

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Urgency in the Midst of Adversity

Acts 21:37–22:29

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 21. And we will pick up today at verse 37.

I have a friend who pastors a church in the Chicago area who grew up an atheist. His parents were atheists. And he used to insult and bully Christians in his high school. But after high school, he got saved. And his life radically changed. In fact, he became a pastor. And irony of ironies, he planted a church in the very high school where he used to harass Christians years earlier. How's that for a providential irony!

Over time members of his own family got saved. He shared Christ with his father, and his dad got saved. And then he and his dad started witnessing to his mom. But mama wasn't buying this whole Jesus stuff. And so this pastor and his dad just kept praying and waiting for God to work on her.

Sure enough, a few years later, this pastor's mom turned to Christ. And then she wanted to get baptized. And this pastor was like, "I don't think I can objectively determine your readiness for baptism, mom. Talk to one of our elders." So one of the elders of the church interviewed her and confirmed that she was saved and ready for baptism.

And so, this pastor got to baptize his mom as a public declaration of her faith in Christ. Is that awesome or what? Usually it's the moms who are used by God to evangelize their children. In this case, it was a son who evangelized his mama.

Why do I tell you that story? Because that pastor, after getting saved, began working as an evangelist to his family *with urgency*. That's the key word for us today—*urgency*. Life is short. Eternity is long. And our approach to evangelism and sharing Christ with others needs to be urgent, whether it's family members or total strangers.

And from Acts 21:37 all the way to Acts 22:29, we're going to see urgency with the Apostle Paul. We're going to see "Urgency in the Midst of Adversity."¹

Now let's review the context for this passage. If you remember, Paul was absolutely certain in Acts 20 that God wanted him to go to Jerusalem even when his friends said, "Paul, don't go there." Paul went anyway. And Paul was absolutely certain that he would face adversity and affliction when he got to Jerusalem. He went anyway. And as we saw last week, Paul goes into the temple participating in this vow as a display of his Jewishness. But the people rise up to persecute him *anyway*. They grab him in the temple and start wailing on him. They beat him to a bloody pulp until finally the Roman soldiers arrive to quell the uproar.

And verse 33 tells us that when the soldiers got there, they arrested Paul! Which is curious to say the least! They arrest the guy who is bloodied and bruised on the ground, not the guys who are standing over him with bloody fists. But it's not a bad thing. It probably saved Paul's life. So the soldiers arrested Paul and bound him in chains, just like Agabus prophesied a few weeks before this.

And verse 35 says this.

³⁵ And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, ³⁶ for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 273: "Paul's conduct throughout his ordeal provides an example for all believers of how to give a positive testimony in negative circumstances."

“Off with his head! We want that guy dead!” This was a murderous, riotous, bloodthirsty crowd. They wanted vengeance on Paul because (allegedly!) he had dared to speak against the people, the law, and this holy place—i.e., the temple (21:28).

Coincidentally this took place during the Feast of Pentecost. So the crowds were much larger than normal in Jerusalem.² **And the crowds were foaming at the mouth with religious fervor.** So you could see how easily something like this could happen to Paul.

Now here’s where the story gets really interesting. Watch what Paul does next. **Because a lesser man, like myself, would have used this opportunity to sneak out of town. A lesser man would have quietly left with the Romans. A lesser man would have regrouped and waited for a more opportune time to reach Jerusalemites for Christ. At least a time when—you know—they didn’t want to kill you! A lesser man would have had less urgency in the face of adversity.**

But watch what happens. Look at **verse 37.**

³⁷ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” And [the tribune] said, “Do you know Greek?”

The tribune probably thought Paul was some uneducated thug. I mean they were beating this guy up outside the temple. So he was really surprised to hear Paul speaking Greek instead of Aramaic.

And maybe based on his accent, he makes the following assumption:

³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins³ out into the wilderness?”

What?!!! Where did that come from? Why would he think that about Paul?

Well, Egyptians at this time spoke Greek.⁴ Egypt had been absorbed into the Greek Empire years before this. And so the tribune surmises that Paul must be this famous, false messiah who led a revolt in Jerusalem.

According to Josephus (a first century Jewish historian), there was an Egyptian false prophet a few years before this who promised that he would bring the walls of the city of Jerusalem down like Jericho.⁵ The governor (or Roman procurator) of Judea at this time was Felix. This guy held the same office as Pontius Pilate before him. And Felix and his troops killed many of the followers of this Egyptian. But the Egyptian “Assassin” somehow managed to escape. This tribune assumes that Paul was that Egyptian prophet.⁶

But Paul says, **“No! no! I’m not that guy.”**⁷ Who are you then?

³⁹ Paul replied, “⁸ am a Jew, from Tarsus⁹ in Cilicia, a citizen¹⁰ of no obscure city.

² MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 263: “The Assassins were especially active during the Jewish festivals, such as Pentecost. Lysias no doubt assumed the crowd had caught one of them (maybe even the Egyptian himself) in the act of murder.”

³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 658: “Apparently, the tribune thinks that Paul is that insurrectionist. The description of the Egyptian’s men as σικαρίων (*sikariōn*) identifies them as political troublemakers. This term, which means ‘dagger men,’ became a reference to other political revolutionaries of the 60s in Israel, also known as assassins, who caused Rome to overrun the nation in AD 70.”

⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 657: “Greek was widely spoken in Egypt, the lingua franca of the age, and it was not unknown in Israel.”

⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 455: “Josephus also spoke of this Egyptian. According to him, the Egyptian was a false prophet who stirred up a following of some 30,000 ‘dupes’ (*ēpatēmenōn*), led them into the wilderness and from there to the Mount of Olives, where he promised that the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command and allow them easy subjugation of the Roman force. Instead of Jerusalem’s walls falling, Felix arrived on the scene with heavy troops, killed four hundred of them, took another two hundred captive, and put the Egyptian and the rest to flight. This was just one of the many incidents of unrest and political foment Josephus related as having occurred during the tenure of Felix. The difference between Luke’s 4,000 and Josephus’s 30,000 is most likely evidence of Josephus’s tendency to give exaggerated figures.” Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 897: “The reference to the Mount of Olives suggests messianic aspirations of this Egyptian impostor (cf. Zech 14:1–5).”

⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 455: “In this instance perhaps he thought the Egyptian had returned and some of his former ‘dupes’ were now repaying him.”

⁷ JOHN CALVIN: “Because it is something that all the servants of God must do, Paul offered to defend his own case personally. For as far as we can we must take pains to make our integrity known to all, so that no discredit may redound on the name of God from our bad name. When the tribune asks whether Paul is not that Egyptian brigand who, a little earlier, had incited a band of men to insurrection, let us learn that no matter how modestly and quietly ministers of Christ conduct themselves, and no matter how free from blame they are, still they cannot avoid the insults of the world. Therefore we must take note of this, so that we may accustom ourselves to reproaches and be prepared to be blamed for doing well.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 302.

⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 897: “Paul quickly clarifies the tribune’s misunderstanding, beginning with his declaration regarding his identity with an emphatic ‘I’ (ἐγώ).”

Tarsus was an important city in the Roman Empire at this time.¹¹ So this statement would have gotten the Tribune's attention.

And here's Paul's request.

I beg you, permit me to speak to the people."

TRIBUNE: "You mean the people that just beat the living tar out of you?"

PAUL: "Yes, them."

TRIBUNE: "You mean the people who are yelling right now, 'We want that guy dead'?"

PAUL: "Yes, those people."

TRIBUNE: "You mean those venomous, murderous people, who would have killed you if I hadn't rescued your sorry self?"

PAUL: "Yes, those people. I've got something to say to them!"

TRIBUNE: "Okay, man. It's your funeral."

Verse 40 tells us that the tribune agreed to Paul's request. And do you know what Paul's going to tell this crowd? Do you know what Paul's going to tell this group of ruffians who just tried to kill him?

I hate to get ahead of the story, but I'll just tell you now. He's going to give his testimony. He's going to tell them how Jesus saved his soul.

Paul was so committed to the gospel, Paul loved Christ so much... Paul loved lost people so much that even when they wanted to kill him, he still wanted to tell them about Jesus.¹² This sense of urgency was so pressing in his soul. Is that awesome or what? **If that doesn't fire you up for the gospel then your wood is wet.**¹³

Write this down as a first point from this text. I want to give you today four answers to the question: **What Does a Sense of Urgency Look Like?**

Here's the first answer.

1) A **boldness** in the face of **opposition** (21:37-39)

What does boldness in the face of opposition look like? 1) Let's say your coworker says that Christianity is passé. And you say, "I beg to differ. Let me tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you what he's done for me."

2) Let's say your sister-in-law says that there's no afterlife. And you say, "Oh, yes there is! And you know what? I want you to go there with me. Believe in Christ and we can spend eternity together with him."

3) Your babysitter says, "Life is meaningless." And you say, "No, it's not. Life is meaningful. And Jesus loves you. And he wants to save your soul and secure a place for you in eternity. Won't you embrace him as your Savior?"

It's easy for us to see Paul's actions in Jerusalem as heroic and unbelievably bold and courageous. And we think to ourselves that we could never imitate him here. But don't think you have to. Not right away, anyway. **Start small. Start with your kids. Start with the kids in children's ministry. Start with your neighbors. Start with your family and your extended family. Just share your faith! Just share your**

⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 898: "The Roman commander may have known that Mark Antony and then Augustus had rewarded Tarsus because its citizens had remained faithful to Caesar in the battle against Brutus and Cassius, Caesar's killers, granting Tarsus the status of a free city and tax exemption."

¹⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 455: "The reference at this point is to his Tarsian citizenship, not his Roman citizenship, which is not divulged to Lysias until later (22:25-29)."

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 658: "Paul's hometown was known as a cultural center of Hellenism, rhetoric, and Stoic philosophy... It had several hundred thousand inhabitants. Noted for its textile industry, it was a center for trade and possessed a lively literary and philosophical tradition."

¹² Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 128: "Paul continually assesses how he can steward his circumstances toward gospel proclamation. No matter what trials he faces, his mind focuses upon his calling to preach Christ and Christ crucified."

¹³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 264: "Paul courageously requested permission to speak to the people. Although battered, bruised, and in chains, the apostle did not think of his own safety and comfort. Instead, his passionate desire to see his countrymen saved (Rom. 10:1) drove him to seize the opportunity to recount his conversion to the crowd."

testimony! And don't let opposition be an obstacle to bold proclamation of Christ as your Savior and your Lord.

Now don't be obnoxious as you present the gospel to others. But I'll be honest with you, I don't think we as a church run the risk of obnoxiousness in the way we present the gospel. I know I don't as your pastor. I think we as a church are more at risk of fear and courage-lessness than obnoxiousness when it comes to sharing the gospel.

So take a courageous step of faith. Make a courageous move towards a lost person. Step out with a sense of urgency. We only get one chance at this life; and life is so short. Don't waste your life hoarding the gospel that we hold dear.

Here's a second thing that you need to have if you are going to have a sense of urgency. Write this down as #2 in your notes.

2) A **love** for your **listeners** (21:40-22:2)

Paul says elsewhere in **1 Corinthians 13**, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (**13:1-3, NIV**). If anyone ever had the right to hate a group of people... if anyone ever had a right, humanly speaking, of despising a group of people, Paul had that right with this crowd in Jerusalem. They wanted to kill him. They *tried* to kill him!

But watch what Paul does in response in **verse 40**.

⁴⁰And when [the tribune] had given [Paul] permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned¹⁴ with his hand to the people.¹⁵

What do you think that looked like? Do you think Paul raised his fist to them and was like, "A curse on all your houses!" No, it was probably more like this, "Calm down, calm down. I need to tell you something."

Here's a replica of the temple complex and what's called the Fortress Antonia that towered over it.



Replica of the Temple Complex with the Fortress Antonia

¹⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 898: "Paul, bound with chains to Roman soldiers, 'motioned' (κατέσεισεν) with his hand to the people, the traditional gesture of an orator."

¹⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 898n2147: "Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.3.98, advises the orator to extend the thumb, the index finger, and the middle finger while closing the remaining two fingers into the palm (also Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.21; and portrayals of speakers in Greek art); cf. Parsons, *Acts*, 307, who points out that the translation of the NRSV ('he motioned to the people for silence') misses the point of the gesture, which would have been understood by the audience as a gesture which alerts the audience that the speech is about to begin."

This was a Roman fortress that sat on the backside of the temple. And this is the place where Paul was taken after he was arrested. And Paul was on the steps leading up to this fortress when he addressed this crowd. This was the perfect place to address a large crowd that was underneath him.

And if it was me, I would probably say something like, **“Alright! Put a cork in it, you bunch of ruffians!”** But look what Paul does. He speaks to them in Hebrew (literally the Hebrew dialect, probably a form of Aramaic in that day).¹⁶

^{40b} ... And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language,

Alistair Begg said this would be like an Irishman addressing a crowd in Gaelic.¹⁷ This would be like a southerner addressing a southern crowd with a southern drawl. Paul speaks in their heart language. saying: ¹ “Brothers and fathers,¹⁸ hear the defense that I now make before you.”

Brothers and fathers? That’s odd. I don’t know about you, but my brother and my father have never tried to kill me. But Paul loves these people. He views them as family, even though they just pummeled him.¹⁹

² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.

His use of the Hebrew language, and probably also his tone, quieted them.²⁰ Paul loved these people.²¹ He loved them! Paul says in **Romans 9:3**, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

Now here’s the application for us. If you are going to be an unafraid witness for Jesus Christ, if you are going to give your testimony to a group of lost people, you better love them. You better not testify with a spirit of hate or vindictiveness or animosity. That doesn’t work. And that’s not biblical. Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (see Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27–28).

And this’ll help—try to remember just how unlovable you were when Christ came and saved your soul.²² Remember how unlovable you were when your friend or your coworker or your parents shared the gospel with you. That should help you love unlovable people when you share your testimony with them.

By the way, do you know how to share your testimony? I hope you do. I hope you don’t say, “O yeah I’ve always been a Christian, ever since I was born.” That’s not a testimony. I hope you don’t say to

¹⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 455n24: “It is generally agreed that the language of Jerusalem in the first century was Western Aramaic, the common speech of non-Greeks in Western Asia. For a dissenting view that argues for Hebrew as the language of Judea, see J. M. Grintz, ‘Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple,’ *JBL* 79 (1960): 32–47.” Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 898: “The term Ἑβραϊστίς can denote the Aramaic language (διαλέκτος), the main language spoken by the Jews of Palestine. While Paul likely spoke to the crowd in Aramaic, it is not impossible that he spoke in Hebrew, a language that was still in use, as the Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated.”

¹⁷ See his sermon on Acts 21:27–22:29 entitled, “Paul States the Facts”, 09-25-05: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/paul-states-the-facts/>

¹⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 457: “In his opening words Paul addressed the crowd with the formal introduction Stephen used before the Sanhedrin, ‘Brothers and fathers’ (v. 1; cf. 7:2). Both were making a defense and were concerned to establish their loyalty to Judaism; hence this deferential Jewish address.”

¹⁹ RUDOLF GWALTHER: “He calls them brothers and fathers in order to gain their good will. For the same reason he uses the Hebrew language, in which he knew they greatly delighted.... His modesty is worth noting. He is so careful to call those who were in so many ways his explicit enemies, who had injured him, brothers and fathers. He does not do this out of flattery or fear, but in part because he himself is of the same nation and in part because he hopes that in so great a multitude there would be found those ... who would be converted and won by the teaching of the Word.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 303.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNCT, 273: “Paul was conciliatory toward his persecutors. He did not threaten the hostile crowd or seek revenge. Instead, he courteously addressed them as ‘brethren and fathers’ (22:1) and even assigned to their vicious beating of him the noble motive of zeal for God.”

²¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNCT, 273: “It was his love for his weaker brethren and desire for unity in the church that brought him to the temple. It was his love for his unsaved countrymen (cf. Rom. 9:1–3) that led him to evangelize the hostile crowd. And it was his love for God that motivated his love for people and caused him to give glory to Him.”

²² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 129: “Paul’s inclusion in his speech of his life outside of grace should encourage Christians to reflect on their own lives before Christ. Believers who can remember coming to Christ in repentance and faith should look back on their previous life of total sin and rebellion. This recollection should stir up our affections for God and cause us to respond in thanksgiving. Only as we acknowledge the depth of our sin can we appreciate the glory of our conversion (1 Timothy 1:15). Furthermore, Paul, by sharing about his life before meeting Christ, allowed his story to demonstrate the transformative grace of the gospel.”

people, “Yep, God helps those who help themselves. That’s how I got saved.” **That’s not a testimony. In fact, that’s heresy.**

“Alright, well how do I share my testimony, Pastor Tony?” Watch what Paul does!²³

So the crowd is quiet in **verse 2**. And Paul starts to give his “defense.”²⁴ But it’s not really a defense.²⁵ All he really does is tell them about how Jesus saved his soul.

And he said: ³ “I am a Jew,²⁶ born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city,²⁷ educated at the feet²⁸ of Gamaliel²⁹ according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers,³⁰ being zealous for God as all of you are this day.³¹

What’s Paul doing here? Well he’s giving his credentials as a Jew, but he’s also building a rapport with his listeners. **“I am just like you.”** Or more appropriately, **“I was just like you.”**³²

⁴ I persecuted this Way

Remember, “the Way” is the term for Christianity used in the book of **Acts**.³³

⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.³⁴ From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds³⁵ to Jerusalem to be punished.³⁶

“I was just like you!” says Paul. **“In fact I was more zealous for Judaism than you are! I was a persecutor of Christianity!”**

²³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 454: “This is the second of three times in the book of Acts that there is a detailed account of this experience. The first account was in Acts 9, and the third account will be in Acts 26.”

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 655: “Luke spends more time on the defense speeches than he does on the missionary addresses. There are 97 verses of defense speech, which represent 39 percent of the prison-defense section. This compares with 47 verses of Pauline missionary speech, or 21 percent of the missionary section. There are 239 prison verses and 226 missionary verses. This shows that Paul the defender of the faith is as important as, if not more important than, Paul the preacher of the faith.”

²⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 658–9: “The noun ἀπολογία (*apologia*) identifies the speech as a defense (the verb ἀπολογέομαι, *apologeomai*, speak in one’s defense, 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:1–2, 24). An ἀπολογία is a defense speech in which one makes the case for what one is doing or believing.”

²⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 897: “Paul, the Christian missionary, never ceases to identify himself as a Jew.”

²⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 458: “The significance to this is that when Paul referred to his being ‘brought up’ in Jerusalem, the most natural meaning is that he was reared from childhood in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus, as is commonly supposed. His family must have moved to Jerusalem when he was still quite young. This ties in with the later reference to his nephew’s being in Jerusalem (23:16).”

²⁸ CHRYSOSTOM: “He does not just say ‘in the school of Gamaliel’ but ‘at the feet of Gamaliel.’ By these words, he shows his patient endurance, his loving attentiveness, his eagerness to listen and his tremendous reverence for the man.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 268.

²⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 458: “Acts 22:3 is the sole New Testament reference to Paul’s education under Gamaliel.”

³⁰ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 128: “Though he was born in this Mediterranean coastal city, Paul attributes his formation to his upbringing in Jerusalem. In this first part of his biography, Paul shows that he too knows this city. He too is a Jew.”

³¹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 129: “If Paul had stopped his speech at this point, the crowd would have applauded.”

³² CHRYSOSTOM: “He brings forward as witnesses the high priest and the elders. On the one hand, [Paul] makes himself their equal when he says, ‘I being a zealot just as you,’ but then he shows through his deeds that he was a greater zealot than they. ‘I wasn’t waiting around,’ he says, ‘to arrest them, but I was even stirring up the priests and being sent abroad. And I wasn’t after just men, as you are, but I sought out women too, put them in chains and even threw them into prison.’” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 268.

³³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 454: “Paul’s zeal even led him to pursue Jewish believers outside the land with the intent of bringing them to Jerusalem for punishment. His point here was that he did not go to Damascus to find the Messiah, but to persecute His followers.”

³⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 901–2: “The listeners could verify Paul’s account, since many of the members of the Sanhedrin who had supported his efforts to curb the activities of the Christians in the months following Stephen’s execution about 25 years earlier were still alive: their testimony will confirm his account (μαρτυρεῖ μοι). While Caiaphas, the high priest from AD 18–36, was no longer in office—the incumbent high priest was Ananias son of Nebedaios (AD 47–58; cf. 23:2, 5; 24:1)—the memory of the first wave of persecution against Jesus’ followers would still have been vivid, and Caiaphas may still have been alive in AD 57.”

³⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 660: “The irony of Paul saying this while in bonds himself should not be missed. He was a zealot for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2). God would change this. God can turn the persecutor into the pious.”

³⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 902: “The term ‘punishment’ (τιμωρηθῶσι), used only here and in 26:11 in the New Testament, does not include the imprisonment and the interrogation but refers to the penalty after the trial, which could range from flogging with forty lashes minus one (see on 5:40) to execution.”

By the way, this is a different approach than how Paul presents the gospel in Athens. Paul contextualizes the gospel for his audience, which is important. **The way you share the gospel should differ depending on your audience. The essence of the gospel can't change. But the way you share it and how you address the specific circumstances and the specific needs of your listeners can change and should change.**

⁶ "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

That light must have been pretty spectacular to outshine the noonday sun.³⁷

⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸ And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus³⁸ of Nazareth,³⁹ whom you are persecuting.'⁴⁰ ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light⁴¹ but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord⁴² said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' ¹¹ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light...

By the way, the word for brightness here is the Greek word δόξα, which means "glory."⁴³ **This wasn't just a glorified halogen light bulb.** This wasn't even the light of the sun or the stars in our solar system. This was the glorious radiance of Christ that blinded Paul. This was *shekinah* glory that overwhelmed and incapacitated Paul.

¹¹ And since I could not see because of the [glory] of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. ¹² "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

Notice again how Paul is contextualizing for his audience.⁴⁴ He's pointing out how devout Ananias was as a Jew. But not just as a Jew, as a Jewish believer in Christ!

³⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 460: "The light was so great it overwhelmed the noonday sun (v. 6). Paul's companions 'saw the light' (v. 9). Paul was blinded by 'the brilliance of the light' (v. 11). None of these details occur in chap. 9. Perhaps this was Paul's way of highlighting the significance of his conversion. In his experience on the Damascus road, he came to a confession of the risen Lord. He had 'seen the light.' He wished the same for his fellow Jews in the temple square."

³⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 902n2173: "Jesus' crucifixion is never mentioned in Paul's account of his conversion. However, the fact that Jesus of Nazareth died in Jerusalem as the result of crucifixion was common knowledge among the Jews in Jerusalem and beyond, and a major factor in Paul's involvement in the persecution of Jesus' followers was his conviction that any person who is executed for a crime and hung on a tree is cursed by God (see on 8:3; 13:45). For Paul, Jesus of Nazareth was always the one who had been crucified. Jesus' crucifixion is mentioned in two of Peter's speeches in Jerusalem (2:23, 36; 4:10)."

³⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 459–60: "Of all three conversion accounts, only in 22:8 do the words 'of Nazareth' occur. The full designation 'Jesus of Nazareth' was appropriate to the Jewish audience before whom Paul was relating his experience. The most significant difference between Paul's account and the earlier conversion narrative occurs in 22:9, where it is said that Paul's traveling companions saw the light but did not understand the voice speaking to Paul. In 9:7 the companions are said to have heard the sound but not to have seen anyone. Paul's account emphasizes their seeing; the earlier account, their hearing. Both accounts make the same point. The companions were witnesses to the experience and could verify that something objective took place. It was not merely an inner experience of Paul's psyche. On the other hand, the companions were not participants in the experience: they heard a sound but did not receive the message, saw a light but not the risen Lord. The vision itself was solely Paul's experience."

⁴⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 267: "Instantly Paul knew how terribly wrong he had been. The One whom he had despised and rejected as a charlatan, a blasphemer, and a false Messiah was in fact the Lord of glory. That Jesus the Nazarene had spoken to Paul from heaven was also disturbing news for the crowd to hear, since they, too, had despised and rejected Him. Perhaps some of the ones who cried out concerning Paul, 'Away with him!' (21:36) had many years earlier raised that same cry against Jesus (cf. Luke 23:18; John 19:15)."

⁴¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 660: "It is overinterpretation to suggest that Acts 9:7 says that they did not see the light whereas here it says they did. All that is said here is that they did not see anyone. For those with Saul, there was neither an appearance nor revelation. The point is that the others knew something happened and that Saul did not have a merely inner, psychological experience. Those with Paul, however, did not know exactly what took place."

⁴² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 460: "At the outset of his vision he may not have known whom he was addressing as Lord (v. 8). Now he knew that it was Jesus, the risen Lord. Up to this point in his speech, Paul had identified closely with his Jewish listeners. In every way he had shown himself to be as Jewish as they were. Now he began to draw the line that differentiated himself from them. On the Damascus road he had seen the risen Jesus. Now he confessed Jesus as Lord. He surely wished the same for them. It was not inappropriate for a faithful Jew to confess Jesus as Lord. He was himself a living witness to that."

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 904: "While 9:8 acknowledges that Paul got up from the ground in obedience to the heavenly voice, his focus here is on the 'brightness' or 'glory' (δόξα) of the light that he saw, as he does in 2 Cor 4:4, where he describes his (and all believers') experience of conversion to faith in Jesus as 'see[ing] the light (τὸν φωτισμὸν) of the gospel of the glory of Christ (τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ), who is the image of God.'"

⁴⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 661: "The note about Ananias's character shows that others who respected the law were responsive to Jesus."

¹³ [Ananias]... came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother⁴⁵ Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him [that's Ananias].¹⁴ And he said, 'The God of our fathers⁴⁶ appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One⁴⁷ [that's Jesus]⁴⁸ and to hear a voice from his mouth;⁴⁹ ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized⁵⁰ and wash away your sins,⁵¹ calling on his name.'⁵²

Acts 9 tells us that Paul regained his sight and was filled with the Spirit. He believed and was saved and then was subsequently baptized.⁵³ Paul, a persecutor of the church... Paul, a murderer and an enemy of Christ... Paul! ... Got!... Saved! He got saved.

And it wasn't because he was smarter or better looking than anyone else. It wasn't because he logically figured it out while everyone else was too doltish to put it all together. He got saved because God sovereignly reached down and grabbed a hold of his life and said, **"Paul you're mine! No more working against me. From now on you're working for me!"**

And by the way, courageous Ananias was willing to meet up with a killer. Talk about urgency. Talk about boldness and *gutsiness*. And now, Paul is imitating that *gutsiness* by sharing his own testimony in-front of a hostile crowd of killers. **We could use a little bit of that gutsiness in our day.**

Write this down as a third point in your notes. Urgency means boldness in the face of opposition (21:37–39). Urgency means love for your listeners (20:40–21:2). And thirdly urgency means...

3) A clear and compelling **testimony** of **conversion** (22:3–16)

⁴⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 456: "Ananias addressed Paul as 'brother,' showing that he had already become a believer."

⁴⁶ JOHN CALVIN: "In calling him the God of our fathers, he renews the memory of the promises, so that the Jews may know that Paul's recent call is connected with them and that those who make the transition to Christ are not abandoning the Law. Therefore by these words Paul confirms what he has previously asserted in person, that he has not deserted the God of Abraham and the God who had already been worshiped by the Jews in times past, but that he is continuing in the ancient worship of their ancestors, which he had learned from the Law." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 307.

⁴⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 461: "Ananias's words to Paul have a strong Jewish flavor. 'God of our fathers' is strong Old Testament language. The 'Righteous One' is a Jewish messianic title, found earlier in the speeches of Peter and of Stephen to Jews (3:14; 7:52)."

⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 661: "The reference to Jesus as the Just One (τὸν δίκαιον, *ton dikaion*) points to his exalted position and to the vindication of his innocence that Luke 23 highlighted (for this title, see Acts 3:14; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15; Zech. 9:9)."

⁴⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 129–30: "In 22:14, Paul interrupts his testimony of Acts 9 with a declaration of the gospel. He shows that Ananias, a devout Jew, was the instrument God used to point Paul to the gospel and the mission field. Ananias says, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth' (22:14). Ananias tells Paul that the God he has studied under Gamaliel is the same God whom he has encountered on the road to Damascus. This amounts to an astounding revelation for Paul. He now comes to terms with his real encounter with the eternal God—with Yahweh himself... This 'Righteous One' was prophesied in Isaiah 53:11, which both Paul and his Jewish audience would have known. So, at that moment in Acts 22:14, Paul declares before the mob what Ananias declared to him years previously: Jesus is God."

⁵⁰ FELIX MANZ: "Just as they were purified internally by the descent of the Holy Spirit, so too water was also poured over them externally as a symbol of their inner cleansing and dying to sin. And as evidence that this is the meaning of baptism, ... Paul tells what happened to him on the road to Damascus... We see very clearly from these words what baptism is and when baptism should be practiced. That is, a person should be baptized if he has been converted through God's Word, if he has changed his mind and wants to live henceforth a renewed life, as Paul clearly shows, if he is dead to his old life and his heart has been circumcised, and if he has died to sin with Christ. Then he should be buried with Christ in baptism and be resurrected with him to new life." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 308.

⁵¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 269: "Paul's sins were washed away not by baptism but by calling on the name of the Lord (cf. Rom. 10:13). A literal translation of the verse says, 'Arise, get yourself baptized and your sins washed away, having called on His name.' Both imperatives reflect the reality that Paul had already called on the Lord's name, which is the act that saves. Baptism and the washing away of sins follow."

⁵² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 461: "'Be baptized and wash your sins away' could be taken as a proof text for baptismal regeneration. The overarching term, however, is 'calling upon the name of the Lord,' the profession of faith in Christ that is the basis for the act of baptism."

⁵³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 268–9: "Some have mistakenly sought support for baptismal regeneration (the false teaching that baptism is required for salvation) in this verse. Although baptism is an act of obedience required of all Christians, it does not save. Paul understood that clearly. To the Romans he wrote: '[This is] the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.' (Rom. 10:8–10) Paul preached that salvation came from belief in the heart (cf. Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:28) and public confession of that faith (cf. Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:13). Obviously, he did not understand Ananias's words to mean that baptism saves."

Not “Yeah, I’m a Christian, because my parents are Christians.” Not “I just went to church and it seemed like the right thing to do.” Not “I made a deal with the man upstairs.” Don’t say that, please. That’s unclear and ambiguous. Urgency means a clear and compelling testimony of conversion.

And I know some of you have an awesome Damascus Road experience that is just begging to be told. “I was going 100mph in the wrong direction, and God dropped a boulder on my life. Then I knew my need for a Savior! Now I’m going 100mph in the opposite direction living for Christ, and if necessary, dying for Christ.” That’s awesome! Get that story out there! Tell somebody about it! And tell them that they can have peace with Christ too.

You might say, “Tony I don’t have a dramatic Damascus Road experience. The gospel got preached; I got saved. That’s it! And there were no histrionics. There were no ‘boulders’ or ‘voices from heaven.’ There were no dramatic, life-altering encounters with God. So I don’t know how to be compelling when I share my testimony.”

If that’s you right now, let me just say two things about that, because I know that represents a fair number of Christians in the church. **Two things:** 1) Salvation, however it takes place, is always a life-altering encounter with God. If you say I was five years old, my parents shared Christ with me, and I got saved. That is life-altering! If your life hasn’t been altered, then you haven’t been saved. So don’t minimize that. Don’t think less of yourself or your testimony because it happened simpler and less dramatically than someone who came to Christ later in life.

That’s my story, by the way. I was a grade-schooler at Nazarene Christian School in Austin, Texas. The principal at that school got up during chapel and preached the gospel. I was convicted about my sin. I came forward and gave my life to the Lord. That was my life-altering experience of salvation. And I love telling that story. I’m not embarrassed to share that with anyone.

2) If your story is like mine, just because your conversion doesn’t have a dramatic set of circumstances surrounding it, that doesn’t mean that it wasn’t amazing. If you can’t emphasize the circumstances surrounding your conversion (a divorce that brought you to your knees, an addiction that was consuming you, a Damascus road encounter with Jesus like the Apostle Paul), then emphasize the theological drama that was enacted when you came to Christ.

We can all say this. “I was an enemy of God. I was separated from him because of my sin, because of humanity’s sin as a whole. And yet God in his mercy came to earth and took on human flesh and died for me. And when I realized that and believed in that work the Holy Spirit came upon me and gave me new life in Christ. And I was a new creation at age five or ten or fifteen or fifty. And now my life is lived for him!

Are those things true when you got saved? Are those things any less amazing than a drug addict who came to faith in his or her twenties? I don’t think so.

We want to share Christ with a sense of urgency and conviction. And an essential part of that is “A clear and compelling testimony of conversion.”

Maybe some of you right now might say, “You know what, Pastor Tony? I don’t have a testimony of conversion. I don’t know *when* or even *if* I’m saved. I don’t sense the Holy Spirit moving in my life.” Well perhaps that’s because you’re not saved. Maybe it’s because you assumed you were saved because your parents were saved, or you were baptized as a baby, or because you were always surrounded by Christians.

Maybe you walked in today unsaved, but you want to leave here saved. Maybe today’s service is the “boulder” in your life. It’s the dramatic moment in your life that you’ve been waiting for.

If that’s the case, don’t delay any longer. Just bow your head right now. Right now! I’ve got more to preach. But for someone in this room (or online), this sermon is over and you need to respond. Just bow your head and confess your sin before a righteous God.

Just say to the Lord, “I’m a sinner. I need Jesus. I believe in Jesus’s death on the cross as a payment for my sin. I believe in Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. And from this point forward I’ll live for him.”

Let this day be a day of salvation for you.

Now let me preach a little more to confirmed believers in this room. Urgency means boldness in the face of opposition (21:37–39). It means love for your listeners (20:40–21:2). It means a clear and compelling testimony of conversion. But urgency also means this:

4) A **willingness** to suffer **rejection** (22:17–29)

If you are not willing to suffer rejection... if you are not willing to risk your reputation for the sake of Christ and the gospel... if you are not willing to suffer insults and name-calling and stereotyping and awkwardness and embarrassment and emotional pain... you won't have a sense of urgency. And you won't see God do amazing things as you bear witness to his glory. That privilege will go to another.

2 Corinthians 2:15–16 says, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.” As Christians, we exude this effervescent, aromatic fragrance. It's the fragrance of Christ. For some people they breathe it in, and it's the breath of life. It's the fragrance of the living. For others, it's the stench of death.

Listen, the most precious thing that we get to do in this world is lead people to new life in Christ. It is a wonderful, awesome privilege. But that same smell that brings joy and hope and new life in Christ to some, provokes hate and insults and rejection and death in others. And you got to risk that. If you are going to have urgency, you've got to risk that. I've got to risk that.

If you are going to be the fragrance of life to some, you've got to be willing to be the fragrance of death to others. That's just the way it is. Urgency means a willingness to suffer rejection.

Here's what happens to Paul. Look at **verse 17**.

¹⁷ “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple,⁵⁴ I fell into a trance

Now this is after Paul's Damascus road experience.⁵⁵ This is after he got saved.⁵⁶ He comes to Jerusalem, and he starts asking God, “**What's next? What do you want me to do, God?**”⁵⁷ And during that time of prayer in the temple, he falls into a trance. This is the same word, trance, that was used of Peter when he had the vision from heaven with that sheet full of all the clean and unclean animals (**Acts 10:9–16**).

And here's what God shows him.

I fell into a trance¹⁸ and saw [Jesus]⁵⁸ saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly,⁵⁹ because they will not accept your testimony about me.’¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 906: “As regards Paul's audience in the outer court, the report of Paul's vision which he received in the temple should allay their fears that he is speaking against the temple.”

⁵⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 906: “Luke's account of Paul's conversion and postconversion activities in Acts 9 does not refer to this incident, which must have taken place after Paul's missionary preaching in Damascus and in Arabia/Nabatea (9:20–25; Gal 1:17) during his visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (cf. 9:26–29; Gal 1:18), i.e., in AD 33/34.”

⁵⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 662–3: “In 9:29–30, it is the Jerusalem believers who surface a plot and have Paul slip away. However, in Acts 22 Paul is warned by the Lord that such danger will come. Paul apparently was prepared when word of a plot came, or else Luke is telescoping the timing of these events. So again the description here intensifies the experience of Acts 9. This event took place so fast that in Gal. 1:17–18 Paul does not count it as a real visit. The Lord protected him from the start.”

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 462: “In many ways Paul's vision in the temple parallels the call of Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13). Just as with Isaiah, Paul had a vision of the Lord (for Isaiah the Lord was Yahweh). Both experienced a call, a commission. Both were told that the people would resist their message. In Isaiah's case the prophet was told to remain in the city in the face of the resistance. Paul was told to leave.”

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 662: “Is the reference to the Lord a reference to God or Jesus? Jervell (1998: 544) argues that God, as the highest authority, is meant, but the narrative flow suggests that the exalted Jesus was directing him. That is, the one speaking seems to be the same one who spoke in verses 13–16. Also in favor of Jesus is that the title “Lord” in verses 10 and 17 seems to point to the same speaker. This fits the pattern in Acts that Jesus or the Spirit guides people, not the Father directly (e.g., 23:11; the vision of Acts 9; Stephen's vision of Jesus in Acts 7).”

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 906: “The fact that he had to leave in a hurry, ‘immediately’ (ἐν τάχει), corresponds to Paul's assertion in Gal 1:18 that his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion lasted only for fifteen days; it also fits the information given in 9:29, where Paul left Jerusalem as the result of a plot of Greek-speaking Jews who want to kill him. Jesus had commissioned Paul to be his witness, but not for the people living in Jerusalem.”

believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness⁶⁰ was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.'

Now take note of this. This is Paul arguing with Jesus about whether or not he should preach to Jews in Jerusalem. Paul thinks he's the perfect candidate to preach to Jews. Paul thinks, because he's been converted out of great violence towards Christians, he's the perfect person to tell people that Christianity is true.

But God's ways are not our ways. And God's plans are different than Paul's plans. God knows that if Paul stays in Jerusalem, he'll just get himself killed, so he sends him out of Jerusalem to minister to Gentiles in the Roman Empire.

And **verse 21** says this:

²¹ And [Jesus] said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

So that's what Paul did. He travelled all around the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, planting churches, and running for his life.

Now on a scale of 1 to 10, how good was Paul as a minister to the Gentiles? He was pretty good, right? How many of you think God knew what he was doing sending Paul to the Gentiles?

But watch how the crowd responds to this statement. Look at **verse 22**.

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."⁶¹

The "word" that infuriated them was the word "Gentiles." They were doing fine until Paul insinuated that Gentiles could be saved as well as Jews.⁶² That was too much for this Jewish crowd. They just go bonkers.⁶³

These Jews were incensed by the idea that Gentiles could be saved, which is interesting because their OT Scriptures told them that they would be a witness to the Gentiles.⁶⁴ See **Isaiah 40-55** for more on that!⁶⁵

And look at **verse 23**.

²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging⁶⁶ dust into the air,

⁶⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 462n44: "In v. 20 Stephen is described as a μάρτυς. This is the earliest NT evidence for the word moving beyond its general sense of 'witness' to the more specific nuance of a martyr, a witness unto death. Cf. the latter meaning in Rev 1:5; 2:13; 3:14."

⁶¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 655: "It is not unusual for speakers in Acts not to make it to the conclusion of their speech (e.g., Stephen, Peter at Cornelius's, Paul in Athens)."

⁶² MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 270-1: "They could not tolerate the suggestion that Gentiles could be saved without first becoming Jewish proselytes. That would make them spiritually equal to the Jewish people before God—the most blatant heresy imaginable to the crowd."

⁶³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 665: "The unwillingness of Paul's opponents to consider how God's recent activity relates to God's promise and program has made them unwilling and unable to respond to a hope designed for them. This is tradition gone bad. It creates blindness and stubbornness, a deadly combination."

⁶⁴ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 131-2: "Today, many teachers of the Bible try to change the message of the gospel to make it less offensive. The gospel, however, is always offensive. In Acts 17, Paul knew he would lose many in his audience by speaking of the resurrection from the dead. Here, in Acts 21-22, Paul knew that he would elicit a strong response from the Jews by proclaiming the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God. Paul could have left out these points which caused so much hostility and mockery from the crowds. He could have avoided speaking of the resurrection from the dead as he preached at Mars Hill. He could have spoken like a "good Jew" in Jerusalem and not have mentioned the Gentiles at all. For Paul to do that, however, would have meant giving up on the central doctrines of the gospel and their implications. He would have been attempting to shape God to the culture, rather than summoning the culture to turn to God. The idea of conforming God to our cultural ideals remains tempting. Adapting the doctrines of the gospel to today's culture might lead to less suffering and mockery for Christians. To do that, however, would mean jettisoning the gospel and the message of salvation. If your desire for cultural relevance supersedes your theological commitment to the Christian faith, then you will not preach good news, though you might proclaim culturally popular news. Christians must know how the gospel offends the most deeply-held assumptions and values of any society, so that we are prepared to challenge the culture when the gospel does offend."

⁶⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13-28 for You*, 131: "Paul is declaring that even Gentiles are part of God's family. The Jews cannot stomach this thought because they revile the Gentiles. They view the Gentiles as defilers of the temple, and as harsh overlords. The Jews in Jerusalem repudiate Gentile rule of their holy City of David. Now, however, Paul tells them that Yahweh has had the 'audacity' to graft the Gentiles into the family of God."

⁶⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 921: "The present tense of the three participles underlines that the tumult in the outer court went on for some time."

These were demonstrations of contempt in Jewish society.⁶⁷ If they had stones, they would probably start throwing them at Paul now.

²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting⁶⁸ against him like this.

The tribune probably didn't understand the Hebrew dialect that Paul was using when he spoke to the crowd. So this mass confusion led to a decision by the tribune to examine Paul by flogging.⁶⁹ This was the same kind of flogging that Jesus endured before the cross. It was customary for Romans to use this for interrogation. And people often died from this use of torture.

But Paul does something smart here.⁷⁰ Look at **verse 25**.

²⁵ But when they had stretched him out for the whips,⁷¹ Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"

Listen, here me on this. This is an important statement from **Ajith Fernando** and his commentary on the book of **Acts**. **Fernando** writes, "[Paul] was not a masochist who took on suffering unnecessarily."⁷² Paul was willing to suffer for Christ, but he wasn't fatalistic in his approach to suffering.⁷³ And here he even uses a little bit of shrewdness to ward off this torture.⁷⁴

Because look at **verse 26**.

²⁶ 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."

The famous Roman philosopher **Cicero** said, "**To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder.**"⁷⁵ These guys could get in some serious hot water for these actions with Paul.⁷⁶

²⁷ So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes."⁷⁷ ²⁸ The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum."⁷⁸ Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."⁷⁹ ²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately,⁸⁰ and the tribune also was afraid,⁸¹ for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

⁶⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 663–4: "It is not entirely clear what this garment-waving gesture is. Do they shake out their garments, take the outer garment off in a mock preparation for stoning, or wave them in the air? ... Throwing dust is a sign of grieving at what has been said (forms of *πάσσω*, *passō*, sprinkle: 2 Sam. 16:13; Job 2:12), suggesting that they have heard something almost blasphemous (*ἐντινάσσω*, *entinassō*, hurl against: 2 Macc. 4:41)."

⁶⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 921: "When he heard the enraged Jews demand Paul's execution—the Jews from the province of Asia (cf. 21:27) would have shouted in Greek—he orders Paul to be taken into the barracks for interrogation under torture."

⁶⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 464: "Paul's address had clarified nothing for him, particularly since it was in Aramaic. Therefore he decided to use the standard Roman method for 'getting the truth' out of a slave or a common provincial, the form of examination under torture known by the Latin name *flagellum*. This was a particularly cruel manner of scourging that consisted of a beating across the raw flesh with leather thongs in which were inserted rough pieces of bone or metal. The thongs were set in a stout wooden handle. This was a much more severe manner of beating than that of the rods which Paul and Silas underwent at Philippi (16:22f., 37; cf. 2 Cor 11:25). It was not uncommon for the victim to die as a result of the *flagellum*."

⁷⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 924: "The commander's reaction is evidence of the key role of Paul's Roman citizenship for the subsequent account of Paul's trial. Without Roman citizenship, Paul would have been interrogated under torture and probably handed over to the Jewish authorities, without any legal or physical protection; and the Jewish authorities presumably would have condemned him, or they would have allowed a plot hatched by Jews who were determined to lynch Paul (23:12) to succeed."

⁷¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 664: "The area was probably the Gabbatha, a stone pavement in the fortress that also served as a central courtyard. Williams (1990: 381) notes that Jesus was probably scourged here as well."

⁷² Fernando, *Acts*, 570.

⁷³ JOHN CALVIN: "Paul escaped because of a privilege, rather than common justice; but he did not hesitate to use, in a good cause, this shield of citizenship to ward off the injury that was prepared for him." Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 310.

⁷⁴ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 133–4: "Paul trusted in the will of God and would endure any suffering which befell him. He did not, however, pursue unnecessary suffering. Suffering for the sake of suffering does not glorify God. Paul used his citizenship as a protection not because he feared suffering, but rather, as a gift of God that enabled him to continue to advance the gospel."

⁷⁵ Taken from Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 664.

⁷⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 464: "It definitely was not legal to examine a Roman citizen by scourging. The Valerian and Porcian laws clearly established the illegality of such an act, and any Roman officer who transgressed this exemption would himself be guilty of a serious breach of law."

As we'll see next time, the tribune now tries another tactic to find out what all this hubbub is about with Paul. He turns to the Sanhedrin. How does that work out for him? Well, as we'll see, that doesn't work out good for anybody—Paul, the Sanhedrin, or the tribune! More on that next time.

But let's finish up here. What's the point of all this? What's the abiding message of this pericope of Scripture, **Acts 21:37–22:29**? The point is this. Paul was faithful to Christ. Paul was bold and courageous in his attempt to share the gospel. Paul was willing to risk everything in an act of love for people who hated him.⁸² They wanted him dead. And his boldness didn't result in salvations. It didn't result in fragrance of life, only fragrance of death. And it didn't result in safety, security, and prosperity.

You might say, **“Well, Paul got rescued from a flogging! God protected him from that.”** Yeah, but nobody would say Paul got off easy. He gotten beaten up by the Jerusalem crowd before all this happened. Also we know from **2 Corinthians 11:24–25** that Paul was flogged five times throughout his life! God didn't always protect him or save him from that fate. **If suffering was evidence that God doesn't love us, then God hated Paul!**

The point is this. Paul exemplified for us a heroic demonstration of love and boldness and willingness to suffer rejection for the gospel. The sense of urgency was so pronounced in his life that he was willing to risk everything, to suffer greatly in order to preach the gospel and testify to the saving power of Jesus Christ. **If Paul was willing to do that in front of a murderous, merciless mob of hostile people, how much more should we be willing and ready to share our testimony with those who we come in contact with? Even if that means we become the fragrance of death to some, it's worth it. It's worth it in order to become the fragrance of life to others. Amen?**

And Paul had those opportunities too. Paul saw many people come to Christ. Not this time in Jerusalem. But plenty of other times, he did. **And I want to see people get saved. I want to be the fragrance of life to some. I desire that we as a church get more and more opportunities here to become the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of life to some.**

I'll close with this. The story is told about Charles Spurgeon, the great nineteenth century preacher in London.⁸³ When he was fifteen years old, he was unsaved. And he was searching. He was trying to find the Lord. And one particular Sunday, it had snowed really bad in his hometown (Colchester), and he couldn't get to the church that he was hoping to go to. So he went to a closer church, a little primitive Methodist chapel. And his soul was aching. He was trying to find some relief to the lack of assurance he felt for his soul.

⁷⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 924: “This fact complicated matters immensely for Lysias. He cannot only be accused of having broken the law that prohibited the binding and torture of Roman citizens, but he had abused a Roman citizen who had higher status. This realization explains the commander's reaction to Paul's disclosure in the next verse.”

⁷⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 465: It is possible that Lysias was being a bit sarcastic when he referred to paying a ‘big price’ for his citizenship, the implication being perhaps that ‘now it seems that just anyone can afford it.’ If that was so, Paul's response would have been a shocker: no, he did not pay a big price but was *born* into it.”

⁷⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 465: “Paul was no Johnny-come-lately to citizenship status like himself but one who was *born* a citizen.”

⁸⁰ CHRYSOSTOM: “He would have earned contempt had he been scourged. But as it is, [Paul] throws them into greater fear. If they had scourged him, they could have dismissed the matter or even killed him. But as it is, the result is not so. See how God permits many results to occur through human ways, both in the case of the apostles and with the rest of humankind.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 275.

⁸¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 272: “To subject a Roman citizen to the *flagellum* could have destroyed Lysias's military career or even cost him his life.”

⁸² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 665: “This passage shows us how focused Paul is on representing the gospel even while he also defends himself. The unit also shows how, in an ironic way, the legal system of Rome has nothing to fear from Christianity (and so neither does any other present political state).”

⁸³ What follows is my own paraphrase of Spurgeon's autobiography. See Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, vol. 1, The Early Years, 1834–1859 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 101–3.

And the snowstorm was so bad that there were like twelve people at this church. And the preacher didn't even make it to the church. So they went up to one of the laypeople, a shoe-maker, and said, "You're preaching today."

So this shoemaker got behind the pulpit and started preaching. And his text for the day was Isaiah 45:22, where it says in the KJV, "Look to me and be ye saved." So this shoemaker started preaching. And he said to those twelve people, "You need to look! You need to look! Look and be ye saved!"

And eventually—I guess he ran out of material—he looked as Spurgeon, who was downcast. And said, "Son, you look miserable. And you're going to be miserable till you obey my text. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ and *be ye saved*."

And you know what? Charles Spurgeon got saved that day. And he went on to be the most famous preacher in the English language. He got saved in a little primitive Methodist chapel through the preaching of a layperson. And we don't even know that shoemaker's name.

And Spurgeon says this in his autobiography, "Like when the bronze serpent in the wilderness was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things in order to be saved. All I had to do was look to Jesus Christ!"

Have you looked to Jesus Christ? Have you believed in his finished work upon the cross as the payment for your sin? That's the only way to salvation. Look to him!