

BIGGER THAN YOU

Lesson 21 The Power of Testimony

Acts 21:37-40; 22:1-30 and 23:1-11

Paul had been worshipping in the Temple when Jews from the province of Asia incited a riot and tried to kill Paul. A Roman commander stepped in, broke up the riot and ordered Paul to be taken into custody (Acts 21:27-36). In this lesson, we will see how Paul uses this situation to tell his story. In fact, before the Book of Acts concludes, Paul will use his personal testimony five times, not only to connect with the audience and defend himself against the charges, but also to bear witness to his Christian faith before the Jewish mob, as well as Jewish and Roman authorities. This lesson covers Paul's first two defenses.

Read Acts 21:37-40

1. In Acts 21:34, the Roman commander could not get a straight answer about the cause of the riot, so he ordered Paul to be taken into custody.
 - a. What does Paul do to interrupt being marched off to the Roman barracks?
 - b. Paul is mistaken for whom?
 - c. How does Paul describe himself?
 - d. What privilege is granted to Paul?
 - e. Why do you think Paul initiated a conversation with the commander instead of doing nothing and "allowing God to take care of him"?

Read Acts 22:1-22

2. Paul's first defense is before a Jewish mob. Surprisingly, he defends himself by telling his life story. List the details from the text that describe the following points about Paul's pre-conversion life (verses 1-5).
 - a. Paul established points of similarity between himself and the crowd (see also Acts 21:40).
 - b. Paul had an orthodox upbringing and education.
 - c. Paul's pre-conversion zeal for God was evidenced by his persecution of Christians.
 - d. Paul studied under a respected and well-known teacher (Acts 5:34).
3. Paul tells the story of his Damascus Road conversion in verses 6-11. We previously studied the narrative of this event in Acts 9.
 - a. What words from the text convey that this event had a divine origin?
 - b. Why would Paul include details about his traveling companions?
 - c. Might Paul's blindness have a symbolic meaning? If so, describe what it might mean.
 - d. What is Paul's response (verse 11) to the Lord's command in verse 10?
 - e. Did you have a supernatural experience at the time of your conversion? If so, please share it.
4. In verses 12-16, God commissions Paul's Christian calling through Ananias, a devout Jew.
 - a. List the phrases from the text that authenticate Ananias as a loyal Jew.
 - b. Why would Paul include details about Ananias's Judaism?
 - c. How does Ananias interpret Paul's Damascus Road experience?

- d. Describe Paul's commission. What does God want Paul to testify about?
 - e. Some scholars use verse 16 to teach that water baptism literally washes away sins. Read 1 Cor. 6:11 and 1 Pet. 3:21 and discuss other ways to read verse 16.
5. Verses 17-22 describe Paul's actions immediately following his conversion.
- a. What should Paul's location and action tell the mob about Paul (verse 17)?
 - b. Why does the Lord send Paul away from Jerusalem (verses 18 and 21)?
 - c. At what point in Paul's testimony does the crowd interrupt him (verse 22)?
 - d. Is there a part of your own testimony that is particularly offensive to some unbelievers?

Read Acts 22:23-30

6. Paul's testimony is interrupted and the action returns to the angry Jewish mob scene. The commander orders Paul to be taken into custody, flogged and questioned (verse 24). Under the Roman Empire, to be flogged meant to be whipped with glass or bone-tipped leather straps that were attached to a wooden handle. It was particularly severe and could result in permanent injury or even death. It was illegal to flog a Roman citizen prior to his trial.
- a. What does Paul do to interrupt the flogging? Compare this to what Paul did in Acts 21:37.
 - b. Once the Roman commander established Paul was indeed a Roman citizen, what was his next step?
 - c. What does this passage suggest about a Christian using the law of the land for his/her own protection?

Read Acts 23:1-11

7. Paul makes his second defense in front of the Sanhedrin. At the beginning of his speech, upon the order of the High Priest, Paul is struck on the mouth. Paul's response contains, in part, a prophecy that the High Priest himself will be struck by God. Indeed, in A.D. 66, the High Priest was murdered by renegades.
- a. Paul addresses the men of the Sanhedrin as "brothers" in verses 1 and 5. What does this suggest?
 - b. Brainstorm and list several reasons why Paul might not have recognized the High Priest.
 - c. Why does Paul quote Scripture to affirm that one should not speak ill of the High Priest?
8. Paul's defense is his own personal testimony.
- a. How does Paul use his own identity to connect with some of the men of the Sanhedrin (verses 6-7)?
 - b. Compare the resurrection beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees (verse 8).
 - c. How does Paul use the resurrection to disrupt the hearing?
 - d. Does the divisive subject of resurrection point to Jesus? If so, how?
 - e. What was the result? Did Paul effectively defend himself? Did Paul win anyone to Jesus?
 - f. What does the commander do once the hearing gets out of control (verse 10)?
9. In Chapter 12, Peter had a miraculous escape from prison. In Chapter 16, the prison doors were supernaturally opened for Paul and Silas. However, in Acts 23:11, there is no miraculous escape. What would the following suggest to Paul?
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| a. The following night | d. "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem..." |
| b. The Lord stood near | e. "...so, you must also testify in Rome" |
| c. "Take courage" | |

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10. Paul defended himself before a Jewish mob and the Sanhedrin. In both cases, Paul found common ground with his audience. He also used his own story to point to Jesus. In the past, Max has suggested that we each prepare "My Story" of 200-500 words about Jesus in our own life so we are prepared to share with others. What is your story? With whom do you already need to share your story?

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8