

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 5TH–6TH // BOOK OF ACTS

ADDRESSING THE PEOPLE (ACTS 21:40–22:5)

Paul was in Jerusalem after feeling “compelled by the Spirit” to go there, despite all the warnings that he would be persecuted once he arrived.

- Just as predicted, Paul had been arrested in the temple and was now in the custody of a Roman tribune who wasn't quite sure why the Jewish crowd wanted him dead.
- At first, the Roman authorities thought Paul was an Egyptian insurrectionist (v. 38).
- But Paul cleared up who he was (a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia) and asked for permission to speak to the Jewish mob (v. 39).
- As Paul began to address the crowd in Aramaic (the Hebrew dialect), they quieted down and actually listened (v. 40).
- Remember, the charges brought against Paul were that he was telling people to “forsake Moses” (21:21) and that he was anti-Jewish.

So Paul launched into his resume, telling the crowd of his birth, upbringing, and formal training in the ways of the Jewish faith.

- He had been born in Tarsus (which made him a Hellenistic Jew), but he was educated by Gamaliel, a very well-known Jewish rabbi.
- Paul was once an intense persecutor of Christians who hated everything about the message of Jesus (vs. 4–5).
- In other words, the violent intensity of the mob was nothing compared to the violence Paul incited against the church.
- Paul could sympathize and understand why the crowd wanted him dead—he was just like them before meeting Jesus.
- Their actions, as unjust, violent, irrational, and horrible as they were, were just symptoms of not knowing Jesus.
- As Christians, we can't blame the dark for being dark—we have to remember that we were once dead, lost, and in darkness ourselves.
- Do we notice the real problem facing our world (an absence of a relationship with God), or do we just focus on the symptoms?
- Do we consider the sins of others to be worse in God's eyes than our sins? Are those who don't know Jesus our enemies or potential siblings?

SEEING THE LIGHT (ACTS 22:6–21)

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ARGUE ANYONE INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

People may doubt your beliefs, and they may not buy into your arguments.

- However, your own personal story of conversion can be very convincing when paired with a changed and godly life.
- Paul began to explain to this group how he had encountered the risen Jesus.

ON PAUL'S WAY TO DAMASCUS TO PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS, HE SAW A BRIGHT LIGHT (V. 6).

The light appeared at noon and was apparently strong enough to outshine the midday sun.

- Paul then heard a voice, who identified Himself as Jesus of Nazareth, asking why Paul was persecuting Him (vs. 7–8).
- The others traveling with Paul saw the light but didn't hear the voice (v. 9).

PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THE VOICE WAS “WHAT SHOULD I DO, LORD?” (V. 10).

That word, “Lord,” was used to refer to Yahweh or the Messiah, the Adonai of the Hebrews.

- Paul was saying that when he actually encountered Jesus, His identity as the one, true God was undeniable, and he acknowledged Him as God.

JESUS IS LORD, BUT SOME OF US SEE HIM AS...

An especially vivid and constantly affirming imaginary friend.

- The moral support for our particular ideology (political, social, etc.).
- Our own personal genie or lucky rabbit's foot for when we're in a bind.
- A fascinating, remote figure of academic or theological study and intellect.
- Then the Lord Jesus told Paul to go into Damascus where he would be told what he was supposed to do (v. 10).
- Paul told the crowd that God also spoke to Ananias, a devout Jewish man who was also a disciple of Jesus, to come to Paul.
- Paul had been struck blind. Ananias prayed for Paul to receive his sight and led him to be baptized as a follower of Jesus.

After Paul's conversion in Damascus, he returned to Jerusalem and spent time worshiping in the temple (a detail he mentions on purpose).

- In the middle of his worship in the temple, Paul received a vision from God to leave Jerusalem because the people there weren't going to accept his testimony of Christ (v. 18).
- Paul began to almost argue with God (v. 19)!

But God commanded Paul to go “far away” to the Gentiles with this message of the gospel (v. 21).

- The hatred of the Gentile world by First Century Jews was so established that many of them couldn't imagine God's concern or love for any other ethnicity or people group.
- For Paul, this first revelation of God's love for ethnic non-Jews was probably shocking.
- It would also be shocking for the crowd that day.

ELEMENTS OF A GENUINE CONVERSION

Faith in Jesus as Lord (v. 10)

- A change of mind and heart (*repentance*)
- A conscious response (vs. 11, 16)
- Reconciliation with others (9:26–31)
- A surrendered life (vs. 18–21)
- A genuine conversion to Christ results in a life radically changed by Christ!

TO THE ROMANS (ACTS 22:22–29)

When Paul mentioned that God had commanded him to take the gospels to the Gentiles, the speech ended.

- The thought that Jews and Gentiles could stand on equal footing before God was completely intolerable to this audience—they turned into a mob as anarchy and chaos filled the air.
- They began to cry out, “Wipe this man off the face of the earth!” (v. 22).

THE IRRATIONALITY OF HATRED

The hostility toward Gentiles expressed by some Jewish groups in the First Century wasn't based on the Hebrew Scriptures.

- Throughout the Old Testament, God's plan had always included the Gentile nations in some way.
- Their hostility was rooted more in historical and cultural prejudices than anything else.

This hatred meant that many were willing to reject something that was consistent with the larger story of their own Scriptures.

- Their problem wasn't that God had suddenly changed His mind about the Gentiles.
- It was that their hostility, hatred, and anger prevented them from recognizing what God had been saying all along.
- Hatred ultimately resists the mission of God.

We can celebrate God's grace when it reaches people like us, but we get really uncomfortable when it reaches people we don't like.

- Hatred, preexisting prejudices, and hostility will distort our reading of Scripture and warp our understanding of the gospel.
- The gospel states that anyone—rich, poor, black, white, moral, immoral, etc.—can come to God just as they are, *if they come through Jesus*.

No one exactly knows why the crowd threw off their cloaks and “threw dust into the air,” but more than likely, there was no symbolic nature to their gestures—it was simply total chaos.

- The mob was so threatening that the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks and then decided to flog him to find out why everybody was so mad (v. 24).
- Scourging was an effective interrogation technique.

Jewish scourging used wooden rods, but Roman scourging used leather thongs with pieces of metal and bone attached to the ends.

- Paul had already been beaten five times with 39 lashes by Jewish authorities, and three times with rods by Roman magistrates, but this kind of scourging (a *flagellum*) was far more brutal.

- This was the kind of beating given to Jesus in Pilate's hall (John 19:1).

As the soldiers stretched Paul out for his beating, Paul addressed the centurion (v. 25).

- He asked, “Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and is uncondemned?”
- It isn't wrong for Christians to exercise their citizenship rights or use legal means to avoid unnecessary persecution.

- If legal injustice is happening, we're responsible to speak out against it *respectfully* and *honorably*.

This question is a game changer. Roman law prohibited the beating, as well as the chaining that Paul had previously received.

- The centurion had no option but to report immediately to his commander, since he had already committed a crime by placing a Roman citizen in chains (v. 26).
- To scourge Paul with the flagellum would have been an even more serious crime.

The commander of the tribune asked Paul if he was a Roman citizen, and Paul answered that he was a citizen “by birth” (the commander had purchased his citizenship, vs. 27–28).

- So the interrogation squad that was getting ready to scourge Paul dispersed, and a meeting with the Sanhedrin was called to find out why Paul had caused such an uproar amongst the Jews.

Paul remained calm and trusted in God's intervention, even in the face of danger and violence.

- If God had brought Paul this far and led him to the city of Jerusalem, He would give Paul the grace he needed in the trial.
- God is faithful to give the grace we need; we must remain calm and trust in His faithfulness.
- We can be a witness to Jesus in our suffering.

THE SYMPTOMS OR THE PROBLEM?

- The reason our world is so broken, filled with hatred, and plagued by perversion isn't because of all the bad people who aren't quite as good as you who are ruining it.
- The perversion, hatred, self-centeredness, and brokenness are just symptoms of not knowing God through Jesus.
- That was *once* you (1 Corinthians 6:11).

“BUT YOU WERE WASHED, YOU WERE SANCTIFIED, YOU WERE JUSTIFIED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND BY THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11).

- Anyone who comes to God through faith in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, experiences a supernatural encounter in which they are:
- Washed: The defilement of sin is cleansed.
- Sanctified: Set apart and made holy.
- Justified: Made right with God.

THIS GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYBODY.

- The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, the drunkards and dopeheads, the verbally abusive, and the swindlers (1 Cor. 6:9–10) have all been offered forgiveness through Jesus.
- Where are you on that list? Who on that list makes you uncomfortable? Is your hatred resisting the mission of God?

JESUS IS LORD.

- Jesus isn't your affirming imaginary friend, ideological puppet, genie in a bottle, or intellectual theological construct. He is Lord over all the universe.
- The invitation is to fall at His feet in the light of His glory and say, “What should I do, Lord?”
- This is the answer to your brokenness, and this is the answer to our world's brokenness.