Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 22:1-21
Lesson 40 – You Don't Know My Story

Acts 22:1-21 (NIV)

[1] "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense." [2] When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: [3] "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. [4] I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, [5] as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. [6] "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. [7] I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' [8] "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. "'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. [9] My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. [10] "'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.' [11] My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. [12] "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. [13] He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. [14] "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. [15] You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. [16] And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' [17] "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance [18] and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' [19] "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. [20] And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' [21] "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Discussion Questions

Theme: Your past may explain who you are, but God's grace determines who you can become.

Theological Focus: Genuine transformation through Jesus Christ requires us to take responsibility for our past, surrender to God's correction, and make ourselves available for His purpose. Our testimony is not simply about what we have survived but about how God's grace has changed us and how He intends to use us.

Section 1: Stop Allowing Your Past to Excuse Your Present

1. Acknowledging Our Past (Acts 22:3–5)

Paul openly acknowledged his religious background and his persecution of Christians. Why is it important for believers to acknowledge their past mistakes rather than minimize, justify, or conceal them? How does taking responsibility demonstrate spiritual maturity?

2. Explanation Versus Excuse (Acts 22:4–5; Proverbs 28:13)

What is the difference between understanding why we developed certain behaviors and using our experiences to excuse those behaviors? Can you identify an area where people commonly use their upbringing, past relationships, or painful experiences to justify present conduct?

3. Grace That Changes Us (Titus 2:11–12)

The sermon emphasized that grace does not simply pardon us; grace teaches us. What does this passage reveal about the transforming power of God's grace? Why is it dangerous to celebrate God's forgiveness while resisting His correction?

4. Taking Personal Responsibility (Ephesians 4:22–24)

Paul teaches believers to put off the old self and put on the new self. What attitudes, habits, or patterns of behavior do Christians sometimes continue defending even after accepting Christ? What practical steps help us replace old behaviors with Christlike character?

Section 2: Stop Resisting What God Is Trying to Change

5. Being Sincere but Wrong (Acts 22:6–8)

Paul was convinced that persecuting Christians was the right thing to do. What does his encounter with Jesus teach us about the difference between religious sincerity and spiritual truth? How can we recognize when our personal convictions are inconsistent with God's Word?

6. Responding to God's Correction (Acts 22:9–10)

After encountering Jesus, Paul asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" Why is this question such an important turning point in his testimony? What is the difference between asking God to approve our decisions and genuinely seeking His direction?

7. The Danger of Defensiveness (Proverbs 12:1; Hebrews 12:11)

Why do people often become defensive when someone challenges their behavior, decisions, or attitudes? How can we distinguish between correction intended to help us grow and criticism that is unhelpful or destructive?

8. Spiritual Maturity Requires Humility (James 1:22–25)

The sermon emphasized that spiritual maturity is not measured simply by how much truth we know but by how much truth we are willing to obey. What are some signs that a person possesses biblical knowledge but is resisting spiritual growth? How can we become more responsive to God's Word?

Section 3: Stop Making Your Story All About You

9. God's Purpose Beyond Our Preferences (Acts 22:17–21)

Paul believed his testimony would be effective among the people in Jerusalem, but God directed him toward the Gentiles. What does this teach us about the difference between our personal preferences and God's assignment? Why do we sometimes resist serving God outside our comfort zones?

10. Transformation Must Produce Availability (Romans 12:1–2)

What does it mean to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God? How does genuine surrender affect the way we use our time, abilities, finances, relationships, and opportunities to serve others?

11. Our Testimony Is Bigger Than Ourselves (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Paul teaches that God comforts us so we can comfort others. How can our personal struggles, failures, victories, and experiences become opportunities to minister to someone else? What happens when we focus more on receiving God's blessings than becoming a blessing?

12. The Evidence of a Changed Life (2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Acts 22:14–15)

Paul's transformation did not end with his conversion; it resulted in a new calling to represent Jesus Christ. What evidence should others see in the life of someone who has genuinely experienced God's transforming grace? How can our personal stories point people toward Christ rather than drawing attention to ourselves?

Practical Takeaway Challenges

Challenge 1: Stop Explaining and Start Changing

Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24; James 1:22

This week, spend intentional time asking God to reveal one attitude, behavior, or habit you have been defending rather than changing.

Ask yourself:

- What have I been excusing because of something that happened in my past?
- Have I become defensive when God or someone I trust has challenged this behavior?
- What specific action can I take this week to demonstrate genuine change?

  Your assignment: Identify one area that needs correction and take one measurable step toward changing it. That might mean apologizing without making excuses, changing how you communicate, forgiving someone, or accepting responsibility for a decision.

  Remember: Your past may explain your behavior, but it does not excuse your refusal to grow.

Challenge 2: Turn Your Story Into Someone Else's Blessing

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; 1 Peter 4:10

This week, identify one experience God has brought you through and consider how that experience could help someone else.

Ask yourself:

- What has God taught me through my struggles or mistakes?
- Who might benefit from the wisdom, encouragement, or testimony I have gained?
- Am I willing to allow God to use my experiences even when doing so requires vulnerability or sacrifice?

  Your assignment: Intentionally encourage, mentor, support, or serve one person who could benefit from something God has taught you. Be willing to share your testimony when appropriate, making certain the attention remains on God's grace rather than your accomplishments.

  Remember: God did not bring you through everything you have experienced just so you would have something interesting to tell. He can use your story to demonstrate His grace and accomplish His purpose.

Closing Reflection

Three questions every believer should continually ask:

1. What from my past am I still allowing to control my present?

2. What is God trying to change in me that I have been resisting?

3. How can God use what He has brought me through to make a difference in someone else's life?

Final Thought: Everybody has a story, but the greatest testimony is not simply what happened to us. It is what Jesus Christ has done within us and what He is now accomplishing through us. **The question is not simply, "Do you have a story?" The question is, "Is your story becoming evidence of God's transforming grace?"**

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

B. Paul's Testimony Before a Crazed Mob: A Message for Upset People, 22:1-21

(22:1-21) **Introduction**: Paul's testimony will always hold lesson after lesson for believers of every generation. Note: he was giving his testimony before a crazed mob that had just been rioting, seeking to kill him.

1. (22:1-2) **Evangelism— Love**: Paul's great love for his people. Why would Paul want to speak to the mob screaming for his death (Acts 21:39-40)? Why would he not want the soldiers to simply rescue him and to save his life? The answer is his love and passion for his own people, the Jews.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Romans 9:1-3).

Very simply, Paul was willing to face death to save as many of his people as he could. He had been saved, and he knew the truth of the glorious salvation found in the Lord Jesus, and he desperately wanted every Jew to know the same salvation. Note how the love and passion just flowed out of his innermost being as he began to address the crowd. And remember, they had just attacked him and were crying for his blood.

His very first words were, "Men, brothers, and fathers." He did not shout against them, did not rebuke them nor charge them with a crime. He called them *brothers* and *fathers*. The word father was the official title for the leaders of the nation, many of whom were present in the crowd. By using the words *brothers* and *fathers,* Paul was appealing to the closest relationship possible—that of a family, which in this case refers to the national family of the Jewish people. He was identifying with them, appealing to them in an attempt to reach them. At the same time, he was revealing his own feelings—the sense, the love he felt for them as the brothers and fathers of his people. Note that he spoke in the Hebrew tongue, that is, in the national language of the Jews.

2. (22:3-5) **Paul— Old Life**: Paul's former life. It had been about twenty-five years since Paul's conversion. Although a few would have known about Paul's past, many in the crowd had no idea who he was.

1. He shared his roots, his personal heritage, that is, the privileges and advantages of his genealogy.

⇒ He was a Jew: not a foreigner, but as much a Jew as any of his listeners. He had been born a Jew.

⇒ He was born in Tarsus but reared in Jerusalem so that he could be educated at the feet of Israel's greatest teachers. He was brought to Jerusalem while still very young for the purpose of securing the very best education (cp. Acts 26:4).

⇒ He was educated in the strictest law of the fathers (teachers). Paul had actually been a Pharisee, one of a small sect of men who had totally dedicated their lives to nothing but living out the law (see Deeper Study #3— Acts 23:8).

⇒ He was zealous toward God in keeping the law, as zealous as any Jew. Note: this is a crucial point in understanding Paul. He claimed to have never forsaken the practice and customs of the Mosaic law, not personally. He was as much a practicing Jew in keeping the law and customs as any of his audience.

2. Paul shared the early part of his life which was hostile against Christianity

3. (22:6-11) **Paul— Conversion**: Paul's conversion. The point to note is Paul's claim: he claimed to have been saved by the Lord alone, by a personal confrontation with Him. Paul described the event exactly….The new facts presented by Paul in this account are as follows.

⇒ His conversion took place "about noon" (Acts 22:6).

⇒ The words "of Nazareth" are not mentioned in the event. By saying that Jesus, the despised Nazarene, was the Lord of heaven is striking.

⇒ The men with him heard a voice speaking, but could not understand the words (Acts 22:9).

⇒ The light was the cause of Paul's blindness (Acts 22:11).

Thought 1. Paul had just covered his former life which included...

- a great personal heritage in which he boasted.
- a great zeal in persecuting the church, priding himself in his zeal, thinking he was pleasing God.

He had shared his conversion to Christ which focuses upon a brilliant light that struck him blind. He was stricken physically blind as a symbol to show that he was *spiritually blind*.

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

4. (22:12-16) **Call— Commission**: Paul's call and commission through Ananias. Paul covered both Ananias' character and his own commission in these verses.

1. Ananias' character was above reproach. He never would have done anything of a questionable nature, never would have helped Paul if Paul had been an evil man.

⇒ Ananias was devout, that is, a God-fearing man, living by the law of Moses and God.

⇒ Ananias was a reputable man, highly esteemed by all the Jews of Damascus.

⇒ Ananias was a true minister, a true servant sent to help Paul when Paul so desperately needed help. Note he called Paul *brother* and healed his eyes!

⇒ Ananias was the messenger of God sent to set Paul apart for God's work.

2. Paul's call and commission to serve God. Paul spelled out exactly what God had called him to do. Note how the emphasis was upon Paul knowing, seeing, and hearing God personally before he was to reach out to others. This is true with every believer. God expects the believer to *know* Him first, no matter who the believer is or how important the mission of the believer is. Paul spelled out exactly what God called him to do.

a. To know God's will: His person, His salvation, His sanctification, His mysteries, His revelation, His commandments—all that is involved in the will of God.

b. To see the Just One: the Messiah, the Son of God Himself, the Sinless One, the Righteous One.

c. To hear the voice of the Just One: knowing Him personally, fellowshipping with, praying and sharing with, being guided and directed by, being instructed by.

d. To be a witness for the Just One to all men

e. To be baptized

Thought 1. The same five points are applicable to the call of every believer. Every believer must know, see, and hear the Just One in his heart and life by faith; and he must bear witness to the Lord and be baptized.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21; cp. Matthew 20:28; Luke 19:10).

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

5. (22:17-21) **Call— Commission**: Paul's clear instructions from God through a vision. This event happened about three years after Paul's conversion (Acts 9:26-29; cp. Galatians 1:18-19). Note four points.

1. Paul was in prayer when the trance came—so lost, so gripped with concern for his people and their hostility toward him that he lost all sense of the world around him. He was swallowed up in the thoughts of God, transported mentally out of this world (see note, pt.3—Acts 10:9-22 for more discussion). Note: Paul saw Christ in the trance.

2. The Lord's will was for Paul to get out of Jerusalem. The Jews were seeking to kill him because he was preaching Christ

3. The argument of Paul against the Lord. Paul felt he was especially qualified to reach the Jews. He had been the arch-persecutor of Christianity, so he felt the Jews would believe him, knowing about his past. They would know that he never would have been converted from such bitter hatred unless he had really seen Christ. But Paul was wrong. The Jews felt he was a traitor.

4. The Lord's command to Paul was emphatic: "depart," go! Paul's mission was not at home; it was elsewhere —to the Gentiles.

Thought 1. Note four points.

1) A man is to fulfill his call, no matter what it is.

2) A man cannot always serve where he wishes.

3) A man is not always accepted by those for whom he cares.

4) When the Lord tells a man to go, he needs to "depart," to go!

Thought 2. Note how Paul was making the same mistake made twenty-five years earlier, still trying to win the Jews over.

Thought 3. Too many try to *stay at home* when the Lord has called them to depart and go.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Acts.