

HOW TO SHARE THE GOSPEL  
ACTS 22:1-29

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

A number of years ago the editor of the magazine of a mainline denomination wrote these words in his magazine: **“The first century expansion of the church, with all of the odds against it, refused to be stamped out by the Roman Empire, but instead, caught the hearts and imaginations of men, from slaves to those of the emperor’s household. This was the result of the contagious enthusiasm of rank and file Christians--- the ministry of the saints, not of an ordained priestly caste.**

**“The fastest growing churches in our day are not those with the greatest ecclesiastical organizations, the biggest overhead, the most executives and the best-trained clergy, but are rather what we call sect churches--- storefront, evangelistic groups where the functions of the ministry are carried on by the members of the congregation....**

**“But we need not be afraid of their competition, because as they grow big enough to get better organized, they generally settle down, put more of the ministry in the hands of better-trained clergymen, develop a bureaucracy and become as respectable as the rest of us. Then God must raise up another group to challenge us to minister rather than to be ministered to. Any so-called church that cannot entrust to its members the job of communicating the faith is not really a church at all... but is a mission field...”**

I hope that our church is closer to the storefront group than the mission field. But these observations serve as a helpful reminder to all of us that the job of ministry does not lie primarily with the pastor or the elders or other church leaders. It lies with all the members of the church.

Ministry involves more than evangelism. But evangelism and outreach are fundamental to the cause of Christ. We may not all have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but we can all be involved in outreach. Indeed, we have seen from our study of Acts that we Christians are commanded to be involved in the task of evangelism. Last week I cited the findings of a church researcher that newer Christians are often the most effective in reaching out to the unchurched.

Sometimes we may be hesitant to do that because we feel like we don’t know the Bible well enough or that we won’t be able to answer people’s objections and questions. We may not be able to answer all of their questions and objections. But we all can be involved in reaching out to the lost. The passage before us today provides us with one of the best ways for doing that. It is not the only way. But it is an effective way.

The Apostle Paul was trained by one of the best rabbis in Jewish history. He was a brilliant debater. He was a persuasive theologian. He had a philosophical, theological mind that is reflected in his New Testament writings. But when he finds himself in the holy temple of Judaism, what method does he use to share the gospel? He shares his own spiritual story. We are going to look at that testimony this morning and see what lessons we can learn from it. How can we be effective in reaching needy people around us?

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. IDENTIFY WITH SINNERS) First, from vv. 1-5 of Acts 22 we are going to consider Paul's example to IDENTIFY WITH SINNERS. After three missionary trips to Asia Minor and Greece, Paul was returning to Jerusalem in about 57 or 58 AD with a gift of money that the predominantly Gentile churches in the west had collected. (THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY) Paul had heard about a famine that was underway in Judea and encouraged the Christians from these new churches to help out their fellow believers to the east. He hoped that this gift would serve to unite the predominantly Gentile churches of the west with the Jewish churches of the east. Many of the Jewish Christians, Paul realized, still had doubts about the whole legitimacy of this idea that Gentiles could have a standing before God equal to that of Jewish believers.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church gratefully received this gift, and they expressed support for Paul's Gentile ministry. They also encouraged Paul to help out four other Jewish Christians with a religious ritual in the temple to demonstrate that he had not rejected his Jewish heritage and was not preaching against Moses. What impact this had on Jewish Christians the New Testament does not tell us. But we saw last week in #21 that the Jewish unbelievers got riled up when they saw Paul in the temple. (FORTRESS ANTONIA AND TEMPLE)

The Fortress Antonia on the northwest corner of the temple compound housed a Roman garrison. A riot got going and the temple police closed the gates of the inner temple area. Paul would have been killed, except that the Romans intervened. There was always a garrison of legionnaires stationed at the fort to make sure that the Jews didn't stir up trouble for them in their most holy religious site. Around the religious feast days, such as this was, extra troops were on hand.

(FORTRESS ANTONIA) So the Roman soldiers ran down the steps and proceeded to rescue Paul. Luke, the author of Acts, says that they had to carry him back up to this fortress. The commander of the fortress first let Paul address this hostile audience.

The apostle begins his speech by addressing the people as "brothers and fathers." Back in v. 28 of #21 the rioters accused Paul of speaking everywhere against the Jewish people, the Law, and the temple. They were accusing Paul of apostasy. Paul immediately sets out to identify with his Jewish audience. He seeks to show his kosher credentials, and he begins by calling his countrymen "brothers and fathers."  
(PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 1 the apostle calls upon the crowd to listen to his defense. The original word is *apologeia*, from which we have the word “apologetics,” which is used to describe the defense of the Christian message.

Verse 2 says that everyone quieted down when they heard him speaking in Aramaic, the native language of this entire region. Probably many in the crowd didn’t even know who Paul was.

In v. 3 Paul begins reciting his Jewish credentials. These credentials were indeed impressive. Our translation leaves us with the impression that although Paul was born in Tarsus, he was really raised in Jerusalem. That does not give us the best sense of the grammar. The word for “brought up” can also be translated as “educated.” So I think that the verse would more accurately read, **“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but educated in this city under Gamaliel, instructed according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today.”** It seems likely that Paul came to Jerusalem as a teenager to be educated under Gamaliel.

Gamaliel was a member of the party of the Pharisees, who had a reputation for strictness in their observance of the law. He is regarded as one of the seven greatest rabbis of Jewish history. He had died just a year or two before this. So Paul was schooled under the most kosher, religious teacher of Judaism in his day.

Not only that, but also according to v. 4, he was a leader of the persecution against the Christians. When one has a reputation for having a leading role in opposing a particular cause, and then converts to that cause, such a change always gets special attention and consideration. (BERNARD NATHANSON) When Bernard Nathanson, a prominent abortion doctor in Atlanta and founder of the US Abortion Rights League, renounced his past participation in abortion, that understandably got a lot of attention and consideration. (WILLIAM MURRAY) When William Murray, the son of atheist Madelyn Murray O’Hare, became a Christian, he also got a special hearing. (FRED HOYLE) When British astronomer and atheist Fred Hoyle came to the conclusion that our world was not the result of a random collision of atoms, that also got much attention. He famously said that the likelihood of our world resulting from chance was like, “a tornado sweeping through a junk-yard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein”. Paul, with his dramatically changed life, is thus calling upon his audience to listen to what he has to say. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 5 Paul makes reference to the fact that the Sanhedrin had sent Paul off on his famous mission to Damascus to persecute Christians. He alludes to the fact that there are still members of that council around who can verify his story. In any story of a dramatic conversion it is understandable that people may be skeptical.

The point is that in seeking to communicate the gospel Paul was identifying with his audience. He was showing that he was once one of them. That is what we need to do in our efforts to share our personal spiritual stories. We may not have had the same particular problems or behaviors as the individual or individuals with whom we are

speaking. But there are certain themes and attitudes that have a universal appeal--- things like fear or loneliness or purposelessness or lack of love or addictions of various sorts.

Christians are sometimes ineffective because they communicate a kind of holy superiority. I remember one couple that I knew in another church. I can recall several times in a Bible study that they told about encounters that they had with unbelieving people. The gist of the story was usually that this Christian couple reamed somebody out for taking the Lord's name in vain or using bad language or for acting unchristianly. There are occasions where unbelievers need to be called to account for their speech or their behavior. But we are never going to be effective in communicating the gospel if our primary approach is to criticize nonchristians for acting unchristianly. We need to reach them at their point of need. We need to demonstrate empathy for their situations in life, and we need to show some understanding for their challenges and problems and perspectives on life.

II.

In vv. 6-21 then we are going to see that Paul's example teaches us to SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE) This is the second of three accounts in the Book of Acts about the details of the actual conversion of Paul. The fact that Luke used space in his book to include that story three times says something about the importance with which he regarded Paul's conversion.

So Paul tells his own story about his conversion, which we saw described by Luke in #9. On the road to Damascus (JERUSALEM TO DAMASCUS), which is about 150 miles to the north and east of Jerusalem, he had an encounter with the risen Christ. Paul knew about Jesus, of course. But, like most of the other Jews, he had convinced himself that Jesus was dead. That accords with the belief of many in the secular world around us today. The truth then and the truth today is that Jesus is alive, that He was resurrected from the dead. But it was only through this encounter with the living Christ that Paul was converted. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Christ sent Paul on to Damascus to meet a Jewish Christian named Ananias. Notice how Paul describes him in v. 12: **“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me...”** The apostle is still being sensitive to his Jewish audience, wanting to show how kosher people played a role in his conversion.

Ananias confirms the message that Paul heard from Jesus and tells him to be baptized. Notice v. 15: **“...for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.”** This idea of being a witness is central to the theme of the whole Book of Acts. Early on we saw Luke quote Jesus, who told His disciples that they were to be His witnesses, ultimately to the ends of the earth. Paul is serving as a witness now. But his audience was beginning to focus in on this “all men” business. Paul's involvement with the Gentiles is what had many of them upset.

Verse 16, which speaks of baptism, has merited a lot of discussion by commentators because of the various ways it has been interpreted. There are some who point to this verse as a reason for believing that water baptism is essential for salvation. But we also have to notice that calling on the name of the Lord is involved with this conversion deal. So faith must also be present. The thing is that we have seen clear evidence in Acts where people came into a saving relationship with God through Christ apart from water baptism. The classic example is the conversion of Cornelius and his friends. In #10, while listening to Peter, these Gentiles believed, and the Holy Spirit came upon them as He had come upon the first disciples at Pentecost. Water baptism only came later.

Galatians #1 vv. 11 & 12 also give reason for believing that Paul was truly a believer by the time of his baptism. In that passage Paul says that he didn't receive the gospel from man but directly from Christ. The verb in "calling on His name" in v. 16 of our passage may also be translated "having called on His name." If that is indeed the intended sense of the verb, it would point toward the conclusion that Paul's sins had already been forgiven, but that water baptism was the outer sign of that inner spiritual change.

Verse 17 speaks about Paul's visit after that to Jerusalem. Probably he is talking about the occasion where Barnabas took him under his wing and brought him in to see the apostles and elders of the church. The thing that Paul singles out is a vision that he had where the Lord told him to leave Jerusalem because his witness would not be accepted in the city. That vision occurred in the temple near where he was presently standing. Paul was being criticized for speaking against the temple. Here he is explaining that God spoke to him in the temple.

Paul says that he objected to that direction from the Lord. He had a strong concern for his countrymen, and it seemed that he was ideally suited to reach them, having been an opponent of these Christians himself. But our immediate desires and our sense of what is best does not always coincide with God's plan. To me it doesn't make sense that it would be best in God's overall plan for my wife to die at such an early age. To me it does not make sense that Dan's brother, who has visited here several times and has a young family, should be diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. But such it is. And such it was for Paul.

All of what Paul was telling his Jewish audience was a dramatic story. It would be difficult to imagine a more powerful testimony. Perhaps a few responded positively, but clearly most did not accept his witness. That is because the primary barrier to Christian conversion is not intellectual. It is moral. The root problem is sin. Evidence and arguments and logic can be useful in presenting the gospel. A powerful testimony is often effective. But in the end there is a spiritual dimension involved. When people refuse to accept the gospel, it is ultimately because they don't want to accept it. They are sinners who don't want to submit their lives to Jesus Christ. They want to run their own lives.

The Jews of Jerusalem were about to reject Paul now just as they rejected him on that earlier visit. The thing that finally lit the match to the fire was Paul's statement in v. 21:

**“And he [Jesus] said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”** This was a restatement and further amplification of Paul’s claim in v. 15 that in his Damascus Road experience the Lord told him that he would become a witness to all men. Here Paul specifically talks about reaching out to Gentiles.

Even though Paul was a theologian and a religious scholar, in this one opportunity that he had to address his countrymen right in the temple, all that he did was share his testimony, the story of his religious conversion. That was not a complicated thing to do. Now he was wise in how he did it. He sought to identify with his audience. But all that he did was tell about what had happened in his life, and that is something that any of us can do--- if we are indeed truly Christians.

If you have some doubt about that, you can make sure that you are going to heaven. (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 2:8-9) The Apostle Paul wrote in the second chapter of Ephesians, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** Eternal salvation is a gift. It cannot be earned. It can only be received by faith. The object of that faith must be Jesus Christ, the God-man who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. If we put our trust in Him, the assurance of God’s Word is that He will give us eternal life.

III.

As the rest of the chapter shows, there may be a cost involved in sharing the gospel, whether by means of our personal testimony or something else. Thus in vv. 22-29 Paul shows that we must DEAL WITH THE CONSEQUENCES. (III. DEAL WITH THE CONSEQUENCES) Luke records in v. 22, **“Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live!’”**

The Jews made some small effort to attract Gentiles to the Jewish faith. In Paul’s missionary journeys we have come across a number of Jewish proselytes, i.e., Gentiles who had some level of commitment to the Jewish faith. The problem for the Jews here was the notion that their supposed Messiah would tell this supposed apostle from these sacred precincts of the temple to carry on the kind of ministry he was supposed to be carrying on among the Gentiles. That was too much for them. They reacted in typical ancient Oriental fashion by throwing dust in the air and tearing off their coats and yelling.

Judgment on Jerusalem had been determined 25 years earlier when the city had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Another nail was put in the coffin as the Jews again rejected the notion of Jesus as their Messiah. Only ten or fifteen years later the Romans would come and level Jerusalem, killing most of its inhabitants in the process.

Paul could have left out this part about the Gentile ministry. That might have avoided some trouble for him. But it would not have given the whole picture, and it would not have given them the whole story of the working of God in his life.

It is likewise a temptation for us to leave out some of the harder aspects of the gospel. In our pluralistic, politically correct society everything is acceptable except that which is absolute. The powers-that-be are willing to accept Buddhists and Hindus and Scientologists and New Agers as long as they accept the notion that there are many paths to God and that the important thing is whether your religion helps you to be a better or more effective person. But when Christians come along saying that Jesus is the only way to God and that other roads lead to eternal death in a lake of fire, the politically correct start attacking: "Away with such people from the earth." "You guys are extremists. You are right wing fundamentalists who threaten the stability of our society."

Paul's audience was ready to go after him again, but the commander brought him into the Roman barracks instead. The Roman probably did not understand Paul's message given in Aramaic, but the Asian Jews probably cried out in Greek, and the Roman commander understood that. According to v. 24 he said **"that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this."** So he was going to use the typical Roman torture method to find out from Paul what was really going on.

Roman scourging involved an instrument called in Latin the *flagellum*, from which we get our word "flagellate." (FLAGELLUM) A *flagellum* was a wooden handle that had several leather thongs or whips attached to it. Each of these whips contained pieces of metal or bone. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he said that he had received 39 lashes from the Jews on five separate occasions. A Jewish whipping did not compare to a Roman scourging. For the Roman scourging was much more deadly. It was likely to produce more permanent damage. Some people did not survive Roman scourging. It was such a scourging that Jesus received before He went to the cross. That scourging explains why He was not able to carry His cross all the way to Golgotha. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Paul was about to receive this scourging when he asked, **"Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"** Paul was well aware of the answer to his own question. Of course it was unlawful. It was unlawful both to scourge a Roman citizen and to bind him without having given him proper due process. The proper legal procedure was for criminal charges to be formulated against the accused, for a formal accusation to be made before a Roman official, and then for a hearing to take place before a Roman judge and his advisory cabinet. The thought that Paul might be a Roman citizen had not even entered the commander's mind.

Why did Paul not bring up his citizenship status earlier? Perhaps because claiming that citizenship in front of the Jewish mob may have infuriated them even more.

Thus we read in vv. 26-29, **"When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.' 27 So the tribune came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' And he said, 'Yes.' 28 The tribune answered, 'I bought this citizenship for a large sum.'**

**Paul said, 'But I am a citizen by birth.' 29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him."**

Citizenship at this time was reserved for only a small minority within the Roman Empire. The elite of society, career military troops, and the wealthy were the only ones who could hope to become official Roman citizens. Paul had been born a Roman citizen, meaning that his father had been a citizen. Some have speculated that Paul's grandfather may have been rewarded with citizenship for performing some valuable service for the Roman general Pompey, who spent time in Asia Minor, near Paul's home area.

This commander says that he bought his citizenship. This implies that bribery was involved. In #23 we will find out that his name is Claudius Lysias. The fact that he has "Claudius" as part of his name suggests that he obtained his citizenship from the Roman emperor Claudius, who ruled from 41-54 AD. The wife of Claudius was known for making extra money by selling citizenship papers to those who could afford it. But the commander's reaction to Paul shows that to be a free born Roman citizen was more prestigious than one who had simply bought his right.

When a new citizen received his citizenship, he got a diploma, and his name was entered on one of the 35 tribal lists of Romans kept in Rome. (PROJECTOR ON--- ROMAN DIPLOMA) Typically this wood diploma was 6 inches by 7 inches in size. It served as a birth certificate as well as proof of citizenship. The citizen's name was also listed in the town records of his own city. Children of Roman citizens would be registered at birth in both Rome and in the local town. We don't know if Paul kept this diploma on him. We do know that one who claimed citizenship falsely was likely to be executed. It doesn't seem that there was any doubt in the commander's mind that Paul was telling the truth. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Paul was to spend four years in jail after this incident in the temple. If he had been more concerned about his own well-being, if he had been more conciliatory in his speech to his countrymen, if he had not been so strong and dogmatic in his claims about Jesus, he might not have experienced such unfortunate consequences. But Paul would not compromise on the basics of the gospel and on the truth of his testimony.

We are fortunate to live in a society that allows freedom of worship. But still there are consequences that we may face when we share the gospel and our own spiritual stories. Some may make fun of us. Some may treat us with disrespect. Some may harass us.

We don't know if some responded positively to Paul's spiritual testimony. Usually in Acts there were at least some people who responded positively to his presentations. We can expect that when we share our life stories and the gospel that some will also respond. God's Word is powerful, and it does change lives. When that power is described in

terms of our own lives, we can be confident that God will use it in the lives of others.  
(PROJECTOR OFF)

Charles Swindoll writes, **“The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed. He may stop his ears to the presentations of a preacher and the pleadings of an evangelist, but he is somehow attracted to the human-interest story of how you--- John Q. Public--- found peace within.”**

So we ought to be ready to share our spiritual stories. In order to do that effectively, we have to be able to describe a little of what our lives were like before we came to faith in Christ. We need to do that without glorifying a sinful lifestyle. But we have to convey one or two behaviors or attitudes that characterized our old lives.

Then we need to explain how we became a Christian. In sharing our story with unbelievers we have to describe exactly what was involved in doing that. They often don't understand exactly what it is that makes someone a born-again Christian. So in telling our testimony we can't assume that they know. We have to explain the mechanics of what was involved in that decision.

After telling about our pre-Christian life and about the exact manner of our salvation, we need to tell a little about the difference that Jesus has made in our lives. We need to be specific in doing that, and we need to avoid using churchy or religious terminology.

I have one more story involving another Russian Christian who is also an “Alex.” First there was Boris Kornfeld who was a Jewish doctor in Russia. He was sent to prison during the Stalin regime for a political crime. The Russian Orthodox Church of that time was very anti-Semitic. Yet a devout Christian and well-educated prisoner had an influence on Boris. He told his spiritual story and described Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who had come to fulfill the promises made to Israel. It was a difficult decision, but after a period of consideration Boris decided to embrace Jesus.

Doctors in the Russian prison camps enjoyed certain privileges because of their medical skill. They treated guards as well as prison officials. They were also asked to sign documents asserting that prisoners being punished in solitary confinement were strong enough to withstand the punishment. Few survived. Boris stopped signing the documents. The officials were not happy.

There were also orderlies in the prison who were prisoners who cooperated with the officials. They were hated by the other prisoners. These orderlies mistreated the other prisoners and stole food from them. The guards allowed it because orderlies gave them inside information.

One day Boris found one of these orderlies stealing food from one of his patients who badly needed it. Boris turned in the orderly. The prison official punished the orderly

knowing full well that the orderly would be out to get Boris later. But the prison officials were tired of Boris's noncooperation.

Boris realized the danger and stayed only in the hospital compound. One afternoon he treated a young patient who had just been diagnosed with cancer. The young man was named Alexander. Boris told Alexander about his spiritual story. He described his conversion to Christ and his newfound freedom. At one point the Jewish Christian doctor declared, **“On the whole, you know, I have become convinced that there is no punishment that comes to us which is undeserved.”** Those seemed to be strange words to Alexander to come from one who had suffered from anti-Semitism.

The patient knew that he was listening to an incredible confession. Though the pain from the operation was severe, Alexander focused on the doctor's words until he fell asleep. The next morning he learned from a fellow patient that an orderly during the night had killed Dr. Boris with a mallet.

But Boris Kornfeld's testimony did not die. For Alexander, too, became a Christian. Eventually Alexander Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel prize for literature. (PROJECTOR ON--- ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN) Alexander wrote about the gulag and about the failures of Communism. He wrote from the perspective of one who was a follower of Jesus Christ. His most famous work was *The Gulag Archipelago*. (PROJECTOR OFF)

May God motivate us to be ready to share our spiritual story.