

Talk – Act 21:37-22:29– Citizenship Concerns

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Misunderstanding: protecting peace

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Your Testimony

Talk – Act 21:37-22:29– Citizenship Concerns

Bible Reading/s

Act 21:37-22:29

Suggestion: Break the reading up – 21:37-40 (reader 1), 22:1-21 (male reader 2), 22:22-29 (reader 1)

Central Truth

Jesus said: Hear my Words, be my Witness.

Purpose

In this sermon, I want my hearers to realise that having a testimony about Jesus is a good thing – but only if spoken and lived

CHECK TIME

Talk

Prayer

Lord and Father,

When and how you call people to yourself is totally up to you.

Before us now is a record of how you chose to call the Apostle Paul to yourself. And before me now sit may who you have called into the faith of Jesus Christ. And perhaps, also before me now sit others who are willing to consider what you have done for them in Jesus.

Help us all to come to terms with your call. In Jesus Name. Amen.

My Testimony

I came to Christ kicking and screaming! Well, I like to say that I put up a fight.

By the time I was 20 I had been told what “sin” was numerous times, but I hadn’t yet realised I was guilty of it!

“Sin”, my mate said, “is when you think you are better than God.”

“I don’t think that”, I quickly replied. To which my wise friend said, “What evidence in your life shows that you think God is better than you? You seem to live first for yourself, then for the world, and I struggle to see which part of your life puts God first!”

How rude!

How right.

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‘I became a Christian because a very patient friend was bold enough to tell me about Jesus and show in the Bible that Jesus did for me what I could never do for myself—make me right with God.

‘He took me to 1 Peter 3:18 (in fact, I am sure he took many of his friends to this verse) and showed me that “Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

‘Four things struck me. 1- Jesus was willing to do for me what I was not willing to do for him. 2 - He did it once and that was sufficient for all. 3 - He was right before God (that is, righteous), a claim that I knew I honestly could not say about myself. 4 - And that, for some reason, he did it for my benefit.

So I asked my friend, “What are you suggesting that I do?”

‘My mate said, “You’ve done enough, how about you let Jesus do the rest!”—and with that he asked me to pray with him. I can’t remember exactly how it went, but it was something like this: “Father, Ken has stuffed up, but you already know that. He now knows that, and he is really sorry. Please take him back by the blood of Jesus and help him from now on to live for you rather than himself. Amen.”

‘I wish I could say that at that moment the heavens opened, a bright light came shining down, a choir of angels suddenly became deafening, that my heart instantly became pure and from that point I never sinned again, but that would be a lie. God graciously put several other faithful and patient friends in my life who, over time, talked to me about Jesus. At some point, by God’s grace, I “stopped unbelieving and believed” (John 20:27).

‘I am so humbled that Jesus is my Lord and God.’

PAUSE

- Friends, that is my testimony.
- I don’t tell that to draw attention to myself, but rather to draw attention to what Jesus has chosen to do to draw me close.

Paul’s Testimony

- In Acts 22, the passage we look at today, the Apostle Paul offers *his* testimony.
- It is the second of three occasions where his testimony is offered in this book.
- And like any good *Christian* testimony, it describes what Jesus did to bring a person from dark to light – from lost to found.
- Now make sure you have Acts open in front of you.
- Pick it up with me from Acts 21:37 – it’s just after the Roman Commander has given instruction to remove Paul from a riotous crowd of Jews who were calling for Paul’s head.

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Misunderstandings

- There are a couple misunderstandings going on here.
- The Jews in the crowd are doing everything they can to *protect their religion* – they have been told that Paul has been trying to undermine their Judaistic culture, by speaking against them as a people, discrediting their laws, desecrating their temple.
- So, motivated by a love for their religion – they oppose Paul.

- On the other hand, the Romans, as the secular authorities are doing everything they can to *protect the peace* – they have been told that Paul is an Egyptian terrorist.
 - Three years earlier according to the Jewish historian Josephus, an Egyptian false prophet had led a revolt involving thousands of people to the Mount of Olives (which was adjacent to Jerusalem in the east) – his aim was to overthrow Roman Rule. The revolt failed, but the Egyptian leader had escaped – and so perhaps the Roman commander in Acts 21, had assumed that Paul was this Egyptian terrorist having another go.

- So, a couple of misunderstandings – shown in what each group of people are trying to protect – the Jews *protecting their religion*, the Romans *protecting the peace*.

Application

- In Adelaide today – we don't have the same two pressure points – but Christians still suffer under the shroud of misunderstandings.
 - The religion of today is all about self-determination. And so, if the understanding is that Christians are trying to control people and force them to live in a particular way – then the response will be to do whatever can be done to protect the religion of self-determination.
 - And from a political point of view, if the understanding is that Christians are trying to make people believe something that causes division, then our political leaders will do what they can to protect the peace by legislating to control what can or cannot be said.
- In Acts, we may have different circumstances, but it shows that humanity hasn't changed much in the way we operate.

- As Paul is about to be taken into the barracks, he asks if he could address the crowd. – he says – verse 39 '*I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city*'.
 - Now, there is a clue here in what Paul says, that should have raised alarm bells – which will come to play a role later in the chapter.
 - Who describes themselves as a 'citizen of no ordinary city'? – that is like me saying 'I am citizen from a land down under'.
 - The commander, had already got Paul's identity wrong, he is about to get citizenship wrong as well – and overlook the fact that Paul has even more right than the commander to address the people of Jerusalem.
- Having got permission – Paul steps up and begins his first defence speech – and you will notice he speaks in Aramaic – the language of the educated.

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- This poor commander, he got his identity wrong, then his citizenship, and now he discovered he is also educated!

Défense Speech #1

And so, Paul begins...22:1

- Brothers and Fathers (very respectful – and the crowd goes silent)
- I am a Jew, born in a Jewish town, and educated in this city Jerusalem – in fact educated under the esteemed teacher Gamal-iel (whom you should know).
- In order words – I am like you. I am not trying to undermine *our* nationality.

- I was trained in the law – in fact I was zealous for upholding the law – as you obviously are.
- I persecuted the followers of ‘the Way’ – to the point of death, regardless of gender, throwing folk into prison – and if you don’t believe me then the High Priest and all the Jewish council should be able to inform you, because they were the ones who commissioned me to do it! They even sent me to Damascus to find more of these followers so that I could arrest and bring them back here.
- If you are zealous for the law, then I was your man.

But you need to know what happened to me. It changed everything.

- On my way, I was suddenly blinded by a light from heaven. Those with me saw it as well – I fell to my knees – and then I heard a voice.
- *‘Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?’*
 - Who are you?
- *‘I am Jesus, of Nazareth’*
- Well that is remarkable – I thought you were dead! ‘What do you want from me?’
- ‘Get up, go into Damascus – and once there I will tell you what to do’
- So up I got, led by my friends – taken into Damascus and to a man named Ananias.
- He also was a devout man of the law and respected by the Jews there.
- And he gave me my sight back – but more, he told me what Jesus wanted me to do.
- And this was my commission – verse 14
‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous one and to hear the words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard – now get up, be baptised, wash your sins away, calling on his name’

- That changed my life.
- What we as Jews have always known, that from the God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will come a Righteous One – a Messiah.
- And that Messiah (it turns out) is Jesus – the very one who I have disregarded, who I have been persecuting by tracking down those who were proclaiming him.

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- That Messiah, who chose to speak to me (and others) to ensure that I knew it was him.
- And that Messiah who told me to change my tune – I needed to be his witness, not hunt his witnesses down.

- So, I returned, back here to Jerusalem – this city of David, this city of the Messiah – and I went to the temple to pray as any good Jew should.
- And while I was there – Jesus spoke to me again – and you know what, he told me that you would not accept what I had to say about him – so I had to go.
- But where? Jews everywhere knew that I persecuted followers of Jesus – they will never trust me if I start proclaiming Jesus.
- And so Jesus told me – Go, I will send you to the Gentiles.

PAUSE

Conversion Observations

- Friends, that is Paul Christian testimony.
- Allow me to point out two things:

1. Paul was not looking for Jesus – Jesus was looking for him.

- Jesus can call whom he wants
- It may be that he calls those who are ready to hear what he has to say, those who are actively checking him out, seekers – those who have the gumption to check out what has been said and done by Jesus.
- It should not be a surprise when someone who is willing to look for Jesus, they find him! – and come to know the Saviour of the world.
- The fact, that so many in the world have a problem with him, should give us pause for thought – What is it about him that makes people react? – perhaps, there is a misunderstanding a play – and checking out Jesus is one of the ways to check out whether there is any substance to the reactions.
- And so, if you are here because you are willing to do just that – to check out Jesus - I hope you will find in him, one who is calling you to himself.

But, it may be that Jesus chooses to call a person to himself – who is doing the exact opposite of checking out Jesus. Like Paul.

- Friends, take heart, that even those who seems so antagonistic, so far from any hope of knowing Jesus – that for them, there is still hope.
- If Jesus can choose to call someone like Paul – and to give him the job of calling others to Christ, then it is very possible that he can call that person you know that is totally against the whole idea of having a Saviour in their life.

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- And friends, it may also be that Jesus, has given you the job to reach that very person!

Aside: How Jesus Calls?

It may also be helpful to point out here – that how Jesus chooses to speak to you may look very different to the way that he chose to speak to Paul.

- Whether that be miraculously is in visions, dreams, bright lights, voices from heaven is well within his means, but not normal (not in the time of Paul nor today)
- But what is normal, and clear, is that He chooses to speak through his word (by his spirit), so that all who come to it will know with certainty what he is asking of them – and as such, any vision, dream, bright light or voice if always be in accord with what we have revealed for us in the Word of the Bible.
- The best way to meet Jesus – is to meet him in his Word.
- And the best way to introduce others to Jesus, is by reading his word with them.

2. Paul's conversion changed his life

- As Paul set out to Damascus, his intent could not have been further opposed to what he ended up doing.
- Meeting Jesus – turned his life around.
- By the time he got to Damascus, this man had a different purpose in life. No longer was it to persecute Jesus, now it was to promote Jesus.
- What Jesus through Ananias called him to do (in verse 15) – he would only do, if he now believed.
 - Get up (do something),
be baptized (which in Acts is a way of indicating belief in Jesus),
wash your sins away (so repent – turn away from what you used to hold dear)
and as you move forward – call on the name of Jesus.
- When you become a Christian – it turns your life around.
- It seems to me, in becoming a Christian - those four things - are helpful and logical steps to take. Let's look at each.
 - *Get-up*: When you accept Jesus as Lord, then sitting there and doing nothing seems counter intuitive – so Get-up and get ready to do something.
 - *Be baptized*: if you now know that Jesus is Lord, then declare it.
 - It helps no-one including yourself to sit on that new-found wisdom. You have a precious stone to show off, don't hid it in your pocket as if you are the only one who should benefit.

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- Baptism, was one way (not the only way) to stand publicly for what you now believe.
 - *Wash your sins away* – no one can come to Jesus and ask him to be Saviour if they don't think they need to be saved – and what is it that we need to be saved from? – that which puts us at odds with the Lord – our sin.
 - So we repent. We acknowledge before God what we have done wrong and call on him to forgive us – to wash our sins away.
 - And of course, if you turn from some sin today, chances are that sin is still worth turning away from tomorrow!! And the next day!!
 - *And call on his name* – I take it that one of the benefits of becoming Christian, is that as you now live your life moving forward, that you continue to do that with Jesus.
 - So calling on him, continuing to call on him – is a way to say 'walk with him day in and out'.
 - That may not always be that easy – certainly wasn't for Paul.
 - One of the comforts that we see here with Paul, is that although there was opposition at points – there were comforts and provisions along the way.
 - And friends that is the same today.
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- A mark of a Christian – is that they live a notably changed life (to what they used too)
 - A mark of a Christian – is that they live a notably different life (to what we see in the world around).

PAUSE

Citizenship Concerns

- Well, at the point where the crowd hears that Paul has gone to the Gentiles – in verse 22 – they raise their voices and call for him to be killed.
- The Romans step in and rescue.
- The commander orders for Paul to be flogged and then questioned – torturing the accused was one way to solicit information so that a conviction could be laid.
- As they string him up – Paul turns to the centurion and asks: *'Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who has not been found guilty?'*
- Paul already knows the answer – absolutely not!
 - In fact, it was a capital offense to torture a citizen of the empire if no fault had been found.
- I imagine, at the point the centurion or then the commander found out that they had broken the law in treating Paul so harshly – that quite a few expletives (which can't be mentioned in polite company) would have been expressed!

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- And this poor commander, now realised that he has not only got Pauls' identity, citizenship and education wrong – but that he had, all this time, been listening to the wrong people – for he has been taking his lead from the Jews and now before him was a Roman Citizen whom he should have first listened to.

PAUSE

Your Testimony

- Here in Acts, we see the testimony of a man who became a Christian.
- It happened because he listened to Jesus.
- It happened because Jesus chose him.
- Now I want us for a moment to consider both the external and internal implications this had on Paul.
 - **Externally** - he didn't lose his *identity*, he didn't deny his *citizenship*, he didn't have to forgo his *education*.

Application

- I wonder if one of the reasons why folk find it difficult to entertain the thought that they too could become a Christian - is because they are too worried that in accepting Jesus that they would have to give up too much.
- Can you relate to that? Was that, is that your story?
- I can almost understand that, in places around the world where becoming Christian is followed by extreme persecution – but not in Adelaide.
- It is not against the law,
 - this is a place where we are free to express ourselves without fear of a riot,
 - we can use our time as we choose,
 - we can gather where we want,
 - and we can invite whom we please.
- Externally - there is no persecution – at worst there is pressure.
- **Internally** – it completely turned Paul's life around.
- It changes what he lived for,
 - what he aimed to achieve,
 - what he thought was important,
 - and what he was willing to stand for.

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- So let me ask you - Do you have a testimony?
 - Do you have a testimony about what Jesus has done in your life?
 - And if you do, then who hears it? *PAUSE*
And who sees it? *LONG PAUSE*

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,

You called Paul to be your witness to all people of what he saw and heard.

And you call Christians today to be your witness to all people of what we know and understand.

*Help us to Get-up, be active in faith, to turn from sin, and to live calling upon your name.
Amen.*