

## “THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL”

I Peter 3:8-16, Acts 21:37-22:21

August 2 & 3, 2025

Early Church Father, “Thomas Aquinas, who knew a great deal about education and a bit about motivation, once said that when you want to convert a person to your view, you go over to where he is standing, take him by the hand, and guide him. You don’t stand across the room and shout at him. You don’t order him to come over where you are. You start where he is and work from that position. He said that’s the only way to get people to budge.”<sup>1</sup>

As you’ve heard in the last few weeks, Paul has found himself in a precarious position - carried onto the steps of the Antonia Fortress at the north-west corner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by Roman soldiers’ intent upon not only saving him, but finding out why he is the source of the riot that has taken place there. Paul has done his best to fulfill the Laws of Moses with regard to the purification rites and vows of a Nazarite, yet folks at the Jewish Temple have made false accusations about him that has stirred up the whole city.

The Roman soldiers stationed at the Fortress have interceded and have rescued Paul, but not knowing who he is or what he has done, they want to find out the truth so that they might put the riot to rest. In invite you to listen to the next part of our study of the Book of Acts, Acts 21:37-22:21. (READ Acts 21:37-22:21)

“The Roman commander naturally assumed that Paul was yet another of the insurrectionaries who constantly aggravated the burden of keeping the peace in Judaea. We know that there was in fact an Egyptian who had led a large following into the wilds about ten years previously with a view to organizing an attack on Jerusalem; and we also know that many murders were committed in Jerusalem by Jewish terrorists during the years immediately preceding the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66, particularly during festivals. The historical distinction

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<sup>1</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 620)

between the two movements has been obscured by Luke's narrative. But the purpose of Paul's dialogue with the commander is to show how far he was from any such movement. A mere insurrectionary would presumably have been an uneducated Jew, unable even to speak Greek correctly. Paul, by contrast, was able to conduct a highly polished conversation in Greek, and as for his upbringing, he could point with pride to his citizenship of one of the leading university cities of the east: Tarsus in Cilicia - 'no mean city,' as Paul adds, using the idiom of a well-read man. These advantages were apparently sufficient for him to obtain permission to speak to the people.

The commander gives him permission, so he begins the address with "Brothers and fathers." The suspicion that Paul had brought a pagan into the sacred precincts of the temple had been the immediate cause of the riot. This was of course unfounded; but it was a symptom of a much more fundamental grievance against Paul which, according to Luke's narrative, was beginning to obsess the Jews in Jerusalem and which eventually left the Roman administration with no choice but to send Paul to Rome for trial. This grievance arose, quite simply, from the fact of Paul's missionary work among the Gentiles. Christian Jews had come to accept this...but to ordinary people in Jerusalem it could appear only as a dangerous and shameless attack upon the whole idea of a single and exclusive Jewish religion. Paul's speech...is a defense against any such interpretation of his work. From the very outset, it stresses Paul's complete solidarity with the Jewish people. Luke even notes the language it was spoken in: not Greek (for, although this was the common language of Jews throughout the world, and the language in which Paul wrote his letters...it was also the language of that whole pagan culture from which the Jews were so anxious to protect their own tradition), but the Jewish language (...Aramaic)...

"Luke lets the testimony of Paul be repeated here (see Acts 9:1-19), but the ending has a

significant new twist. The man called Ananias, who was Paul's first personal contact in Damascus, is described as a '*devout observer of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews of that place*' (Acts 22:12). That is to say, even Paul's experience of the risen Jesus did not separate him from the company of the strictest Jews; indeed, the new turn in his life was something that could be analyzed according to the traditional patterns of Jewish religion. So much so, that he expected his work to be among his former Jewish friends. But his natural expectations were overruled by a vision in the Temple...'*Go, for I am sending you far away to the Gentiles*' (22:21).

"But all of this made no difference. Paul may have been as Jewish as any of his hearers, and have received his divine summons in the very Temple he was accused of desecrating; but a deliberate mission to the Gentiles was still incompatible with the traditional Jewish faith, and the moment he referred to it the uproar began again."<sup>2</sup>

Paul may have thought that the words given to him by Ananias might open up the eyes of the strict Jews who were accusing him of going against the Laws of Moses. "*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 people of what you have seen and heard*" (Acts 22:14-15). Paul was called to tell others about the Messiah, Jesus, so that they might come to know Him, too, and find Salvation through Him. It was not God giving Paul a new gospel, but rather calling Paul to share what he had seen and heard from Jesus, Himself. Paul would be the one to be the witness of Jesus to the Gentiles, not taking them new words of the Lord and becoming another Messiah. Paul knew Jesus was the Messiah of God, the very Son of God, and He was called into service as His witness to the whole world about Him, not just to the Jews.

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<sup>2</sup> (A.E. Harvey, *Companion to the New Testament*, [Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979] pg. 485-486)

So Paul was starting out where his fellow Jewish people were, even at the site of a riot, with the attempt to lead them into following Jesus. He was attempting to take them by the hand and lead them to come to know Jesus, too. But the Jews from Asia had already experienced this step of Paul striving to lead the Jews into a relationship with Jesus, and they weren't about to have it happen in the city of Jerusalem.

But Paul was just being faithful to his call by Jesus to share the Salvation of the Lord with everyone. However, Jesus' words of prophecy came true, "*...the people here will not accept your testimony about Me*" (Acts 22:18). That is why Paul had left in the first place, to leave the Jerusalem Jews to the other disciples of Jesus to reach through their witness of Jesus. But having returned, Paul did not shy away from sharing his own experience among the people, even about his call to share the news of the Messiah "*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). But the problem of sharing the Messiah with other people groups seems to have been a problem the strict Jews had an issue with. They were firmly convinced that only the nation of Israel was God's people and that the Messiah would only be given to them. Their mindset of the Messiah was of a military ruler who would free their people and make Israel the prominent nation once again, as in the days of King David.

However, Paul was trying to help the Jews see that God was now reaching out to all people with the possibility of Salvation from their sins, and Jesus having died for our sins on the cross, taking our own punishment upon Him, paid the price for the sins of those who would believe in Him and receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

And that is our own calling as followers of Jesus. We have been entrusted with the Good News of Jesus to take to all the people of the world, so that they might hear of God's love for everyone, and receive Jesus, and find life.

You see, “According to a legend, when Jesus returned to heaven following His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb, the angels gathered in amazement. They gazed at the wounds in His hands and feet, and shuddered to recall His suffering.

“Finally Gabriel spoke: ‘Master, you suffered terribly down there. Do they know and appreciate the extent of Your sacrifice?’

“No,’ said Jesus. ‘Not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Israel know.’

“Then what have you done to let everyone else know?’ asked Gabriel.

“I’ve asked Peter, James, and John, and a few others to spread the news. They will tell others who will tell others until the message spreads to the ends of the earth.’

“But Gabriel, knowing the nature of human beings, asked, ‘What is Plan B?’

“I have no Plan B,’ replied Christ. ‘There is no alternative strategy. I’m counting on them.’

“Twenty centuries later, Jesus still has no other plan. He’s counting on you and me”<sup>3</sup> to take the Good News of God’s Great Love for us into the world so that everyone might hear and have the chance to believe in Jesus.

We’re invited to start right where we are, even at the point of riots and rebellion, to step up next to the people we are with and help them to hear and understand the love of God through Jesus Christ. We, too, have been called by God to be His witnesses of the things we have seen and heard and experienced in our lives with regard to the love of Jesus. We, too, have been invited into His service as followers of Jesus to “*Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [He] has commanded us*” (Matt. 28:18).

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<sup>3</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 787)

Unfortunately, we have become scared about sharing our testimony with others. Many of us can't even tell another person about the difference Jesus has made in our life. And others are afraid that no one will listen to them, just as they did to Paul that day on the steps of the Antonio Fortress.

But we are encouraged to do exactly what Paul did before the people on the Temple Mount. He told the people there who he was and what his life had been before Jesus was his Lord and Savior. He shared what he had done against the Lord's people, the followers of Jesus. And then Paul shared how Jesus personally introduced Himself to him, and how he came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah through the help of others, and how God had called him into His service. And finally, Paul shared with them how God used him to touch the lives of thousands for the sake of Jesus Christ, helping them to come to know Him personally as their own Savior.

That's the way we are invited to tell others about Jesus. 1) What were we like before our encounter with Jesus? What junk was going on in our lives that we needed to repent of and turn over to the forgiveness of Jesus? 2) Then, how did we come to know Jesus as our Savior? How did He intervene in our life to call us into His service? 3) And finally, what have we done to fulfill that call in our life? How have we been able to help others come to know the Lord Jesus in their own life? What have we done to be faithful followers of Jesus?

That's all we need in our testimony. It's sharing Jesus with another at our own personal level, and inviting them to open up their lives to have their own encounter with Jesus and find Salvation in them, too.

But often we miss the importance of our witnessing to others around us. We don't understand the importance of our sharing the Good News of Jesus with those around us.

Tony Evens expresses it this way. He says, “When the *Titanic* went under, three messages had been sent that said to watch out for the icebergs. Because everything looked all right, the folks taking the message never passed it on. They never sent the warning out to people who needed to hear and, as a result, over fifteen hundred people lost their lives. The folks who knew kept quiet.

“Another tragedy of the *Titanic* was that the lifeboats, designed to carry people away from the sinking ship, were only half full. People who had made it to safety in the lifeboats didn’t want to turn around and go pick up people who were dying. They didn’t want to take the risk of panicking people flipping over their boat. So the people who were saved and safe kept on going. Fifteen hundred people didn’t have to die, but they did. The folks who were saved didn’t want to go back because it was risky.

“Sharing the Gospel has risks - the risk of rejection, the risk of being made fun of, the risk of being called ‘holier than thou,’ the risk of being called ‘Reverend,’ the risk of being avoided, the risk of being asked questions you don’t know the answers to. Yes, there are risks, but when someone is dying, offering them the gift of salvation is worth the risk.”<sup>4</sup> Isn’t it?

Aren’t your loved ones worth taking the risk of you telling them what Jesus has done in your life? Don’t you love your friends enough to share with them the pathway to eternal life? Aren’t those around you who are struggling with all kinds of life’s issues, trying to live the best they can all by themselves, aren’t they worth your sharing with them what has changed your life and given you the hope that is within you? Aren’t even those who bug the snot out of you with their selfishness and pride and arrogance worth hearing about the transformation that Jesus can make as they let Him into their life as Savior and Lord? If it has given you great strength, peace, joy and hope in your life, why not share it with those around you so that they might be able to

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<sup>4</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evens’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 341-342, #1036)

experience the same thing that you have been blessed with in your life? Why not take the risk of being misunderstood, or seen as a fanatic, or being thought of as weird, or being considered absolutely crazy? Why not help them to see the difference that Jesus has made in your life, as you live through all of your own struggles and pain and grief in front of them with the joy that Jesus gives you during all those trials?

That's what Jesus is calling each one of us to do - be His witness to everyone around us of the power of His love for us to forgive our sins and bring us into God's presence. Our life is not just here to enjoy all of the world's stuff. We are here as witnesses for Jesus, to give our testimony of how He changed us and made us new and given us abundant life.

Paul Gilbert says it best in his little poem, *According to You*. He says,

“You are writing a gospel,  
A chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do,  
By the words that you say;  
Men read what you write,  
Whether faithless or true,  
Say - what is the gospel,  
According to you?”

Let's pray. Father God, Thank You for helping us to know about Jesus so that we could believe in Him and let Him become our Savior and Lord. Thank You that Jesus made a pathway for us to find our way back into your presence through His death and resurrection. But Father, we are shy with our testimony about how You have changed our lives. So give us the courage and the desire to begin seeing those around us who need to hear what You can do in the life of a sinner who found Your grace. Teach us how to love those around us enough to take them by the hand and lead them to Jesus so that they, too, might find eternal life. Lead us, Lord Jesus, to love others so that they might love you, too. Give us the courage to be Your bold witnesses in our world today. This we pray in Your Holy Name, Jesus. AMEN.