


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
September 28 - October 4, 2008
Acts 21:37-22:29

a time to speak

1 Please let me talk to these people

Read. Acts 21:37-22:5 NLT

As Paul was about to be taken inside, he said to the commander, "May I have a word with you?"

"Do you know Greek?" the commander asked, surprised. "Aren't you the Egyptian who led a rebellion some time ago and took 4,000 members of the Assassins out into the desert?" "No," Paul replied, "I am a Jew and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please, let me talk to these people." The commander agreed, so Paul stood on the stairs and motioned to the people to be quiet. Soon a deep silence enveloped the crowd, and he addressed them in their own language, Aramaic.

"Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense." When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater. Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished."

Think.

- What assumption had the commander made about Paul at this point? How does Paul correct that assumption?
- What do you think is driving Paul's desire to talk to this angry mob who had just beaten him up? What would you have wanted to do and say? How does Paul address them?
- How well do you handle "hostile encounters"? How well are you able to defuse the anger of others and establish a more healthy level of communication? What are some keys to accomplishing this?
- How does Paul describe his life "before Christ"? How does his story compare with yours?

Pray. Lord, let me not fuel the anger of others, nor allow their anger to fuel mine. Help me to see, to hear, & to speak with your love.

Live. Write a paragraph summarizing your life B.C./before Christ

Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad.

1 Peter 3:15-16 Message

His face and torso bore the imprints of their fists.

Bruised and no doubt bleeding, he literally had to be carried up the stairs away from the violent crowd that howled after him, "Away with him! Death! Death!"

It just doesn't seem like a good time to stop and make a speech.

But only weeks prior to this moment, this man had written about these very people, "If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute. They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah..." Wherever anti-Semitism got started, it was not authored or carried by this man, this Paul. He loved these people and their heritage and their temple, and he had to speak.

As the Preacher says in the Old Testament book bearing his name, "There is a time to be silent, and a time to speak." Before a hardened Jewish court, Jesus remained silent. Before the family he loved and longed for, Paul had to speak.

We likewise need divine wisdom and insight whether dealing with a crowd or just that one person sitting across from me — the wisdom of knowing when prayerful silence is the call of the moment and when a time to speak must be embraced with courage and love. Paul's example and Peter's counsel above show us how to wisely embrace the time to speak — a time sitting squarely before us as we make our way through a world desperately in need of the voice of Jesus.

2) Who are you Lord?

Read. Acts 22:6-11 NLT

“As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’

“‘Who are you, lord?’ I asked.

“And the voice replied, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.’ The people with me saw the light but didn’t understand the voice speaking to me.

“I asked, ‘What should I do, Lord?’

“And the Lord told me, ‘Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do.’

“I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led by the hand to Damascus by my companions.”

Think.

- If you like, go back and reread Luke’s account of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9:1-19 (we’re going to hear this story one more time before we are done with Acts). Why do you think Luke repeats this story three times?
- What most impresses you about this initial encounter between Saul and Jesus? How does it compare with your own encounter(s) with Jesus?
- Where are you wishing you could encounter God in your life right now?

Pray.

Lord, interrupt my agenda, intercept me on my way, break into my life with a fresh vision of you and of your goodness and let it not leave me unchanged.

Live.

Write a paragraph about your own conversion experience — what you saw, heard, felt, etc.

4) Away with such a fellow!

Read. Acts 22:17-23 NLT

“After I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple and fell into a trance. I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, ‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won’t accept your testimony about me.’

“‘But Lord,’ I argued, ‘they certainly know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.

And I was in complete agreement when your witness Stephen was killed. I stood by and kept the coats they took off when they stoned him.’

“But the Lord said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!’”

The crowd listened until Paul said that word. Then they all began to shout, “Away with such a fellow! He isn’t fit to live!” They yelled, threw off their coats, and tossed handfuls of dust into the air.

Think.

- What happened to Paul when he returned to Jerusalem as a Jesus follower (this would probably have been his visit three years after his conversion)? What did he see in the temple? What was he told to do? How did he respond? What was the final word in this conversation?
- Why did the crowd stop Paul at this point? What hot button did he push? How do you think Paul might have finished his speech if he had had the chance to do so?

Pray.

Lord, make me a faithful witness to you, that I would speak with love and courtesy and passion, being myself and allowing you to be who you are.

Live. Write one more paragraph, finishing your story. Now share it as God calls and opportunity knocks...

3) What are you waiting for?

Read. Acts 22:12-16 NLT

A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, and well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus. He came and stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight.’ And that very moment I could see him!

“Then he told me, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.’”

Think.

- How does Paul describe Ananias, and why do you think he does so in these terms?
- What did Ananias do for Saul? How did he address Saul? What did he tell Saul he was going to be? What did he ask him to do and why?
- Who has been an “Ananias” in your life — helping you as a new believer to see things clearly and helping you to take your first steps in Christ? Whom have you most recently blessed in this way?

Pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you for shining into the darkness of my heart and life. Open my eyes to see you, my ears to hear you, and my mouth to speak openly of what I have seen and heard of you in my life.

Live.

Write a paragraph that describes the key person or persons who helped you fully turn to and begin following Jesus.

5) Are you a Roman citizen?

Read. Acts 22:24-29 NLT

The commander brought Paul inside and ordered him lashed with whips to make him confess his crime. He wanted to find out why the crowd had become so furious. When they tied Paul down to lash him, Paul said to the officer standing there, “Is it legal for you to whip a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been tried?”

When the officer heard this, he went to the commander and asked, “What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!” So the commander went over and asked Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes, I certainly am,” Paul replied.

“I am, too,” the commander muttered, “and it cost me plenty!”

Paul answered, “But I am a citizen by birth!”

The soldiers who were about to interrogate Paul quickly withdrew when they heard he was a Roman citizen, and the commander was frightened because he had ordered him bound and whipped.

Think.

- What does the commander determine to do at this point? What does he do with Paul? What other important detail about himself does Paul share at this point? What impact does this have on the soldiers present?
- Paul’s citizenship got him out of trouble and ultimately opened doors for him to share the good news with others. What gifts and abilities do you see in yourself that can help you share Jesus?

Pray. Lord, help me to see and seize the advantages, gifts and abilities you have put within my reach that can help me share the life of Jesus in this world.

Live. Make a list of three people you know who need Jesus and start praying for them — and for opportunities to serve and share.