



Walking Through the Scripture Together

September 28 - October 4, 2008

Acts 21:37-22:29

a time to speak

Text Acts 21:37-22:29 (TNIV)

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸ "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

³⁹ Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

⁴⁰ Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

¹ "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: 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. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ 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.

⁶ "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

⁸ "Who are you, Lord?" I asked.

"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ "What shall I do, Lord?" I asked.

"Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do." ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ "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. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what

you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

¹⁷ "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'

¹⁹ " 'Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ 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.'

²¹ "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Paul the Roman Citizen

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!"

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ 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?"

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

²⁸ Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

²⁹ Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

Thought

I can't help but be amazed at Paul's calm tenacity in the face of that angry mob. How do you not ask for a nice, secure maximum security cell at that moment, or at least loudly proclaim your Roman citizenship and demand protection. It's not that I think Paul was a saint...well, wait, yes I do. Every Jesus follower is a saint. You know what I mean. He was just a guy filled with his share of weaknesses. And yet he so shines here. One clear reminder of the reason for his calm and presence of mind in the storm leapt out of the text (in the Message version, anyway). It's his statement that in the temple he was praying and was "lost in God's presence." Now there's an indicator of the inner spring that filled that life and animated the man on the stairs.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

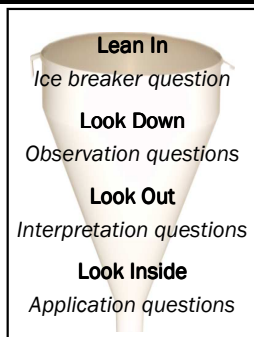
- Share about a time when someone was really mad at you. What did you do? How did you handle the situation?

Look Down / Look Out

- What assumption had the commander made about Paul at this point? How does Paul correct that assumption?
- What do you think is driving Paul to want 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 does Paul describe his conversion experience? What most impresses you about his initial encounter with Jesus? What role did Ananias play in Paul's conversion?
- 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?
- 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 it have on the soldiers present?

Look Inside

- 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 ready are you to share your story with others who need to know about Jesus?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 21:37-22:5

How do you handle it when people around you are really mad? What have you found is the best thing to do or to say?

Day Two Acts 22:6-11

When was the first time you really "met" Jesus — or is that something you are still waiting to see happen? Why do you think Paul's conversion was so dramatic? Do you think coming to Jesus is always this way? Why or why not?

Day Three Acts 22:12-16

In what ways did Ananias help Saul? When have you helped someone like Saul — someone alone and scared — in a similar way? When has someone reached out to you as Ananias reached out to Saul?

Day Four Acts 22:17-23

When most recently have you really felt like you met God while in prayer or worship? What happened?

Day Five Acts 22:24-29

Paul's gift of Roman citizenship saved him from getting a beating more than once — and also gave him more chances to share Jesus with others. What gifts and talents has God given you that can help you share Jesus with others?

Life in Bible Times

Paul, the Roman Citizen

The question presses: did Paul have to prove his Roman citizenship? If not, why didn't everyone who was about to be flogged make the same claim, in the hope that they might have been able to escape by the time the truth was discovered?

Well, there were severe punishments on offer for anyone claiming untruthfully to be a citizen. Some sources say you could even be put to death for it. But in fact there was a way of proving it. It may seem unlikely that Paul still had it about his person after all he'd just been through, but there was an official badge, a little double-faced tablet, made of bronze, most likely, known as a 'diploma'; this functioned both as a birth certificate and as a citizenship token. Maybe we are to understand that Paul might have produced an object as the conversation was progressing; perhaps, if this were a play instead of a history, there would be an understood stage direction at this point, like someone silently producing a passport. ("Yes," replied Paul, feeling under his tunic and producing his diploma.) But one way or another, Paul convinced first the centurion, then his commanding officer, the tribune.

The tribune sounds quite doubtful. He is a first-generation citizen, and he had had to pay for the privilege (something quite common under the Emperor Claudius). But Paul, for whatever reason, had not had to go that route; he had been born a citizen. Speculation abounds as to how this came about. Antony had granted some Jews citizenship after they had helped him in his campaigns in the middle of the first century BC. Further back, there is evidence for a Jewish presence in Tarsus in the 170's BC, and for some Jews there becoming Roman citizens at least 100 years before Paul's day. So it is perfectly possible that Paul's citizenship was inherited, not just by him, but by his father and even grandfather before him: a Jew of the strictest pedigree and highest biblical training; a Greek speaker and thinker thoroughly at home with the world of ancient philosophy and rhetoric; and a Roman citizen—who knew his rights under the law and was determined to use them as necessary.

NT Wright, Acts for Everyone

details, details...

Let me speak to the people

This is the first of five defenses (Greek *apologia*) that Paul makes through the remaining chapters of Acts. Each speech highlights the nonpolitical character of Paul's mission and message, contrary to other messianic movements of the day, and highlighting the real reasons for his opposition — in this instance, his inclusion of gentiles with Israel.

Are you not the Egyptian?

At the head of the stone stairway leading into the Fortress of Antonia, Paul asked for permission to say something to Claudius Lysias, the commander (see 23:26). The commander was startled to hear Paul speaking in fluent Greek and surmised that perhaps the prisoner was the Egyptian Jew who three years earlier had appeared in Jerusalem claiming to be a prophet and had led a large band of followers into the wilderness and then to the Mount of Olives in preparation for the messianic overthrow of Jerusalem. Most people had considered him a charlatan, and the Roman governor Felix had driven him off.

He spoke in the Hebrew dialect

The Greek phrase here is *hebraidi dialecto* — "in the Hebrew dialect." Though there is debate among scholars as to what the dialect of the common man in fact was in first century Jerusalem, most conclude that it was in fact Aramaic — a sister language to Hebrew adopted by the Hebrew people since the days of the Babylonian exile some 500 years before Christ. Biblical Hebrew would probably not have been understood by such a crowd, whereas the Aramaic, being their language, calmed them. Poor Claudius Lysias, of course, would have had no idea whatsoever as to what Paul was saying.