

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 22****“SHACKLED BUT NOT SILENT!”**

A man on a mission for God is hard to stop; a man who is not ashamed of the Gospel is hard to silence. Arrested, chained and surrounded by Roman soldiers, Paul, the soldier in the army of Jesus Christ, took advantage of a crowd bent on killing him, to give them a witness. Put a preacher like Paul before a crowd and he cannot remain silent!

Standing on the stairway Paul gave a speech that can be divided in three parts: he gave a defense of himself; he gave a testimony of his conversion and he gave a witness for Jesus Christ.

Paul's Defense. vs. 1-5

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” (v.1) This beat up but unbowed Jew from Tarsus stood at the top of the stairs and began speaking.

He declared his Jewishness.

“I am a Jew.” (v.3a) That got the crowd's attention. The Roman captain had thought him to be an Egyptian rabble-rouser. When he arrested Paul he said, *“Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”* (21:38)

He identified his hometown.

“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia....” (v.3b) Paul said he was born of Jewish parents in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, which is by some thought to be the same as the city of Tarshish of the Old Testament.

He emphasized his education.

“....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.” (v.3c) Gamaliel was one of their most esteemed Jewish teachers. (Acts 5:34) If this throng thought that Paul was an ignorant nobody, they must have been surprised when Paul informed them that he had been a scholar in Gamaliel's school.

He rehearsed his past activities.

In verses four and five Paul admitted that he was at one time just as opposed to The Way, and more so, as they were. He had persecuted Christians, imprisoned them and killed them, doing so with the approval and by the authority of the high priest and Jewish elders. At that

time he was known as Saul and he was just as opposed to this Jesus movement as they were.

In giving his defense he was identifying with the incensed citizenry which thought that he had desecrated the temple by taking into it a Gentile, which he had not done, and that he was out to destroy the Law of Moses. He did not address these issues in his defense for it was enough, for the time being, that he had gotten the attention of the assemblage and had temporarily defused their anger.

Paul's Testimony. vs. 6-13

Now that the crowd was calmed, Paul transitioned into giving his testimony of conversion from a Christian hater and hunter to becoming a Christian himself. He testifies about:

When he met Jesus. v.5b

He was on his way up to the Syrian city of Damascus to pick up Christians who had been incarcerated there and bring them back to Jerusalem to punish them. But God had other plans. He knows where we are, what we are doing and his timing for interrupting our plans is never late, never ahead of time but always exactly right on time.

David sang in Psalm 139, *"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."* (vs.1-3) And, *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."* (vs.7-10)

Where He Met Jesus. vs.6-8

"...as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly 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?' So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'"

Thank God that He is the Great Interrupter – the Great Confronter! He has interrupted all of us who are now his own, as we pursued a life of rebellion against him, ignorantly or knowingly. When Saul/Paul departed the city of Jerusalem to go to Damascus he never dreamed that he would be a different man when he entered Damascus than he was when he left Jerusalem. He left Jerusalem a Christ-hater and entered Damascus a Christ-lover having met Him as he journeyed.

Saul/Paul did not meet Jesus in a synagogue, or church service; he did not meet Jesus because he was searching for Him; he did not meet him while he was praying or engaged in any other religious exercise. The Light suddenly broke upon him when he least expected it.

He was going about his assigned duties, thinking he was doing God a service by punishing followers of Jesus Christ. Then suddenly he met Jesus Christ and he was changed and the world has not been the same since. His life and writings have impacted history.

Matthew met Jesus while he was employed as a tax collector; Peter, Andrew, James and John met him while they were fishing; Cornelius was at home; the Ethiopian was in a chariot; Lydia was down by the riverside; the Philippian jailer was in the jail, Zacchaeus was up a tree, etc. Have you met the Master? When? Where?

How He Met Jesus.

"...as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me." Saul/Paul was not on the Damascus road looking for Jesus -- Jesus was on the Damascus road waiting for him! The Light v.6; the Voice v.7; the command v.10 and Saul/Paul was forever changed. When he left Jerusalem he was a sinner, but was converted in the middle of the roadway and arrived in Damascus a saint, temporarily physically blind but with spiritual sight.

When we met the master, we were converted -- that is, we experienced a change of mind about God, sin and self with a corresponding change in nature, direction and purpose. That is what "conversion" is. A confrontation with Christ precedes conversion to Christ. And, He initiates the contact! *"There is none who seeks after God."* (Rom. 3:11)

I wonder what happened to those Christians that he was intending to escort back to Jerusalem from Damascus to be punished? Did God answer their prayers for deliverance and were they set free? I don't know about them but I do know that Saul/Paul was set free from the prison house of sin!

Paul's Witness.

All the time Paul was speaking from the stairway to the Christless hordes below him, they must have been experiencing a flood of conflicting emotions. This fellow they had intended to kill was a more complicated and interesting figure than they had imagined.

But just when they were perhaps on the verge of changing their minds about him, Paul poured fuel on the smoldering fire which inflamed them more than ever. He gave them a twofold witness:

First, He said that he had seen the Just One. vs.14-15

Ananias, "A devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews" (v.12) in Damascus, was sent by God to minister to Paul after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Ananias explained to Paul that: *"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."* (22:14 KJV & NKJV. "The Just One" is translated the "Righteous One" in the NASB, NIV and ESV)

"The Just One" or "the Righteous One" is a title given to the Messiah. Note the following:

In Acts 3 Peter and John were preaching and Peter said, *“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”* (vs.13-15) The result? The Jewish leaders put Peter and John in jail. (Acts 4:1-3)

In Acts 7 Stephen was addressing a similar mob like that Paul was addressing and he said, *“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers....”* (vs. 51-52) The result? They took stones and pummeled Stephen to death.

In Acts 22 Paul said in essence, “You killed the Just One, the Messiah, but He is alive from the dead, I saw Him and talked with Him on my way to Damascus!” The result? This infuriated these religious but lost Jews even more. To them Paul was a blasphemer and worthy of death.

Second, He said that God sent him to preach to the Gentiles. v.21

Ananias further informed Paul that God said, *“I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.”* At the mention of the Gentiles, Paul struck a raw nerve that triggered the riot in the first place. This was the “straw that broke the camel's back.” Now the fat was really in the fire! The terrorists who had been silent were silent no longer. All their pent-up rage that they had stifled now came gushing out as they remembered why they wanted to kill him. His horrible crime, as they viewed it, was taking a filthy heathen, a ceremoniously unclean Gentile, as they had been led to believe, into their sacred temple.

“They raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air....” (vs.22-23) They would have torn Paul limb from limb if the Roman captain with his soldiers had not intervened and rescued Paul from the mass of mad mankind.

Paul's Apprehension. vs. 24-30

Paul was rescued from a gang of killers and taken into protective custody. He was not out of danger yet for he was threatened with a whipping by the soldiers in order to force the truth out of him as to who he was and why he had caused such an uproar.

When the captain discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen like himself, he abandoned the idea of scourging Paul for to do so would have been an illegal act, since Paul was a Roman citizen. It was a serious crime to flog a Roman citizen. The commander could lose his military commission or even his life. However Paul was held overnight in house arrest. The next day he was brought before the Sanhedrin Council, The highest Jewish court. They demanded an explanation from him for the disturbance that his presence had caused. That is where we leave him as the chapter ends.

Paul was aware that God had a plan and that he was the instrument that God was using to accomplish His purposes. Never mind what happened to him; he must live in the present with an eye to the future when God would reward him for his faithful witness. Paul was living with eternity's values in view.

What can we take away from this chapter? Several principles:

- The majority was against Paul, however, the majority is not always in the right;
- Here on the earth, God is accomplishing His purposes through a minority;
- Might does not make right - right eventually triumphs over might;
- Keep the big picture in view for the Sovereign God is always in control;
- Never sacrifice the permanent upon the altar of the immediate by taking the easy way out.

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