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(Acts 21:27-22:29)

**Intro.** I’m going to tell you the testimony of a guy many of you know. He was born & raised in Los Angeles. He got into acting as a 9yo & acted in some commercials. He considered himself an atheist, because he couldn’t see God & never heard from God. He eventually landed a big role at a 14yo in a TV show & began making lots of money & had lots of fame. A few years later, he attended church with a friend & heard how money couldn’t save him, but only Jesus could. He began reading the Bible & learned how evil & dark his heart was—no matter how clean & good he looked on the outside, he was a blind, lost sinner. Yet God sought him out through Christ & found him & he surrendered his life to Jesus—that’s the story of Kirk Cameron, who now preaches the gospel & speaks on marriage. That’s his personal testimony. We are in “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth” & today we look at chapters 21-22 of Acts on “Your Personal Testimony.”

Theme: Personal testimony

Background: As the Apostle Paul finished his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, he made his way back to Jerusalem, where he met significant resistance from the Jews, so much so that they captured him to punish him.

### Overview of the Narrative:

- When Paul was in the temple, certain Jews from Asia recognized him & incited the crowd to capture him & drag him out of the temple to beat him to death. When the Roman soldiers were made aware of it, they came & the Jews stopped beating him. The Roman tribune arrested Paul & was carrying him to the barracks. They were surprised he spoke Greek, assuming he was an Egyptian insurrectionist, but Paul identified himself & asked to speak to the crowd & did so in their language—Hebrew. He told his personal testimony—how he was a Jew born in the Roman empire. He had a Harvard education from the leading scholar of the day—Gamaliel. He was the chief persecutor of the Way, the Church. One day, the Lord Jesus appeared to him (Saul) & asked him why he was persecuting Jesus (because to persecute the church is to persecute the body of Christ)? The Lord blinded Saul & he was led to Damascus, where he met Ananias, who healed him, preached Jesus the Righteous One to him & commanded him to be baptized. After Saul returned to Jerusalem, the Lord warned him to flee because the Jews wouldn’t accept his testimony of being their main hit man turned Christian, but he would become a missionary to the Gentiles. That testimony enraged the Jews & a Roman centurion was about to flog him to get information from him (what he had supposedly done wrong) when Paul revealed his Roman citizenship & they dared not punish him, because he had the right to a fair trial as a Roman.
- This testimony is the first of 3 main defenses Paul gives in these latter chapters of Acts (chapters 21-22, 24, 26)
- **Work on telling your personal testimony succinctly under 4 main areas:**
- 1. Describe what your life was like apart from the Lord (22:3-5)**
- Just as Paul talked about his life before Jesus, you want to do the same thing, because many of the people you talk to will be able to identify with this aspect, because they don’t know Jesus yet
- 2. Describe how you knew you needed the Lord (22:6-11)**
- Paul described how he was blinded & Jesus appeared to him—don’t be looking for that, because very few people have encountered Jesus that way (Paul was unique in what he was doing & what Jesus wanted him to do)—talk about how God got your attention or how you knew you needed hope
- 3. Describe how you came to trust in the Lord (22:12-16)**
- As Paul heard about Jesus as the Righteous One & how He can forgive sins, you will want to emphasize how you repented from your sins & trusted in Jesus—you may highlight notions of surrender or commitment, which are other ways of talking about coming to Jesus
- 4. Describe what your life has been like since following the Lord (22:17-21)**
- Paul became the great missionary to the Gentiles, but the important thing here for you is to let others know how Jesus has really changed your life—given you hope or purpose or mission

### Follow-up Question: Would you like to know how you can follow the Lord?

- You use this question to invite them to find out more, because if you only tell them your story without asking this kind of question, they may think “good for you, but that could never happen to me”—it can & asking them for more will help them see that
- The goal is to tell your testimony within 2 minutes (but it doesn’t hurt to have a 30-second version either)

**Illus:** I will give you my testimony in under 2 minutes—I grew up in a home where my parents took the Bible seriously, so seriously that they raised my brothers and I by teaching us God’s Word daily & praying with us. Those Bible readings, along with regular church attendance, taught me about a holy God & my sin which separated me from Him. Without God, I was lost in my sin. I had no hope, no future & no purpose in life. But I also learned about Jesus Christ & how He was sinless. He died for my sins, in my place, & rose from the dead to prove He is the Lord. He offered me forgiveness of my sins, peace with God & eternal life. I surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus. He not only gave me hope & a future, but He also has given direction to my life & my family. Would you like to know how you can follow the Lord, too?

**Homework:** Write/type your personal testimony & bring it with you next week to worship, because you are going to practice telling it to someone in here

**Illus:** Another way you can share the gospel is through visuals—we live in an image-saturated culture, so visuals can be quite helpful. I need 3 volunteers to come up here (you don’t have to say anything). One will represent God the Father (holy, separate from His creation). One will represent man (sinful, rebellious & separate from God). One will represent Jesus Christ (sent by God the Father to sinful man to die for his sins). Man must repent from his sins & surrender to Jesus Christ by faith. You can get a few friends to help you demonstrate the truths of this message so that people see what you are talking about

- I’ve given you 2 ways to share the gospel today. One is through your personal testimony as you describe what your life was like apart from the Lord, how you knew you needed the Lord, how you came to trust in the Lord & what your life has been like since following the Lord. I have also given you a way to share the gospel visually with the help of 3 people. You are going to work on writing out your testimony so you can share it with someone here next week.

**Conc.** One more testimony as I close: While a new believer around 1750, John Newton had commanded an English slave ship. You know what that meant. Ships would make the first leg of their voyage from England nearly empty until they would anchor off the African coast. There tribal chiefs would deliver to the Europeans stockades full of men and women, captured in raids and wars against other tribes. Buyers would select the finest specimens, which would be bartered for weapons, ammunition, metal, liquor, trinkets, and cloth. Then the captives would be loaded aboard, packed for sailing. They were chained below decks to prevent suicides, laid side by side to save space, row after row, one after another, until the vessel was laden with as many as 600 units of human cargo. Captains sought a fast voyage across the Atlantic’s infamous “middle passage,” hoping to preserve as much as their cargo as possible, yet mortality sometimes ran 20% or higher. When an outbreak of smallpox or dysentery occurred, the stricken were cast overboard. Once they arrived in the New World, blacks were traded for sugar and molasses to manufacture rum, which the ships would carry to England for the final leg of their “triangle trade.” Then off to Africa for yet another round. John Newton transported more than a few shiploads of the 6 million African slaves brought to the Americas in the 18th century. At sea by the age of eleven, he was forced to enlist on a British man-of-war seven years later. Recaptured after desertion, the disgraced sailor was exchanged to the crew of a slave ship bound for Africa. It was a book he found on board—Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*—which sowed the seeds of his conversion. When a ship nearly foundered in a storm, he gave his life to Christ. Later he was promoted to captain of a slave ship. Commanding a slave vessel seems like a strange place to find a new Christian. But at last the inhuman aspects of the business began to pall on him, and he left the sea for good. While working as a tide surveyor he studied for the ministry, and for the last 43 years of his life preached the gospel in Olney and London. At 82, Newton said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.” No wonder he understood so well grace—the completely undeserved mercy and favor of God. Newton’s tombstone reads, “John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.” But a far greater testimony outlives Newton in the most famous of the hundreds of hymns he wrote: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see. ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.” Do you have “Your Personal Testimony” of God’s saving grace in your life? If not, will you trust Jesus today & receive forgiveness of sins?