as he sort of coyly touts to the tribune it's not where Paul rests his defense you know he could have right I mean think of how this scene could have run a little differently if maybe you or I were in Paul's shoes we would have stood on the steps and said look idiots I'm smarter and better than all of you check my credentials I know people and have been places that you backwater hicks could only dream of so cool it down before I pull rank on this tribune and have him send you packing with the edge of a sword but that's not what

Paul does it's the furthest thing from his mind in that moment when Paul stands defenseless before the angry shouts of Jerusalem on one hand and the prisons of Rome behind him his defense was nothing in himself nothing what he had done not his wisdom not his status not his zeal he had one defense the words of Ananias coming back to his memory in that moment Jesus Christ the righteous one as Paul stood before a crowd roaring for his execution as he opens his mouth and starts speaking their own language to people who were his own flesh and blood how could Paul not remember the one who years earlier had faced the same crowd stood before people of his own flesh and blood shouting for his own execution and how could Paul not remember that this one instead of being saved from the jaws of the lion was crushed in its grip that Jesus goes to the cross for Paul's own sins so that before the only bar of the only courtroom that really matters you and I could actually have a righteous defense that the righteous one is cast out with the unrighteous so the unrighteous can finally stand before God even when every worldly defense has been stripped away Jesus is his defense friends is he yours he is if you've placed your trust in him a righteous one isn't I mean think about it I mean Harper Lee just released a new novel this week has anyone read Harper Lee's new novel no because you all read the New York Times review that said it's the worst piece of literature ever created and they've destroyed all of our childhood dreams that the one righteous person that we could find in all of American literature Atticus Finch the one who held out one little shred of hope for us that there's some last spark of dignity and rightness in the world lo and behold has feet of clay

[36 : 19] Ghost Out of Watchmen is a beautiful book it's a hard book and there's a chapter in that book where Scout sorry if many of you have read to go kill to kill a mockingbird go read it after the service there's a beautiful passage where Scout having come home she's 26 she's been living in New York City her father has just been shown as being very morally questionable and suddenly she's spinning in her mind everything that I'd built my life on and all those moments growing up when I wondered what should I do is there hope for me is there right in the world the one voice that she could hear in her mind was the voice of her father back home one little picture of righteousness in a sea of unclean lips and when that falls she goes into basically existential tailspin who is she what is she what hope is there is it worth going on friends isn't that a heart cry in all of us for someone who actually is righteous for someone who actually in the sea of injustice and duplicity for someone who's actually right and who could be a rock on which we could stand and a hope in a sea of hopelessness friends there is a righteous one it's

Jesus Christ and like Paul that will give you and me when we finally come to rest in him an incredible boldness look at Paul bold to stand before an angry crowd and to see them with love and to tell them the truth about Jesus in ways they might actually understand bold to leave your home and all that's comfortable to go far away to the Gentiles as Paul was seeing Jesus as your righteous one makes you bold to see your conversion as also what it is friends your conversion just like Paul is a commission it's a calling to go friends what's your defense this morning if it's Jesus Christ the righteous one then you can love in the face of anger and you can speak in the face of confusion and you can be brave in the face of danger and if he's not your righteousness this morning then hear the other thing that

Ananias told Paul when he was converted why do you wait why do you wait let's pray father father I pray that we would be so rooted in the righteousness of Christ that we could not help but have love

and humility and boldness come surging forth Lord when we too feel caught in the middle of worlds belonging everywhere and belonging nowhere with no defense and no one standing up for us God lift our gaze to Jesus the righteous one Amen