

Paul's Defence

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[0 : 0 0] We were looking at this morning, I suppose, with Jesus' spirit after his death and between his death and resurrection being very much alive.

I want us today, this evening, to return to Acts 21 and 22. You'll have guessed and you'll have recognized through reading that passage together that it's a narrative passage, it's a passage that's giving us a narrative account.

It's just telling us a story about what happened. And I've got a question here that isn't actually part of the questions that are in your Bible.

But it's a recognition that the Bible's written in different ways, okay? There's different kinds of writing in the Bible. It's not all the same.

Writing is one of the kinds. The posh word used for that is there's different genres of Scripture, different types of ways in which the Bible has been written. And it's important that we at least recognize these different types of writing because it affects the way we read the stories and it probably affects the way that I would preach them as well, depending on what type of writing we're looking at in the Bible.

[1 : 1 9] When you think of some of the different types of writing that is in the Bible, if this is narrative, if this is a history account of the early church, what other kinds of writings are there in the Bible?

There's poetry, okay? That's distinctive. Sam's is part of the writing that is poetry in the Bible. What other kinds of writing are there in the Bible?

There's prophecy, okay? That's another type. Jeremiah, Isaiah, some of these Old Testament books are prophetic. In fact, quite often it's linked together with law.

So there's the law and the prophets as part of the Scripture. Any other types of Scripture that you can think of? Epistles. Epistles, yeah. The letters of Paul.

So they're quite distinctive as well. They're different from Acts. It's different from the Old Testament. And from the Sam's, it's letters. And maybe when you're looking at the letters of Paul, which is telling us about how to deliver Christians, we might kind of look at it in much more detail, verse by verse, than that's why I'm not going through Acts verse by verse.

[2 : 3 1] It would be here forever, apart from anything else. But it's a bit, it's just very different kind of writing. Any other types of writing? Parables. Sorry?

Parables. Yeah, which they come under which part of Scripture? Where are the parables in? The Gospels.

So the Gospels again are maybe slightly different. They are narrative and they give us the story of Jesus, but there's also a lot of teaching and there's a lot of parables that come under Gospel.

Is that everything? There's maybe one major one you've missed out. It's really weird. Very different. Sorry? Genealogy. Genealogy. Genealogy, yeah, which would possibly come under history, I guess.

Oh, yeah. That's, well, Tom's going into college. Apocalyptic. That's the bits of the Bible that speak about the future using lots of different pictures, like Revelation or Daniel.

[3 : 35] And again, you treat them all differently. This is narrative. This is history. But Revelation, you wouldn't treat in the same way. You're not looking for a seven-headed serpent outside when you go outside because it's symbolic and it's a different type of writing.

So we're reminded that there's all kinds of different writings. And this is history. This is narrative. So we've come to the point where Paul has been, remember, he's driven towards Jerusalem, isn't he?

We've seen that. He's moving towards Jerusalem all the time. Even though lots of people have said to him, don't go to Jerusalem because the people there want to kill you, very similar to what people said about Jesus.

But he went to Jerusalem. We saw that the last time that we studied Acts. And he got a hard time from the church and he got a hard time from the opponents of the church. And this is really just following on from that.

He is violently opposed by people, the Jewish people, who don't like what he is saying and don't like what he's preaching.

[4 : 40] And it's based on, he's based on kind of half truths and assumptions in verse 39 of that passage.

We find, oh no, no, that's not the wrong, that's the wrong reference I've got there. We do recognize that they were, forgive me, 29.

No, okay. I've got the wrong reference for that. Never mind. There was people, well, they assumed that he was part of an Egyptian uprising, which he wasn't.

And that they assumed also that he'd taken someone into the temple with him, which he hadn't. And then the crowd mentality went against him and it was violent and oppressive.

And it's quite interesting that we find and recognize and see there that the herd mentality is something we've got to be aware of, as are making half truths or assumptions about people based on half truths.

[5 : 47] There's lessons there for us. But anyway, nonetheless, he's protected by the Roman guards and he's taken away by them ironically.

And he is kept from being beaten up by the crowds. And then having given his testimony, he is taken again by the crowds, by the Roman leaders, because the crowds really want rid of him because of what he said about going to the Gentiles.

The crowd listened to Paul up to this point, then they raised their voices and shouted, get rid the earth of him. He's not fit to live. Not dissimilar to the opposition that Jesus had when they said, crucify him, crucify him.

We don't want this man to rule over us. And of course, the Romans were set then to find out what all the opposition was about. So they were going to flog him.

And then they were going to flog him and then question him. That was nicer than it was and that was decent. They wanted to find out what it was. So they flog him first and then they'd question him. And flogging wasn't just a little bashing about in the corner.

[6 : 58] It was a hugely brutal and violent whipping with a leather strap that had bone and metal tied into it, which either killed you or if it didn't kill you, were at least maimed for life.

So it was very brutal. And then at that point, Paul said something very significant that stopped him getting flogged. So that's the account that we have that has brought us up to date with his story.

Now the first question that's on your sheet is, as we have seen Paul knew that he would face opposition when he got to Jerusalem. It helped him to be courageous.

What I mean by that is that he knew that the Holy Spirit had told him that he should go to Jerusalem chapter 20, 22, 23, but the Holy Spirit also said, you will be opposed when you get there.

But the fact that he knew that and that God had told him that gave him courage to face what lay ahead. What does the Bible teach us about the Christian life that helps us to face the future with insight and therefore with courage?

[8 : 15] So we face our Christian lives and we face the future. What enables us to face our Christian lives in the future with a sense of insight and therefore courage?

What do you know about the Christian life that enables you to move forward with courage? What facts do you know about the Christian life? I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

I know what I'm trying to ask, but that's because I know the answers, because they're my answers. But what does the Bible teach us about our Christian life that gives us confidence to persevere and to move forward in God's will?

Yeah, that's one thing. It tells us we will have trouble. So if we know we're going to have trouble, Paul knew he was going to have trouble when he went to Jerusalem, but it gave him courage because he knew that that was part of God's plan for him and we know we'll have trouble.

And that's not easy, is it? It's not something we look forward to. But if you're a Christian, if you're a young Christian, it's important for you to know that there will be trouble ahead for you as a Christian because you're standing up for Christ and because of the opposition that is targeted on you because you're a Christian.

[9 : 31] But that gives you courage to persevere when you know that that is what the Bible teaches about the way forward. Anything else about the Christian life that enables us to move forward with perseverance and courage?

Sorry? The Psalms of David. The Psalms of David, in what sense, they give us a sense of comfort knowing that there's trouble.

Yeah, okay, yeah. Someone would say that we can sing like our great spiritual man. Okay, so the character of God, the faithfulness of God is very important.

You've entrusted your life to someone who is worth entrusting your life to because he's faithful. If God is a liar, if God's a cheat, or if God isn't faithful, then it's very difficult to persevere in the Christian life.

He is faithful and he's also sovereign in life. Is there anything else that enables us to move forward? Okay, so we've got the promises of relying on his strength and his simply that promise that he will stick with us and he will remain faithful and he will continue to be with us in our Christian life.

[11 : 01] Is there anything else? I'm sure there is. Okay, yeah, he's promised that in his strength we'll be able to cope with whatever lies ahead.

Now sometimes that's very difficult to understand. For some people it's very difficult. Yeah, we've a God who understands and who's gone through it before.

You're bringing up a lot of things that I hadn't thought of as well and that's good. It's important and these things and knowing these things help us to keep on going and give us courage when it's difficult because we know the character of God.

We know what God has told us about himself and probably most significantly but related to and intertwining with all of that is that he loves us, loves us and will never let go of us in our lives.

Okay, so we see in this narrative story that Paul's able to go forward and face a lot of things he faced because he knew God's guidance and God's love and God's promises and God's work in his life.

[12 : 11] And that is because Christ was his Lord and he was close to his God and that's a challenge for us in our lives also to have that same closeness. Okay, the second question is about Paul's testimony.

We've got a great account of Paul, his story here is coming to faith from verse 1 to verse 20 where he goes through the fact that he is upbringing and then how he met with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, that famous story.

So highlight some of the features of Paul's testimony in verses 1 to 20 and I've got two main points that I wanted to highlight that are important for our testimony but look at the testimony of Paul, what are some of the things that you notice about the way that he shares his faith in this passage?

He tells his own story, how he started off. He started off very much not being a Christian, in fact quite anti-Christian. He was a poet who was trying to defeat the Christian way so he's very antagonistic.

So he tells a little bit about what he was like before. What else do we notice about his testimony? Okay, that's very important that he met with Jesus in the story.

[13 : 47] A personal encounter, it wasn't just that he read a book and thought, oh that must be what it is to be a Christian. That sounds like a good idea. He met with Jesus Christ, with an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Okay, anything else you notice about this testimony that is given to us? Yes, so he knew when his life was changed, he knew exactly when that happened and he remembered that and that was important to him, transforming time in his life.

What else? Okay, God centred, it's Christ centred.

He wasn't looking to be converted, even was he? Well, not what he says in here. He was going to oppose, he was going to do this to Damascus to arrest people, but he was arrested by God.

Anything else? Okay, when God spoke to him, he responded to that.

[14 : 55] He asked what to do and God said what he had to do and he responded to that. There was a change. Christ became his Lord rather than his enemy.

Is there anything else? Does it say that?

Tom? Does it say that in the passage? Yeah, yeah.

He got told to be baptized, yeah. He did. It is part of his testimony, yeah. Which is good because that's part of the Great Commission, isn't it?

Be baptized in the name of Jesus. So that was significant. Change is like that, after the first two weeks. Okay.

[15 : 49] I don't know if the construction would get off, so it would be, it wasn't a protest or something like that.

Dramatic, yeah. Immediate change, immediate change. Now I know that as we look at our own testimonies, we'll see a lot of differences because very many of us don't have such a dramatic account of becoming a Christian as he did.

But there are some things that we can take from it. There's one thing, there's one other thing that I picked out. I will, a couple of things that I picked out that I think are significant.

One is he was very respectful. Now these guys were begging for his blood. They wanted him dead. They didn't want anything to do with him. And he speaks to the Roman leaders and he says, excuse me, may I have an opportunity to speak to these people?

So he does that. And then he says to them, and there's two things. First is he says something in their own language. Paul is very, he's very intelligent obviously, and he can speak to the Romans in their own language and then he can speak to the Jewish people in Aramaic.

[17 : 12] So he speaks to them in their own tongue and immediately they're really quiet. They don't expect that. There's immediate attention to the listen. And when he speaks to them, he says, brothers and fathers.

In other words, he's very respectful when he gives his testimony. See he's really in a lion's den here. And yet he speaks really respectfully, brothers and fathers. These guys are just foaming at the mouth or they've got blood dripping in their hands or they're out to get them.

And he speaks very respectfully and lovingly in many ways to them. So these are some of the further aspects of his testimony.

There's a couple of things that I want to pick out so that I think and apply. Every testimony is individual and every testimony coming to faith in Jesus is individual. There's a couple of things I would like to pick out from his that I think and apply to us.

The first is that I think Paul is saying in the early part of the story, what he's saying to them is, listen, I'm just like you. I'm just like you guys.

[18 : 20] In fact, I was exactly like you guys in the way that you are opposing the Christian faith and the Christian truth. I was just like that. You know, he states who he was.

I was a Jew, I was under Gamaliel who they would have respected greatly. He was taught in the law of the fathers. He was as zealous for God as any of you. And he's making the point.

He's saying, look, I'm not a two headed freak here. I'm just like you. I'm one of you. I'm similar to you guys. I'm part of your people, part of your culture.

I'm a brother with you in many ways. That's what he's saying. He's associating with his own people and his culture. And I think making common ground with people.

That's what he's doing. He's wanting them to listen because he's at common ground. He speaks the same language. The Bible tells us that they go quiet when they hear that he speaks Aramaic.

[19 : 15] And then he says, he nails that he's the same kind of guy as them. And he's making common ground, respectfully, sensitively and with tact.

And I think that's really important in our Christian lives when we're talking about our testimony or sharing our faith. That we don't want to make ourselves out as freaks because everyone thinks we're freaks anyway, as Christians.

But that we want them to make clear to people that I'm just like you. I'm just like you. You know, I've been born in the same city. I went to the same school.

You know, whatever it might be, I like the same things. There's a common... We're looking... When we share our testimony with people in our lives, we're looking for common ground with them.

We're not necessarily looking always to be completely different, but we're looking to share common ground, common humanity with them.

[20 : 17] Very often we're unwilling to associate with people. But we have to come alongside people and say, I'm just like you. Because we are, aren't we?

In that great unbiblical phrase, we're all Jock Tampion's bairns, but we're all made in God's image. We're all lost without Christ. But we're all just together.

You know, we're not a breed apart. We're not more special. We're not more significant. In and of ourselves, I'm just like you. And the other thing he says, and Tom picked up on that, I've met with Christ.

You know, however our testimony is individual and whatever is important in what we say, we say I'm like you, but I've met with Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ, maybe more accurately, has met with me.

I've met with Jesus Christ. That's the big change, isn't it? It's not how many years we've been going to church. It's not how long we, how much understanding or knowledge we have of the Bible, it's that we've had a personal encounter with the living God through Jesus Christ.

[21 : 25] Unique to all of us. None of us here, I don't think, will have had Damascus Road experiences. Poof! Dramatic. Absolutely life-changing. Many of us will have been brought up in a Christian home, and we've known the truth since before we could walk.

And we may have been gently ushered into the Kingdom of God that way. But nonetheless, we've come to the point where we can say, I was just like you, but I've met with Jesus Christ.

And I think that's hugely significant. Our testimony is not maybe of a once-for-all meeting with Jesus Christ that was like a Damascus Road, but that we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and it is in Him that our hope is based.

And that's what we need to share. Telling someone you're going to church on Sunday isn't sharing your testimony. Telling someone that you know and love Jesus Christ is. Tell them you go to church might be a stepping stone towards it, of course.

He is the core of what we are to share as Christians. And often what we should wear as a crown, that is our relationship with Jesus Christ, we hide in our boots.

[22 : 34] We hide it in our boots the last place. The last thing that we say is referred to Jesus Christ, but we tell about His love, we tell about His grace, we tell about the change that He's made.

And we do so sensitively, as we saw this morning from that text, and with tact. And I was reading a commentary on this passage by a man called Gordon Kedde.

He used to sit just right there where Alan's sitting. When I was a wee boy, when I used to sit over there. And he and his brother used to sit there, they used to come to this church. And he's now a pastor in America.

And he says, anyone can read the riot act, but evangelism means reaching out in love. And he saw that from this whole account of the way Paul reached out sensitively and with love to those who needed to hear the gospel.

What do you find are the hardest things about sharing your faith? Sharing your testimony just quickly? What's the hardest thing about telling people about Jesus Christ?

[23 : 43] Starting it, okay. Anything else that we can share? Fear of being rejected, be laughed at.

Embarrassment, lack of knowledge. Thinking we'll get found out. I think we all have different fears, but it's important, I think, to take at least some of the principles from this and apply them in our own lives.

I'm just like you. I've met with Christ. And let that open the conversation to people. Okay.

The last question there is, Saul being born in Tarsus, verse three, may have seemed like an incidental fact of his life. Why is it important as the story unfolds in verse 22 to 29?

And do you have any other similar experiences where seemingly incidental events or choices in your life are shown to have been part of God's purpose all along? This is a very simple question, actually, which you all know the answer to, I'm sure.

[24 : 54] Why is it important, though, as the story unfolds when he goes to be flogged at the end of the story?

Why, what possible connection could there be with him being threatened with flogging and the fact that he was born in Tarsus?

He was born in Tarsus, maybe 37. Correct. And he says that in that passage that he is a citizen of no, it's not no mean city, that's another city, isn't it?

Yeah, let's stare somewhere. Anyway, we recognize and see that he isn't flogged because it was illegal for the Roman soldiers to flog Roman citizens.

And Paul, much to their surprise, because they thought he was a Jew, he was also a Roman citizen born in Tarsus. And Paul may have had no concept of how significant it was that he was a Roman citizen for many, many years until he comes to times like this in his life.

[26 : 20] It kept him, and this account, from certain death, the fact that he was a Roman citizen, that he wasn't going to be flogged and just thrown back to the crowd.

He had the protection of the Roman legal system. He had the right to appeal to Caesar. He had opportunities because he was imprisoned as a Roman citizen in a much more civilized way than he would have otherwise been imprisoned.

He had an opportunity, as he says in Philippians 1.13, to witness to all of Caesar's household about the gospel. It's probably the inspiration for him to have given us the Armour of God picture in Ephesians 6, because there would have been a Roman soldier at his door, and he brought the gospel to Rome because he was appealing to Caesar.

So the gospel spread massively because of this incidental place of birth that he had and his genealogy born a Roman citizen.

So we see that nothing in God's purpose and plan was without reason, without a plan behind it, because God had planned of all of these things in his life.

[27 : 45] It may have seemed incidental for many years, but it came to be very significant and important. Does anyone have any similar experiences of things that may have seemed completely incidental and insignificant in their lives, that has been revealed to be important and significant?

Something in this insignificant is one of your all-beachers that you like, both the door and the door. Yeah? Yeah, it can be. If you've got a special, an interest in something that you don't really think about, but then you get an opportunity to share the gospel through it, I will finish with a couple of illustrations in my own life.

That's when I left school, worked for a year, and then I randomly chose to go to Aberdeen to study business studies in Aberdeen, because it was the easiest course to get into, and there was a great pool table in the common room, and there weren't many hard exams to do, which is why I chose it.

And then, so I did that degree, and then I worked for you while I went to Jordan Hill to do business studies teaching, training.

And then it was during that year that I felt called to the ministry. And I had no real plan or purpose in either of these things, particularly, but over the 22 years, 21 and a half, 22 years I've been a minister, I found both the skills that I acquired and what I learned in both of these areas of my life very helpful in the ministry.

[29 : 44] The teacher training particularly in sermon preparation and in planning sermons and things like that. And also some of the stuff at the business school about leadership and people management and all these kind of things.

And I can look back and see that there was a purpose in these things, even though I had no purpose in plan myself, I could see God molding and fashioning me for the work to which he was calling me.

And I think you'll find that in your lives, and a narrative passage like this reminds us of the fact that nothing in God's purpose and plan happens without a reason.

And that many of the things that are mentioned, even in a narrative account like this, have real significance and importance for us as we apply scripture to our lives.

So it's bow our heads in prayer. Father God, we ask in prayer that you would help us and teach us to understand your word and understand the different types of writing there is in the Bible that you have breathed life into and that remains significant and important for us all scripture being God breathed and useful for teaching and training and correcting and leading and righteousness.

[31 : 13] We thank you for these things and we thank you for again the testimony of Paul and for his life and for what we can learn from him and his testimony.

May we be unashamed this week if the opportunity arises, we would be unashamed to point people to Jesus, help us to be bold and courageous and bite the bullet and not be afraid to share with them our testimony of the love of Christ, even though we might think they will laugh or mock or not understand it.

As we do so gently and respectfully, we know that very often their reaction will be very different to what we think it will be and that there are many people searching in their lives for the peace and the forgiveness and the direction and the hope that we have in Jesus.

And so may we not be ashamed as if we don't really believe in ourselves but help us to be bold and strong and set apart Jesus Christ as Lord in our hearts so that we are able to give an answer when we are asked for the hope that we have.

May the Lord bless as we pray and teach us from your word. In Christ. Amen.