

Scripture Reading:

Acts 21:40 "So when [the commander] had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, Acts 22:1 " "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." 2 And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: 3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gam-A-liel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, & went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. 6 Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10 So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. 12 Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, 13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. 14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' 17 Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' 19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' "22 And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" 23 Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him."

"Paul Gives His Testimony"

I have read the text and Paul gives a powerful presentation of the Gospel, so I guess I am just about finished here this morning! Well, there are some important lessons for us to learn, especially for those coming from a reformed tradition...

- What Paul did to defend himself before this hostile crowd... Was to give his testimony!
- Something that we do NOT do often enough, I fear.

Now don't get me wrong: I do not think that we need to send our covenant children out into the world so they can get messed up and then saved so they have a testimony to share!

- Those who have been raised in the faith walking with the Lord have a BETTER testimony and one that God is very pleased to see & hear!

Such a testimony can be seen in young Timothy who was likely traveling with Paul at this time: Paul reminds him of his testimony in his second letter...

II Timothy 1:3 “3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, 5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”

However, we also know that God does bring back covenant breakers who have wandered from the faith and saves those who have not been raised under the blessing of the covenant.

- There are times where such testimonies can be used to serve God’s purposes and such was the case with Paul here in Jerusalem.

Despite his valiant efforts to be at peace with all men, Paul has been attacked and almost killed by a hostile crowd in the Temple. Paul is now given the opportunity to address the crowd and we need to remember that he is addressing two different groups of Jews [as well as those Roman soldiers!]: There were present Jews, who have come to faith and are still zealous for the Law and suspicious of Paul, like the four men who had taken vows.

- And you have present those Jews who have rejected the Messiah and wanted to have Paul killed: Who I suspect are Paul’s primary audience.

The Roman commander allows Paul to speak because he is trying to ascertain just what caused the uproar & he sees this as the next step in his investigation.

- I think we can be pretty sure this is his motive because when it fails he quickly moves to have Paul scourged to get more information, as we will see next week.

So Paul has the opportunity to address both of these Jewish groups and he stresses two important points:

- He wants both groups to know that he is a faithful Jew who has not spoken ill of the people he loves, the Law he now knows is fulfilled in Christ nor even the temple where God has dwelled for 1,000 years.
- He also takes the opportunity to show how he has been converted by Jesus and given a new heart!

He gives his testimony which Luke gave us an account of in chapter nine and which we will see Paul give again before King Agrippa in chapter 26. Since we dealt with his conversion in our work on chapter nine I will not spend much time on those details this morning: There are some differences and we will look at all of them when we come to the third account.

What I want us to see this morning is how Paul made those two important points relevant to both groups in the crowd that he was addressing. In this one speech, he both ministers to those who need to be ready to flee this city in just a few years...

- AND he challenges those with hardened hearts to repent and believe before it is too late!
- This is why we have spent much time looking at the historical context of the times and Paul’s own testimony in the Book of Romans about his love for his people.

So let us quickly look at what Paul took opportunity to say...

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.”

That salutation should NOT be overlooked and let me use Mike as a modern example of how shocking this should be: [I do so with his approval]

Let’s say he takes a trip down to San Francisco and starts handing out Gospel tracks in front of the very liberal Metropolitan Church.

A group of homosexual radicals and some of the ministers of that church come rushing out and declare that this is the man who hates all homosexuals, wants them to die and would burn down their beautiful building. If you have seen the recent reaction by the homosexuals to a quiet group of Christians who prayed in the Castro district you would have no trouble imagining a near riot breaking out and folks ready to kill Mike on the spot. So the San Francisco police show up to restore order and before Mike is taken away he asks to address the crowd:

- **Can you imagine how shocked we would be IF Mike began his speech by addressing them as “brethren and fathers?”**
- **If we used a modern equivalent, Mike might have said ‘brothers and Americans.’**

Paul was addressing a hostile crowd, which we can understand. But these men were circumcised so he also refers to them as brethren: That we have a bit more trouble understanding.

I guess Pastor Wilson would want us to imagine having to address a group of men who were caught up in the sin of adultery: Would it be proper to address them as men and husbands?

- **Now, they would be very BAD husbands, BUT if they are not husbands, then how could they be committing adultery.**

Paul is not sugar coating the sins of this crowd nor their leaders, he is appealing to them on what common ground he can find calling them brethren & fathers and we will see Paul go on to explain how he has been a faithful Jew and calls on them to do the same by repenting and turning to Jesus!

- **Both the greeting and the language in which he spoke it get their attention.**

2 And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: 3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today."

- **The hardened Jews are zealous for the wrong reasons, but Paul knows that there are also converted Jews in this city who are zealous for the right reasons and he has appealed to both!**
- **He does the same in explaining his past actions: Telling the hardened Jews he was as tough on the Christians as anyone and showing the Christians that he has changed.**

4 “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, & went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”

- **At this point I can imagine that some of the unconverted Jews were beginning to wonder if they were picking on the right man and the converted Jews were wondering if they should be supporting the Apostle Paul.**
- **Paul does not leave them to wonder: He immediately tells BOTH groups he is a changed man because of his encounter with Jesus!**

6 “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.”

- **Paul has politely addressed this crowd and is being somewhat subtle as he gives his testimony, BUT he does not compromise: The name Jesus will divide this crowd bringing suspicion among those who have rejected Jesus and comfort to those who are following Him, an example we must remember in our witnessing.**

10 “So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ 11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. 12 Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, 13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. 14 Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.’”

- Here Paul again appeals to both groups, talking about Ananias as a devout Jew and mentioning the ‘God of our fathers.’

We know from Luke’s account in chapter nine that Ananias mentioned the name of Jesus again at this point, so is Paul compromising here? Did not Jesus tell these same Jewish leaders that Abraham saw Jesus and rejoiced? Paul knew that Jesus was the God of their fathers, so again he brings comfort to the believing Jews and challenges those with stubborn hearts [he also gives us another Trinitarian text that I have not heard many use!].

- And we will see that Paul pulls no punches as he continues to give his testimony!
- Paul is being subtle but will not compromise God’s truth!

15 “For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

- What a great comfort we have here for those who struggle with sin even in the Christian life!

When we call upon the name of the Lord for salvation, we are baptized and know that our sins are washed away.

- Not with the water, but with the very blood of Jesus which was poured out on our behalf!

Both Reformed and Baptist traditions are not comfortable using the language that Ananias uses here...

- And sadly it takes away the security that we should have as believers in the Lord Jesus.

Our baptism is effectual because the work of Jesus is effectual... On the cross and in our hearts!

Paul did in fact arise and call upon the name of the Lord and he could always remember that his sins were washed away recalling how he was baptized with water! [*our covenant children can do the same!*]

Paul could go on to honestly refer to himself as the chief of sinners and yet not struggle to know that he was forgiven! Each time he approached the Lord in worship he could confess his sins as we do each week and know that he was forgiven and ascended before God in the righteousness of Jesus. As he shares this testimony, he wants the Jewish Christians who are listening to be encouraged, remembering their own baptism and what it means... AND he wants those who have rejected the Messiah to repent of their sin; hoping that they too will arise and have their sins washed away in baptism as they call upon the Lord!

- Now Paul turns to a portion of his testimony that describes a trip back to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion.

Most commentators try to fit this in with one of his later visits, but in the context, I think he is continuing to share the heart that he had for his brethren the Jews: Remember, he had just written to the Saints at Rome that he would be willing to be cursed in order to save his brethren, including those who tried to kill him that day.

- Jesus had commissioned Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles and he was willing to carry that burden, BUT he also wanted to be used by God to save many Jews there in Jerusalem.

17 “Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

- Paul again brings comfort to the Saints who were zealous for the law by showing that he was not afraid to go and pray in the Temple!
- He certainly would also have the full attention of the other Jews at this point.

19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

- Paul joins Abraham, Moses and other Saints like Ananias who seemed unafraid to have honest discussions with God!

Paul has a heart for his people the Jews and he is convinced from a human standpoint that he has a powerful testimony to share with them and that it could bring many to salvation.

- But Jesus has other plans for Paul and reminds him of this in NO uncertain terms!

21 “Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' ”

- Paul gives the same message to both the sheep and the goats and now the division will become clear.

His commission will be seen as the sweet smell of life to those converted Jews who now more fully understand the commission that Paul has been given and how it is NOT in conflict with their being zealous for the law.

- On the other hand the mere mention of the hated Gentiles is a stench in the nostrils of those who are being lost as we can see from the text:

22 “And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

- The mob is back to being a mob and as we shall see next week the Roman Commander still does not understand what is going on so he will turn to floggings and trials to ascertain the truth.

So what are the lessons we are to learn from this account of Paul’s testimony?

- First and foremost, we must learn that it is OK, no, it is GOOD for us to share our testimony!

It is important to see that this will include BOTH those inside and outside of the Church.

- Our covenant children need to hear over and over again what Jesus has done for us!

As a bonus, it is good for US to remember what Jesus has done for us!

- And of course we must be ready and willing to share the Gospel with the lost!

We see here in Paul’s defense the lesson we have often seen in Acts:

- The Gospel will divide!

AND we must again remember that while the Gospel will often bring offense WE are NOT to be offensive. The Apostle Paul did not begin his speech by saying something like, “Well, let me tell you about how Jesus want us to save the Gentiles!”

Paul did get to that important point, but not before giving a strong call to repentance using his own life as an example and making sure that the many Jewish Saints who were also there that day could see his continuing love toward all of God’s people!

There are many trials and testimonies that lie ahead in the life of Paul as Luke presents it to us in his orderly account.

➤ May we never tire of hearing and telling the Good News!

Our hymn of response this morning was written by a man who also had a powerful testimony and through the singing of Amazing Grace even in many secular settings it has been shared many times around the world. John Newton had a rough early life and ended up as the captain of a slave ship at the height of the English slave trade: But God had other plans.

According to one historical account, “Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions. However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his “great deliverance.”

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

For the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of May 10, 1748 as the day of his conversion, a day of humiliation in which he subjected his will to a higher power.

“Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

➤ John Newton would go on to become a minister of the Gospel!

His hymn about his conversion, his testimony if you will, has been a challenge and encouragement to many down through the ages.

May it comfort us this morning

AND

May it always remind us, along with the conversion of the Apostle Paul, that no mere man it beyond the saving grace of Jesus whenever we think any particular person would not be receptive to the Gospel!

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 11:23

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this as a memorial of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”