

Grace Church  
Roanoke, Virginia

Dr. Jack L. Arnold  
Lesson #53

ACTS  
The Power in a Personal Testimony  
Acts 21:27-22:29

Now we take up a section of Scripture that I would probably never preach on in a lifetime unless I was committed to expository preaching, that is, a verse by verse explanation of the Bible. We must remember that, even if this section does not seem as interesting as other sections of Scripture, it is just as inspired and God has placed it in the canon for our edification.

In this section we have Paul's defense or apology before an angry mob of Jews. He starts out his defense by giving a personal testimony, but before he gets to the place where he defends his action, the infuriated mob stops him and tries to kill him.

By way of background, Paul came to Jerusalem to preach the gospel and was ready to be imprisoned and die, if necessary, for the cause of Christ. When he arrived in Jerusalem, there were many Jewish Christians who were zealous for the Mosaic Law who thought that Paul was telling Jews in Gentile lands not to keep the law. Of course, this was hearsay and not the truth, but these rank and file Christians would rather believe a lie than the truth. James and the elders of the Jerusalem Church devised a plan for Paul. He was to take a Nazarite vow with four other Jews and at the end of the vow, he was to pay his fees for the animal sacrifices for himself and the four other Jews. This vow was taken in order to appease these legalistic Jewish Christians to show them that Paul was not against the Law. Paul was not in sin for taking this vow. for he had the freedom to go back under the Law if he wanted to. However, Paul and the elders were wrong in trying to appease the critics. Rarely does appeasement change a critical person's heart. Not until the critical person deals with his critical spirit before God will there be any real change.

ASSUMPTION ABOUT PAUL - Acts 21:27-29

“And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.” -- Seven days had to elapse before one who took a Nazarite vow could be purified and released from the vow. Towards the end of these seven days, some Jews from Asia, probably Ephesus, began to stir up trouble for Paul because they hated Paul's

teaching that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ apart from the works of the Mosaic Law. These were unbelieving Jews who were trained in riot engineering and they dogged Paul's steps wherever he went. They accused Paul of hating the Jews! opposing the Mosaic Law and speaking evil against the temple. For a Jew, this was like an American challenging motherhood, baseball and apple pie. They also made an assumption that Paul brought a Gentile, Trophimus, into the temple area which was punishable by death. Archeologists have discovered copper plaques placed on the steps that separated the outer court where Gentiles could gather from the inner court of the temple open only to Jews. One plaque said, "No foreigner (Gentile) may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." These charges against Paul were all false. They were based on circumstantial evidence and were pure assumption. These charges, unexamined by the people, got them very excited and stirred their hatred because they thought that Paul was against the Law and traditions of the Jews. The inferences were enough to inflame the excitable passions of the mob, for mob psychology is to always get the multitude to operate on assumption, half-truths and misinformation.

It is very important that Christians do not operate on assumption, inference and slanderous accusations. We must get to the facts of every case. We should try to find out what a man has done, not what we suppose he has done. We should attempt to state what a man believes, not what we think he believes. It is a sin to judge a man on circumstantial evidence alone.

#### ASSAULT ON PAUL - Acts 21:30, 31

"And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion." -- This murderous mob was itching to get their hands on Paul to tear him to pieces. They rushed on Paul, seized him and began to beat him with their fists and kick him with their feet, trying to knock him down so they could stamp the life out of him. But it was the Romans to the rescue! On the north side of the temple was the castle (fortress) of Antonia which had four towers, one of which overlooked the temple area. In the castle there were stationed hundreds of Roman occupation troops to secure the temple area from Jewish uprisings and to keep the peace. The Roman sentries in the tower saw the riot and sent word to their commander, Claudius Lysias, who was in charge of Jerusalem. We must remember that this was the time of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost and the population of Jerusalem swelled from 200,000 to over two million and the Romans did not want a riot. This might also explain why the Jews were so edgy and why they were so bold to start a riot.

#### ARREST OF PAUL - Acts 21:32-39

##### Intervention by the Romans (21:30-33)

And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when

they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.” -- Claudius Lysias took centurions who commanded groups of one hundred men, so there must have been at least two or three hundred soldiers thrown into the streets to calm the riot. As soon as the Jews saw the Roman show of power, they stopped beating Paul. The soldiers bound Paul to indicate to the angry mob that they meant to deal with this rioter, whoever he was.

#### Interaction Between the Jews and Romans (21:34-36)

“But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, ‘Away with him!’” -- Claudius Lysias was a good Roman officer, for he wanted to get Paul away from the mob to get to the facts. The soldiers pushed their way through the enraged mob, surrounded Paul, picked him up bodily and carried him out on their shoulders. The crowd followed Paul right to the steps of the castle, Antonia. The crowd viciously cried out, “Away with him,” or “Put him to death!”

Some people never learn, for it was a Jewish mob that cried out to the Romans, thirty-three years before, to put the Lord Jesus Christ to death. As He stood before Pilate, they said, “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas . . . crucify, crucify Him” (Luke 23:18-20).

#### Interchange of Information (21:37-39)

“And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks he said to the commander, ‘May I say something to you?’ And he said, ‘Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?’ But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.’” -- The commander was amazed. He thought he had bound a common criminal but the moment Paul spoke in fluent Greek he knew Paul was no common criminal. The commander thought Paul was an Egyptian robber-baron who appeared on the scene about three years before this time. According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, this Egyptian claimed to be a prophet. He was able to gather a large following--Josephus said 40,000 and Dr. Luke said 4,000 and I believe Dr. Luke--and he led his men to the Mount of Olives, promising them that he had the power to make the walls of Jerusalem fall down at his command. However, the Roman procurator, Felix, found out about this plot and dispatched many Roman soldiers to the scene. There was a battle and the forces of the rebel Egyptian lost 400 by death and 200 were captured. The Egyptian leader, however, was able to escape and had been a fugitive for three years. Those that remained of the Egyptian's band formed a guerilla group called the Sicarii or Assassins or Daggermen who concealed daggers under their cloaks, and as they mingled among the people, they

would strike without warning, killing Romans and pro- Roman Jews in cold blood. They were Jewish terrorists, trying to strike terror into the Jewish populace and overthrow the Roman government. This Egyptian was one of the top ten most wanted criminals in the Roman Empire.

As soon as Paul spoke in educated Greek, the commander knew he did not have his man. Paul identified himself, and then did a very brave act. He asked that he might speak to this murderous mob. Paul had a divine viewpoint towards life, and he saw this as an opportunity to speak to the Jews about Christ. Perhaps Paul felt that this might be his last chance to witness for Christ ever, for the crowd wanted his life. Whatever, he felt the urgency of the Spirit to speak to them about Jesus Christ.

ADDRESS BY PAUL - Acts 21:40-22:21

#### Recognition of Background (21 :40-22 :3)

“And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying, ‘Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer you.’ And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said, ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today.’” -- The commander gave Paul permission to speak. Paul raised his hand and a great hush fell over the crowd as he began to speak to them in the Hebrew dialect of that day which was called Aramaic. Paul sought to gain the crowd's ear so as to win a hearing. He reminded them that he himself was a Jew, born in Tarsus and educated at the secular university of Tarsus, but he came to Jerusalem and sat under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, who was one of the seven great rabbis of all time. Paul took his seminary training in Jerusalem and became a specialist in the Mosaic law. Paul was trying to convince them that he knew the Mosaic Law and had been trained by the greatest teacher of the Law. He reminded them that he too was zealous for the Law at one time as they were presently. Paul was trying to get the crowd to sympathize with him so they would listen. In essence he was saying, “I am a rabbi and was as zealous for the Law as any Jew. I know how you Jews feel, for I was there once myself; therefore I do understand your anger and frustration with Christians.”

#### Persecution of Christians (22:4, 5)

“And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.” -- Paul really knew where these Jews were coming from and that is why he could love them and be concerned about them. He went on to explain that he persecuted Christians which he calls the “Way.”

The title, the “Way,” is very appropriate for Christ Himself said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

Christianity is a person, Jesus Christ. It is a way of life centered in the resurrected Christ. Christianity is the way to forgiveness of sins, the way to eternal life, the way to heaven, the way of no fear over death, the way to finding the real meaning to life. Christianity is the Way because Christ is the Way.

One Sunday morning, I looked out over the congregation at Grace Church and saw many visitors. Some I knew; some I did not know. I said to myself, “I wonder if these dear folks really think that Christianity is dressing up in a suit and tie or nice dress, coming to a pretty building, singing a few songs which they probably do not know, giving money and listening to a sermon.” Now, don't misunderstand me. I think we must listen to sermons, give faithfully to the Lord's work and our culture says we should dress up for church, but this is not the essence of Christianity. Christianity is knowing Christ. It is being loved by Christ and loving Christ. It is an intimate, personal and dynamic relationship with the resurrected Christ. Christ forgives our sins, gives us eternal life, never leaves us day or night, gives us meaning and purpose for life, and causes us to look at life from God's perspective. Christianity is Christ and we must help people understand this.

#### Conversion of Paul (22:6-16)

In this section Paul sets out to make a defense of his attitude towards the Mosaic Law and he begins by giving his personal testimony but he never gets to his defense because the angry mob calls for his death. He sets out to set forth his case for Christianity and his relationship to the Mosaic law and he begins by giving his own experience conversion. He makes no attempt to preach to these angry Jews; he gives no erudite theological argument. He falls back upon what is the most powerful form of witness--a simple testimony of what happened to him when he met the resurrected Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul's conversion to Christ, which happened thirty years before this time. was still real to him and etched into his memory so he could give the details of the most important event that ever happened to him. He recalls everything that happened to him on the road to Damascus as vividly as if it had happened yesterday.

Paul had a testimony to give and he gave it twice in the Book of Acts and alluded to it in several epistles he wrote.

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those

who would believe in Him for eternal life” (I Tim. 1:12-16).

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith . . .” (Phil. 3:7-9).

Paul's life was changed by Jesus Christ and he had to speak about the One who gave him the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, peace about death, assurance of heaven and purpose for life. What about you, Christian friend, how powerful is your testimony for Christ? Are you speaking to others a simple testimony as to how Christ saved you and changed life? Remember, brethren, whenever you give your own testimony, you are the greatest authority on that subject. Have you grown cold in your zeal for Christ and has your testimony been dampened because of worldliness, materialism and indifference? You must remember that Christ saved you and you are responsible to tell others that He changed your life and will change the lives of all others who turn to Him and accept Him as Savior and Lord.

Revelation (6-9): And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all 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 art Thou, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.” -- Paul met the resurrected Christ that day on the road to Damascus, and the appearance of Christ was brighter than the noonday sun. Actually what happened was that Christ arrested and sovereignly intervened the life of Paul that day. Paul was not seeking Christ, for he was on his way to persecute Christians, but Christ was seeking Paul. Paul was changed when Christ laid hold of him for salvation somewhere on the road to Damascus.

The conversion of Paul raises the whole question of what is conversion? Obviously Paul was a changed man and millions and millions of people called Christians have claimed to have had a similar conversion to Christ. Their conversions may not have been as dynamic as Paul's but they claim that Christ has invaded their lives and radically changed their attitudes about life and their personal life styles. Is conversion real? Is conversion just an emotional, psychological experience, or does Christ truly enter a man's or woman's life and radically change it? Every thinking Christian, at one time or another, has asked himself if he has been “conned,” “duped,” or “brainwashed” into believing the Christian Faith. This is especially true of Christians who have been raised in a Christian home. We also know there are other religions where people are claiming conversion experiences and changed lives. Mohammedans, Zen-Buddists, Transcendental Meditationists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and others are recording dynamic, changed lives when they follow their particular religion. What then makes Christian conversion any different from any other kind of religious conversion? First,

Christian conversion is a subjective experience based on historical facts--Christ lived, died for sinners and was resurrected from the dead. He is alive today and lives in the hearts and lives of all who trust Him for salvation. It is possible to have a religious, psychological conversion without having a Christian conversion, for Christian conversion involves a relationship with a historical person, Jesus Christ. Second, the Bible very specifically states that conversion is caused by God and not man. God's grace causes faith and it is not faith which causes God's grace to work.

“(God) who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (II Tim. 1:9).

“God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (I Cor. 1:9).

It is true that people are Christians because they have believed in Christ but this belief was part of the plan of God and given to them by God. Conversion to Christ, therefore, is supernatural, not natural. Third, conversion to Christ does involve a psychological process for it touches the whole-man--his mind, his will, his conscience, his emotions and his body. In conversion, the total personality passes through a psychological process and the change that has taken place is towards love for Christ. Fourth, conversion to Christ does bring new desires for Christ and spiritual realities. A true Christian knows he still has many desires of the old life but he cannot deny that something radical happened to him when he trusted Christ, and he does have new desires to please Christ. Fifth, a true Christian can try to stop believing in Christ but he cannot do it, for Christ has taken up residence in the life of the believer in Christ. If you are truly converted, you cannot stop believing in Christ no matter how hard you try.

Capitulation (10, 11): “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’ But 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.” -- The very first thing Paul wanted to know after he encountered Christ was the will of God for his life. He said, “What shall I do, Lord?” The will of God for the Christian is directly related to his relationship with the resurrected Christ. Who we are related to is more important than what we are to do or where we are to serve.

Commission (12-15): “And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I looked up at him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.’” -- Through Ananias, Christ gave Paul his commission to preach the gospel.

Regeneration (16): “And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash

away your sins, calling on His name.” -- This sounds like Paul was to get his sins washed away by believing in Christ and by being water baptized. Does this teach baptismal regeneration? Does a person have to be water baptized before his sins can be forgiven? The word “calling” is an adverbial participle of manner in the Greek and could be translated “by calling.” The sense of the passage is, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.” It, therefore, is not baptism that is the means for washing away sins but the calling on the name of Christ by faith. “For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

This verse raises the question as to when Paul was really saved, on the Damascus road or in the home of Ananias? This verse seems to indicate that it was when he called on the name of Christ to save him in the house of Ananias. On the Damascus road, Christ made Himself known to Paul as preparatory to salvation, and this was all part of Christ's sovereign drawing, but Paul came to a commitment to Christ by faith which saves in the house of Ananias. Saving faith happens when a person trusts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord for time and eternity.

Opposition to Paul (22:17-21): “And it came about that when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance, and I 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 understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.’ And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” -- Paul reminded this angry mob that twenty-seven years before this time he came to Jerusalem to tell them about Christ and they were angry with him then as they were now. At that time God sent him to the Gentiles.

ANGER OF THE JEWS - Acts 22:22-29

Protest of the Mob (22:22)

“And they listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!’” -- Apparently at this point, Paul was to begin his defense, but the word “Gentiles” infuriated this racially prejudiced Jewish crowd who hated Gentiles and called them “dogs.” God had originally called the Jews to be a vehicle to reach the Gentile nations with the truth of Jehovah-God. However, the Jews wrongly reasoned, “God has chosen us; therefore we must be a superior people. God doesn't have any interest in the rest of the Gentile nations. Let them all go to hell, for God is only interested in the Jews!”

Christians must be careful about having an isolationist attitude. It is the height of arrogance for a Christian to reason, “God has chosen me; therefore, I'm superior. Let the world go to hell. I'm saved and God is only interested in me!” Such pride, such haughtiness, such arrogance! God has chosen the Christian to salvation in order that



Christ will save all who place their faith and trust in Christ to save them. God always hates a self-righteous, superior attitude and He will judge it accordingly.

#### Plan to Scourge Paul (22:23-29)

“And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.” -- The Romans had decided that they were going to beat the truth out of Paul so they took him back to the castle of Antonia to scourge him. The scourge was a horrible type of torture. The scourge consisted of strips of leather with sharp metal or bone fastened to it. These strips of leather were fastened to a stick for a handle. If a person did not die under the scourge, he would certainly be crippled for life. The whole purpose of the scourge was to extort a confession.

#### Protection of Citizenship for Paul (22:25-29)

“And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’ And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.’ And the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ And the commander answered, ‘I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was actually born a citizen.’ Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.” -- All Roman citizens were to have a legal trial, and no Roman citizen was to be given the scourge. To punish a Roman citizen illegally was punishable by death. These Romans were about to commit a serious offense. Apparently, in the course of the conversation, the commander made it known that he was a slave who had purchased his citizenship for a high fee, but Paul was born a Roman citizen, probably because his father or grandfather had served the Roman state well and was rewarded with citizenship which passed on through the family of Paul.

#### CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, I want to remind you that the resurrected Christ is still seeking men and women, invading their lives and changing them just as He did Paul. Conversion to Christ is real. How can you know Christ has intervened in your life? The moment you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus to save you, you will know that Christ has supernaturally come into your life.

Call upon Christ. The Bible says, “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” Christ will give you a new heart with new desires. He will also give you a powerful testimony, for you will experience a changed life which you will be able to share with others. Call on Christ's name to save you, for today is the day of salvation.