

## PAUL'S TESTIMONY TO HIS FELLOW JEWS

Acts 21:40-22:29

Key Verses: 22:14-15

*Then he said: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard."*

Today's passage is about St. Paul's life testimony given to his fellow Jews in Jerusalem. He delivered the testimony on the steps of the temple. He was bound with two chains. He was not wearing a nice suit and tie. Nor was he standing before friendly audience, speaking into microphone. No, he was speaking before a hostile crowd who had tried to kill him earlier. But he testified clearly to them about the grace of God. He really wanted to help them to accept Jesus as the Messiah. He spoke in a way that would touch the hearts of the Jews, if they were willing to listen. He testified to the grace of salvation and the grace of calling in Christ. May God help us to be ready to testify to the grace of our Lord Jesus!

### I. WHO ARE YOU, LORD? (21:40-22:9)

As we learned in chapter 21, an angry Jewish mob dragged Paul from the temple, falsely accusing him for desecrating the holy place (21:28). The whole city was aroused and the people came running from all directions (21:30). They were about to kill him. But the Roman commander intervened. He ordered Paul to be bound with two chains. As the soldiers were taking him into the barracks of the Antonia Fortress near the temple, Paul asked the commander to give him a permission to speak to the crowd. Why? What was he trying to accomplish by speaking to the angry mob who wanted him dead? It was his shepherd's heart for his fellow Jews. Almost the entire city population was gathered there. He didn't want to miss the opportunity to deliver the message of salvation to his own brothers and sisters. This fact alone should move our hearts. Are you ready to give your testimony, anytime and anywhere, when you are given an opportunity? Do you have your life testimony ready to be delivered?

Paul got the attention of the Jews by speaking to them in Aramaic, a Hebrew language. How did he begin his testimony? Look at verse 3. *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today."* Before meeting Jesus personally, Paul had been an ambitious young rabbi. His passion for the Jewish religion was unrivaled. He was thoroughly trained in Jewish law under a prominent rabbi named Gamaliel. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Pharisee (Php 3:5). Look at verses 4-5. *"I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished."* So what was the point of Paul's testimony? He was telling his Jewish brothers, "Look, I know you are zealous for God. But you know that I was just

as zealous for God as you are, if not more. After all, I persecuted the Christians like a mad man. But I was wrong. What I did was not God's will. And you are making the same mistake I made. Listen to me now how my life was turned around when Jesus came into my life, because this could happen to you as well!" Then he told them how the Lord Jesus appeared to him personally on the road to Damascus.

Look at verses 6-7. *About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?"* Paul's name at that time was Saul. The Risen Christ revealed himself to Saul with a bright light from heaven flashing around him. It was so powerful that it blinded him. He was knocked down to the ground. The Lord Jesus came to meet a proud young man personally with a heavenly light. Why? Only later, Paul came to understand why. It was to reveal the depth of his mercy and grace to a proud man. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15-16. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life."

How did Saul respond to this surprising visit by Jesus? Look at verse 8. *"Who are you, Lord?" I asked. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied.* Saul persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem. He went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in Jesus (19). Now he was on his way to do the same to the believers in Damascus. He thought he was serving God by persecuting the church. But Jesus told him that he was persecuting the Lord himself. He was persecuting the Son of God. He was against God. His actions were against God's will. His zeal was totally misguided. He was wrong. He had to admit he was wrong. It was a moment of truth for Saul. But I believe that God had been preparing him for this moment through the martyrdom of Stephen. As the Jews were stoning him to death, Stephen cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Ac 7:60). This prayer of Stephen left a lasting impression on Saul's heart. It shook his conviction from the core. How could a man pray like that when his body was crushed with stones? Saul tried to suppress a voice inside him that he was wrong. He doubled down in his persecution of the Christians trying to convince himself that he was right. Now the Lord Jesus came to meet him personally. This encounter changed everything. It was a final nail on the coffin of his self-righteous denial. He realized that he was a sinner before God. It was a turning point in his life.

Through the personal encounter, Saul came to know who Jesus is. Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is God Almighty. He was crucified but he rose from the dead. Now the Risen Christ came to meet him personally. Saul realized that Jesus could have crushed him for what he was doing. But he did not. Instead, Jesus bore all of his mistreatment. Each time Saul beat a Christian, Jesus bore the pain. Jesus did this, not because he was helpless, but because he was willing to suffer to save people from their sins. He was willing to suffer to save Saul from his sins. Jesus did not come to condemn people, but to save them from their sins. To do so, Jesus suffered on the cross and died. In this way, Jesus revealed God's love and mercy to sinners. Romans 5:8 says, "But God

demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Paul’s testimony to the Jews was not only about himself. It was about the grace of our Lord for all sinners including his Jewish brothers in Jerusalem. He called Jesus “the Lord” several times in his testimony.

## II. WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD? (10-16)

What did Saul say when he realized God’s amazing grace upon his life? He asked Jesus, “What shall I do, Lord?” He surrendered himself to the Lord. He was willing to do what the Lord told him. He was no longer his own man, but a servant of Jesus Christ. His life and future belonged to Christ. The Risen Christ told him, “Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do” (10). Jesus had a clear purpose and mission for Saul. But he did not tell him directly. He simply told him to go into Damascus.

Saul’s companions led him by the hand into Damascus, because he was blind (11). Then what happened in Damascus? God had prepared a servant named Ananias to help Saul. Ananias stood beside him and said, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” And at that very moment Paul was able to see him (13). His blindness was cured instantly. Paul emphasized the fact that Ananias was “a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there” (12). He was not some random slacker from the street. This was important to establish the credibility of his testimony to his audience. Furthermore, there was a miracle of healing. Jews believed that only the Messiah could open the eyes of the blind. With these undeniable facts, Paul testified to his Jewish brothers that what happened to him was not a fluke. His testimony was not a fiction that he made up. He did not meet a ghost on the road to Damascus. It was the Risen Christ. The words he heard were from none other than the Lord God!

So why did God call a man like Saul? Sometimes we ask the same question. Why did God call a person like me? Let us see why God chose Saul. Look at verses 14-15. Ananias said to him, *“The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.”* The God who chose Israel as his chosen people now had chosen Paul to know his will. What was his will? It was to send the Messiah through the Jews to save all peoples of the world. This plan was outlined in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3. But few understood it. It remained a mystery for a long time. By God’s revelation, Paul would deeply understand it and proclaim it. God chose Paul to see the Righteous One. “The Righteous One” was a Jewish expression for the Messiah (Ac 3:14; 7:52). From the Scriptures, Paul came to know that Jesus is God’s Righteousness for all who believe. He said in Romans 1:17: “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

God chose Paul to hear words from the mouth of Christ. He heard the word of God through Jesus. This was a significant statement. Paul was declaring that he was not sharing human ideas with them, but the very word of God through Jesus. St. Paul is the author of many books in the New Testament. However, it was not his scholarly work. It

is the word of God, as all Scripture is God-breathed (2Ti 3:16). He said, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1Co 2:4-5).

Still, why did God choose Paul to see the Righteous One and to hear the word of God? It was to use him as his witness. Look at verse 15. “*You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.*” Indeed, Paul became a powerful witness to Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. And we believe that we are also called to be his witness to the world. Paul’s encounter with Jesus was dramatic. Not many of us have such conversion experience. Still, all of us are called to know Jesus and hear his words so that we may share the good news with those who are in darkness. Paul said in Romans 1:5, “Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.”

What else did Ananias do for Saul? He said to Saul: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (16). So Saul got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength (Ac 9:18-19). He became a believer in Jesus Christ. All of his sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus. He was a new person. He made a decision to be baptized. He declared to the world that he was a follower of Jesus Christ. After spending several days with the disciples in Damascus, at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (Ac 9:19-20). He accepted the grace of forgiveness and began his life of mission. What can we learn from this? Some people tend to dwell on their sinful past, wallow in guilt and self-pity, and do nothing for Christ. This is not why our Lord Jesus died on the cross for us. Like Paul, we must accept the grace of forgiveness of sins with a clear decision of faith and live as a witness to his love and mercy.

### III. GO; I WILL SEND YOU TO THE GENTILES (17-29)

Jews in Damascus felt betrayed by Paul. They tried to kill him. He had to escape the city. He returned to Jerusalem as a new Christian. He boldly spoke in the name of the Lord. But the Jews there tried to kill him. Then the Lord came to him to give him a direction. While praying in the temple, he fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking, “Quick! Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me” (18). But Paul replied, “Lord, these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him” (19-20). Paul really wanted to share the good news with the Jews in Jerusalem. He knew them very well and they knew him. They knew him as the passionate persecutor of the church. They must listen to him. He was so sure about this that he tried to argue with the Lord. But the Lord told him: “Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (21). Paul had a broken shepherd’s heart for his own Jewish brothers. He wanted them to be saved by God’s grace just as he was.

However, God’s plan was different from his. God wanted to use him as the apostle to the Gentiles. God works in his own way. We may have our own ideas about

how God should work or about how God should use us. But God knows better. He sent Paul to the Gentiles and used him greatly as we have seen through his mission journeys.

Look at verse 22. *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"* The crowd became violent again. Which part of Paul's testimony triggered them to be violent? It was his mention of the Gentiles. They had falsely accused him of bringing Gentiles into the holy temple. Now they were offended when he said that God had sent him to minister to the Gentiles. Paul's life was in danger.

The commander again stepped into the situation and ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the Jews were angry at him. Paul was a shepherd for Gentiles, including the Roman people. But the Roman commander had no idea. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" Roman citizens enjoyed a wide range of privileges and protections, such as due process. Paul claimed his Roman citizenship. This ended the effort to flog him. I don't think he did so solely to avoid the suffering. He was ready to die for the gospel. But he also knew that God wanted him to go to Rome to preach the good news there. Perhaps he was thinking about this when he invoked the citizenship.

In conclusion, Paul's testimony teaches us that the Lord saves and calls sinners like Paul by the grace of God and for his purpose. What is the purpose? He wants us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are groping in the darkness of sin. May God help each of us to be a witness to the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus!