

Paul's Arrest, Part 3: Positive Testimony in Negative Situation

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This morning we come again to the 21st chapter of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 21, continuing in our study of Paul's arrest and defense. Throughout the history of God's people... whether you're starting from the very beginnings of the Old Testament or the New Testament, it has always been true that there are those who have been willing to give a testimony for God or for Christ against all odds. Didn't really matter what the situation was or how negative it was or how impossible it seemed, there were always those faithful who were willing to buck the situation to give a positive testimony in a negative situation. Whether you wanna go back to Daniel, who would not defile himself with the king's meat, who would not cease to pray, and was willing to pay the price of a lions' den for that commitment; or his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who would not worship Nebuchadnezzar's image and, consequently, had to face a fiery furnace; or whether you come to the New Testament and find someone like Peter, who would not capitulate to the directives of the Sanhedrin, but rather would obey God and preach the gospel, no matter what it cost him; or Stephen who, even in sinking beneath the bloody stones as they crushed the life out of his body, announced the living reality of the Lord Jesus to those who were throwing the stones.

Or whether even past that, you wanna go into the New Testament, the post-New Testament years of the early church and read about men like Ignatius, who, under the persecution of Trajan suffered unbelievable pain and was one of hundreds and hundreds and perhaps thousands of people who so suffered. He boldly presented the gospel of Christ to the Emperor Trajan. He would not denounce it. He would not deny it, and so Trajan made him hold fire in his hands, and then he dipped papers in oil, lit them on fire, and draped them around his body, and took hot irons and poked his flesh, and when all that was done, threw him to wild animals. In the midst of all of that, Ignatius said, quoting really, or paraphrasing Paul, "Let the fire, the gallows, the wild beasts, the breaking of bones, the pulling asunder of members, the bruising of my whole body, the torments of the devil and hell itself come upon me, so that I may win Jesus Christ."

Or whether you wanna go even further than that, through the history of more modern days; and there's been suffering for Jesus Christ in many places in the world and continues to be so today. Perhaps into the Tribulation, which may not be very far away, where we find that those who name the name of Jesus Christ and refuse the mark of the beast will pay with their lives and; yet, there will be such great evangelism that people will be won to Christ at a rate unknown in any time previous to that

Tribulation.

Throughout all of the history of God's people, beginning in Old Testament times and all the way through the end of the Tribulation till Jesus raptures His church, there have been faithful people, willing to confront the system, willing to stand in a negative situation and give a positive testimony.

Now let me add this...in most every situation of true confrontation...there is going to be a negative...so you might as well realize that to begin with; and I say that for this reason. You say, "Aren't there any positive times when you present the gospel?" Yes, but whenever you are struggling to deliver somebody from Satan's domain, Satan will put up some kind of resistance. The presentation of the gospel has a positive power, but it is a positive power in the midst of a negative situation, because Satan will do everything he can to hold on.

So people who are waiting for the absolute, positive situation, "Well, when the Lord makes everything just perfect, then I'll do it," are gonna spend a loooooong time waiting. Sooner or later you might as well realize that, if it is confrontation that we're talking about, if it is actually facing the world nose to nose and proclaiming the truth of the gospel to somebody who is in Satan's domain, there's going to be a negative factor somewhere. So you might as well realize it and get on it.

If you were to study the book of Acts with just that in mind, and we could go back - we won't take the time - we could go back and go all the way through the book of Acts, and in all of the presentations of the gospel, there is somewhere a negative factor. It is never easy. People say, "When I was young, they used to say to me when they would try to get me to go out and win people to Christ, say, "Well, the more you do it, the easier it gets." That isn't true. The more you do, the easier...that doesn't work at all. The more you do it, the more effective you get, the harder Satan works against you. And, incidentally, the longer you do it, the closer you get to the end of the age, and the closer you get to the end of the age, the worse people are gonna get. Isn't gonna get any...you're just gonna get tougher so you might as well do it. Do it now while it's easier than it's gonna be tomorrow...

You never rescue a soul from hell without putting up a struggle. Just that way. So if you're going to give a positive testimony, I mean something that really makes waves in the system, you're gonna have to be aware that there's gonna be a negative involved in it. Be willing to take a little flack.

You know, it's exciting to make waves, really. I imagine there are some Christians who don't know what that means, whose only testimony is given to other Christians. If you're gonna confront the system, you're gonna find it's always a negative situation, but you can just have a tremendous time seeing the power of God overcome that situation, and in the book of Acts, we've seen that happen. The Apostle Paul, it's just one negative situation after another, never phased him. He just figured, "That's the way it's gonna be. I'll just go ahead with what I'm gonna do." And he gave a positive testimony in a negative situation. God blessed.

Now, he comes to Jerusalem in chapter 21 of Acts. It's the final step in his third journey, and the third journey is the last journey that he ever made as a free man. The last "missionary" journey. The next trip that he makes back toward Rome is as a prisoner. It's no less a missionary journey, because whether he was in or outta chains never changed what he said and never changed his effect at all, either; but, technically speaking, this is last of his three missionary journeys.

He's coming to Jerusalem. He wants to come to Jerusalem, because he wants to bring some Gentile converts who have money. He wants them to bring their money, which are love offerings from the Gentile churches, to give to the poor Jerusalem saints. He feels, one, it will meet the need of those saints. Two, it will...it will bring together in a beautiful act of love, the Jewish and Gentile Christians; and he believes they should be one, as he so aptly communicated from the Holy Spirit in Ephesians; and so he does this as an act of conciliation, to bring together the two parts of the church, Jew and Gentile.

It's is the great climax of his ministry. He has evangelized all over the area from Jerusalem west, as far as west as Achaia at this point, Macedonia, as far east as Seleucia, Syria, and then through Galatia, Pisidia, Asia Minor, and so forth. In all of those areas, he has established churches. He's gone back, built those churches up. They have begun to go out like little feelers and establish more churches in more places, and there's a block of Christian churches that occupies the territory that his feet have touched...And as he comes back, the last act as a free man, as a free missionary, able to determine his own direction, is to bring this money to try to bring these two parts of the church together.

When he arrives in Jerusalem, he finds out that there are some of the Jewish Christians that think he's anti-Jewish, that think he doesn't believe in the traditions and the ceremonies of Israel. And some of those Jewish Christians, even though they had given their lives to Christ and were counting only on His perfect work for salvation, were still used to the customs of Israel, because it was hard to separate, you see, religious custom from just the custom of life, just the culture; and so some of them were still doing customs that were very Jewish traditions. They had no doctrinal consequence; and they had been told by the Judaizers that Paul was anti-Jewish custom; and so when Paul arrives, the elders of the Jerusalem church are very concerned that he's not gonna have any hearing at all with the Jewish Christians, and so he does something to try to gain their ears. He goes to the temple with some folks taking a Nazarite vow, which was an old-fashioned Jewish traditional way of separating yourself unto God.

And so he just joins in with them and goes through a Jewish ceremony in order to show these Jewish Christians that he was not against the customs and the ceremonies of cultural Judaism. But while he was in the temple doing this, he was seen, and he was seen by some people who knew him well. They were some Jews, non-Christian, antagonistic, Christ-hating Jews from Asia Minor; and when

Paul had been in Asia Minor, he had dramatically affected the entire province. In fact, in the three years that he was in Ephesus, he had not only established the church at Ephesus, but from the church in Ephesus had been established the other six churches of Asia Minor. All seven are listed in Revelation 2 and 3. He had had such a profound effect on that province that seven churches had grown up in the years of his ministry. Jews had been converted from Judaism to Jesus, and the rest of the Jews had hated and despised him. In fact, there was a riot in Ephesus, and they tried to kill him once. And, now, here are some Jews in Jerusalem. They're there for the feast of Pentecost, which is occurring at this time; and while they're there, they spy Paul in the temple going through this Nazarite purification ceremony; and they feel they've got their chance to get him.

In the riot that began in Ephesus, Gentile heads prevailed and saved his life; but there wouldn't be any Gentile heads, they figured, around to stop this. This was a mass Jewish population...so we find that he is attacked beginning in verse 27 of Acts 21, and this becomes his arrest and first defense. From here on out to the end of the book, he's a prisoner in some sense or another; and, also, he gives six different defenses of himself. He defends himself six times. This is the first of those six. And we've divided the section beginning in 21:27 through 22:30 or 22:29, whichever, into five parts: the attack of the mob, the arrest of the Romans, the apology of Paul, the action by the people, and the attitude of Paul.

Now, these five things carry us through this first defense. Now, it's very hard to just give you little homiletical sermons on a lengthy thing like this. To break it up into little bits and pieces wouldn't be fair to Paul, because it all happened in one moment of time; and we must consider it as one unit; but we'll have to section it up week by week, because it takes me an hour to say what Paul said in a verse. But that's my problem. We'll have to live with it.

Now, to begin with, we see the attack of Paul in verses 27 to 30, the attack of Paul, and we'll just review for a minute by reading it. "When the seven days were almost ended...that is the seven days of the purification of the Nazarite vow that he was taking with four other men...the Jews who were of Asia Minor, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, laid hands on him...they attacked him...crying out, 'Men of Israel, help!...as if he'd committed some blasphemy...This is the man that teachest all men everywhere against the people...he's anti-Semitic...against the law...he's anti-Biblical...and this place...he's anti-temple...and, further, he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.'"

You say, "Did he do that?" No, verse 29 says, "They had with him in the city of Jerusalem Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed Paul had brought into the temple." Of course he didn't. They just lied. "And all the city was moved and the people ran together, took Paul and drew him out of the temple; and at once the doors were shut." So they grabbed him, and they hauled him outta there right in the middle of the conclusion of his Nazarite purification vow. They did it for the purpose of beating him up, killing him.

Well, here, then, is the negative situation. He is being beaten up. That's about as negative as you're gonna get. The amazing thing about it is Paul expected it. He expected it; because every city he'd been in before this, the Holy Spirit had witnessed to him that he was gonna get it when he got to Jerusalem. So he was just saying in his mind, "Wasn't it wonderful how accurate God's revelations are?"

So we see the attack of the mob. We also studied last time the arrest by the Romans. To the rescue came the Romans. You remember that above the temple grounds to the northwest corner was a great tower, which was the lookout station for Fort Antonia, which was right adjacent to the temple. In fact, the steps from Antonia came right into the courtyard. Since the courtyard was a potential bombshell because, when the Jews came at feast time, they could have two million in the city, and most of them milling and milling around and the courtyard jammed with people. That the...the Romans knew that one of the very primary targets for civil order that they would have to really conquer was the temple court, so they had a...a garrison there watching out. They had a well-trained riot squad of at least a thousand men at feast time who watched that temple ground, and anything happened, they came down the steps and fixed it.

Well, that's exactly what happens here. As they went about to kill him, their intention was obvious; and, you know, the mob didn't know what was going on. They had no idea what they were doing. They were just doing what somebody else was doing, so they were all trying to kill Paul. "Tidings came unto the chief captain," the chiliarch. That means he was the head of a thousand men. He was the commander of the garrison, Fort Antonia. "And all Jerusalem is in an uproar," was the report. "Immediately, he took soldiers and centurions...Those would be leaders of a hundred men...and ran down unto them; and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they ceased beating Paul."

The people saw, "Here comes the Roman riot squad," and they stopped. "Then the chief captain came near, and took him and commanded that he be bound with two chains, demanded who he was and what he had done." He makes the assumption that he's somebody who's done something, which I suppose in most cases is a fair assumption if they're trying to kill somebody. Only problem was he hadn't done anything, but the Roman didn't know that. He assumed that he had done something.

In fact, as I told you last week, he had a very definite assumption as to who he was. Well, he wanted to find out what he had done, so verse 34, "Some cried one thing and some another, among the multitude." One thing about a mob, as I said last week, a mob is a body of people with no head. They haven't got the faintest idea what they're doing. They're just doing what everybody's doing, sort of like civilization. Sort of like life as we live it. We don't know what we're doing. We're just doing it, because people do it. And so what happens? Some cry out one. Some cry out another, and he gets no answers. "When he could not the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the barracks." Well, he's...his final resolution at this point is haul him off and put in the quarters. "We can't

get any answers here." When they tried to do that, "When he came unto stairs, so it was that he was borne of the soldiers because of the violence of the people."

When they came down the stairs and into the crowd, the people closed around them in front of the stairs. They tried to get back to the stairs. They couldn't get Paul through. They had to lift him over their heads and carry him through the people. Verse 36, "For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, 'Away with him!'" As they go up the stairs, the crowd surges up the stairs after screaming for his death. You know what's so interesting about this is the fact that do you know why all those people were in the temple ground that day? They were there for one reason. You know what it was? Worship God. That's interesting, isn't it? It's amazing how absolutely stupid religion is if it's not the right religion.

You say, "Wasn't Judaism the right religion?" It was all right up until the cross. After the cross, it ceased to be. It became just as pagan as animism. Just as pagan as the worship of the sun. Just as pagan as atheism, if you will...Christianity qualified absolutely truth, and outside of that, truth is incomplete and incomplete truth is the same as error. So these people were very religious, but religion that is not true is only a pretense. So here they are worshiping God, and at a minute's notice, they stop and murder somebody. I mean it seems like a short trip, doesn't it, from one to the other?

Well, that's what it is with religion. How many times have you read in history about the religious wars, about people even today supposedly in Ireland killing each other over the problem of who's a Catholic and who's a Protestant. Don't you think Satan doesn't love that war...Religion that is a forum with no change of heart is just as apt to murder as it is to worship, because it's external. So we see the attack of the mob and the arrest of the Romans.

Now, thirdly, and this is what we'll dwell on a little longer this morning is the apology of Paul; and when I use the word apology, I don't mean he's apologizing like we think of it. The word apology in...in the Greek, apologia, means a speech in defense of. This is apologetics. This is defending himself.

Now, Paul does that. The extended passage of his defense begins in verse 37 and goes through chapter 22 verse 21, and so it's a long passage, and we'll have to consider it in a couple of weeks, because it's lengthy and some significant things that we don't wanna bypass. Now, lemme mention this. His defense, his speech in defense of is basically biographical, because he has to defend his...himself. It's basically experiential. He grabs this particular situation and forces his own defense, and this last week, you remember how we...he gets up there.

Well, let's just review the verse 37, and then I'll go into that. "As Paul was being led into the barracks, he said to the chief captain, 'May I speak unto thee?' And the guy was shocked. He says, 'Can you speak Greek?'" You say, "What was he so shocked about?" Well, because he didn't think Paul was an educated man. Verse 38 tells us who he thought he was. "Aren't you the Egyptian who before

these days made an uproar and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?" Remember the Egyptian who came and tried to bring an insurrection and a rebellion against Jerusalem, and they were slaughtered? And then they became assassins, and I told you last time they would infiltrate Jewish feast times, and they would assassinate people because they were so anti-Jewish.

Well, this particular chief captain had assumed that, when they caught Paul in the middle of the crowd, that he was this guy, this assassin or one of his henchmen...and so he says, "How come you can speak Greek? Aren't you the Egyptian assassin that led that insurrection?...in 54 A.D. is when it was done....Aren't you that guy?...He had it all figured out. Paul said, "I am a man who's a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city." Listen, Tarsus wasn't small time stuff. Tarsus was no Barstow...Tarsus ranked with Alexandria and Athens. Tarsus was important. Tarsus was education. It was culture. It was art. It was Greek civilization.

Now, he says, "I...I'm a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of mean city; and I beseech thee, permit me to speak unto the people." Well, it's very unusual for a guy, as I told you last time, you think his reaction would be, "Get me outta here," but he says, "I wanna speak." And the man who...who was the commander wanted to find out what was going on, so he figured this is my chance to hear what's happening. So verse 40, when he had given him permission, "Paul stood on the stairs, beckoned with the hand unto the people. When there was a great silence, he spoke unto them in their own language, in the Hebrew language." And the Hebrews at that time spoke Aramaic. So he spoke unto them in Aramaic. He knew their...their very vernacular.

Lemme stop here to add this. We said that we were going to draw out of this entire study of his first offense principles as to how to give a positive testimony in a negative situation, right? The first principle we mentioned last week is this. In order to give a positive testimony in a negative situation, you have to, No. 1, accept the situation as from God. In other words, you've gotta accept the situation as ordained by God. Paul got into this situation, didn't try to run from it. He accepted it. Why? It was a God-ordained situation. You say, "You mean God let this happen?" No, God made this happen. God put Paul in this place, because it was a positive testimony that He wanted in a negative situation. You see, a positive testimony in a negative situation means there's potential for change; and so that's what God wanted.

So, No. 1, if you're ever gonna do anything in a negative situation, if you're gonna do anything confronting the system at all, you've gotta accept that as a God-allowed or God-ordained opportunity. The second principle was turn it into an opportunity. Accept it as a God-ordained situation. Turn it into an opportunity. Paul did that. He didn't say, "Oh, I hope something happens so I can talk." See. "Lord, I've opened the door. Ooh, see." You know, some people are sitting around waiting for the Lord to do something. They're gonna be sitting around a loooong time.

So what did he do? He said, "Sir, I would like to say something." I like that. You see, he was in the business of forcing issues. It wasn't a question of hanging around until all the doors fell open. He was gonna kick a few open himself, which is all right. The Greeks used to have a statue, and the statue's name was opportunity, and it was a guy with great, long, flowing hair in the front; and then in the back he was bald. The whole back half was totally bald. That's opportunity. You can grab it in the front; gone by, there's nothing. See...

It makes its point. Now that's opportunity. Paul never was grabbing at the bald back of opportunity. He got it while it could be gotten. Paul was busy confronting. He was creating opportunities. How do you give a positive testimony in a negative situation? One, you accept the negative situation as God-ordained. Two, you create an opportunity. You create an opportunity, and that's exciting. That's exciting.

Now, we'll see some more things that you do this morning as we go. Now what happens in his defense, which begins actually in verse 1 of chapter 22. Well, this I have to mention. He...he defends himself on two counts: his motive and his deed. Usually, in a court of law, there's a great concern about motive, right? Because, usually, if you can establish motive, you've got a great chance at establishing the guilt of the deed. So it is critically important in any defense that motive be a consideration, as well as the very deed itself. What Paul wants to show is, "Not only can you not condemn my deeds, you can't even condemn my motives. The deeds that I've done, I have done with a righteous motive." So he wants to talk about motive and then deed, and this is important.

So there he stands at the top of the stairs. The crowd all the way halfway up the stairs and filling the entire courtyard, jammed in there. He's got chains on his hands. He's surrounded by Roman soldiers. There's blood all over his clothes from the beating, and his skin is all puffed and bruised, and the mob is now silent as he holds his hand up, and he speaks his defense, and it is a masterpiece. Listen to what he says, and he uses the words of Stephen, the same words Stephen used when he started his defense. "Men, brethren, and fathers." Now, that's a very gentle beginning. I mean he could've, "You crummy, rabbleroising mob." No, it's a very conciliating statement. "Men, brothers, fathers...hear ye my defense which I make now unto you." Defense, apologia, speech in defense of. "Listen to my defense." And he begins his defense, and as I mentioned earlier, it is biographical. It is his testimony.

Now, if you know anything about what we've taught in the past, we have taught you that when you share Jesus Christ with people, it is much more important that you communicate the truth of Christ than it is that you communicate your experience, right? I mean it's fine that you've experienced Jesus Christ; but, hopefully, along with that, you're gonna explain who He is and what He has done. And so we would major in our presentation on the truth of salvation rather than on our experience. But experience is not to be eliminated entirely. There is power in personal testimony when the emphasis is right. When the emphasis is on you, it's wrong. When it's on what God has done, it's right. In fact, at

least five times in the New Testament, Paul's testimony is reiterated, and it's hinted at a sixth time. It's given in Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26, Philippians 3, 1 Timothy 1, and it's gently given in Galatians 1. Now, the Spirit of God five times and at least gently a sixth time gives reference to the testimony of this man to show what God has done in his life. Now mark that. If you're going to give your testimony, forget it. If you're gonna give a testimony to what God has done in you, good. Now here he begins, and he says, "Here, my defense which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spoke in the Aramaic language to them, they kept more quiet.)"

"He knows our language." See how God has given him all the tools to just communicate with the right people in the right language, and he uses just the right one...and they even got quieter. Everything is ready. Paul has forced his opportunity, and now he gives his defense. Now his defense, the actual words of it, are from verse 3 to 21, and there's three parts: his conduct before his conversion, verses 3 to 5; the circumstances at his conversion, verses 6 to 16; and his commission after conversion, verses 17 to 21. So he divides his biography and his defense into three parts: conduct before, commission at, and commission after; and the center point is his conversion.

Now, notice how he begins with his conduct before conversion; and this is a defense of his motives. I love this. Watch. "I am verily a man who is a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." Stop there. That's gotta be an absolutely fantastic beginning. I mean that is just excellent. What does he do? He begins by showing them that his motive was never anti-Jewish. He could never be accused of being anti-Jewish. People were saying, "Well, he's gone over to Christianity. He's anti-Semitic, anti-Biblical, anti-God, anti-temple," and all of it.

"No," he says, "you could never accuse me of being motivated by anti-Semitic feelings...I'm a zealous Jew," is what he says in verse 3. It's an excellent beginning. He makes contact with everybody, first of all, because he speaks the right language, verse 2 says. And listen to this, says, "I am verily a man who is a Jew." Now, this is in the literal Greek emphatic. "I myself, like you, am truly a Jew." What is he saying? "I'm as Jewish as you are. I am truly, myself, a Jew." Emphatic Greek construction. He's proud of it, and he should be. Nothing to be ashamed of to be Jewish. He's proud of it; and, man, he announces it, because it...it identifies with those people. It conciliates them immediately. This is no foreigner. This is no rabbleroising Egyptian; and, you know, the most of the mob don't have any idea who he is. There's just that little group that started the thing that know.

Disraeli, speaking to British Parliament just after he became prime minister of England, and he was in the middle of his speech, and a...and a very bitter and hateful, brutal lord in the House stood up and said, "You, sir, are a Jew." Sat down. Disraeli drew himself to full height, which wasn't very much; and he replied these words, "My Lord, you accuse me of being a Jew. I am proud to answer to the name, and I would remind you, sir, that one-half of Christendom worships a Jew, and the other half a

Jewess, and I would also remind you that my forefathers were worshipping the One true and living God while yours were naked savages running around the woods of Britain."...Well said.

When he said, "I truly am, in every sense, a Jew," he immediately gained their hearts...Now notice what else he says. "Born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia." Now what was that for? That was to indicate to them that he was not stupid. He was cultured. He was educated. They got the message just from the fact that he was from Tarsus, they knew he had been educated well; but he goes a step further. Something he didn't tell the tribune, 'cause it wasn't important to the Greek tribune. He said this. "Yet brought up in this city, but you know where I really spent my life and where I was trained? Right here in Jerusalem." What does brought up mean? Probably from his bar mitzvah, from the time that he was a...considered a young man, from of the time of 12 or 13 years of age, he was sent to Jerusalem to study to be a rabbi...and you know who his teacher was? Gamaliel.

You say, "Was that significant?" Sure, it was significant, because Gamaliel was the greatest teacher of his day. So he says, "I am not only truly a Jew and proud of it, I was educated a Greek. I'm an educated man. Not only that, I was brought here to study for the rabbinate, and I studied under the greatest teacher in Israel, Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder." He was a Pharisaic leader of great eminence. He was the greatest disciple of Hillel. You see, there were two great Jewish rabbis who became kind of the...the heads of two strains of Jewish interpretation. Shammai and Hillel. Shammai was a very conservative, very orthodox, very fundamental, very narrow interpretation. Hillel was the broad.

For example, illustration we've shared with you. The idea of marriage, divorce, the Bible says there can only be divorce for uncleanness. That's why Moses provided a bill of divorcement. Shammai said uncleanness means sexual uncleanness only, nothing more. Hillel says it means if she burns the bagels, you know, whatever...The point was you had one very conservative school and one very liberal school. Well, if you were growing up in Judaism and you had your choice of getting rid of your wife under the category of Shammai or Hillel, you'd tend to go Hillel's route. So most of the people looked to Hillel as the great rabbinical tradition to which they subscribed. So anybody in that line was revered, and Gamaliel was the greatest of those, so they really thought he was something else.

The Mishnah said, "Since Rabbi Gamaliel died, there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time." Now, that...that means they thought he was really something. So here Paul says, "I am every sense a Jew like you are. I was educated in a Greek culture, but I came here to study to be a rabbi and trained through Gamaliel." And you could just see 'em going, "Oh, buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz, this guy's something else." And what's he trying to do with all this? He's trying to identify with those people. He's trying to bring them to himself. He's trying to win them.

Then he adds this, "And I was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers." The word taught here means carefully trained. He was really taught. He was disciplined in his teaching. In

other words, they just catechized him. They instructed him carefully, and he was "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the father." Now, the law of the fathers is simply the Old Testament tradition. The Old Testament Mosaic Law, as well as all the traditions, the historic faith of Judaism. But not just taught the law of the fathers, but the perfect manner.

You say, "What do you mean the perfect manner?" That meant the extreme, strict interpretation. He was a letter of the law legalist. So here were these characters from Asia Minor saying that he is against the law, and he says, "I was trained to the strictest degree in legalism." Now, listen to what he adds. "And was zealous toward God." Now, in the Greek, the word zealous is a noun. "I was a Zealot for God." When he says, "I was a Zealot," he is identifying with a party in Israel...A Zealot was an uncompromising partisan. This guy was so nationalistic that, of all the people, they were the most who... anti-Roman. They despised the Romans. In fact, in 66 A.D., the Zealots started the rebellion against Rome that resulted in 70 A.D., the wipeout of Jerusalem by the Romans. The Zealots were responsible. The Zealots were started by Judas of Galilee; and, from there, the thing grew; and these people, just to give you an idea, they were the extreme, super-super-conservatives of the Pharisees.

Josephus the historian says, "You could divide the philosophies of Judaism into four parts: Sadducees, they were the religious liberals. Didn't believe in resurrection, didn't believe in miracles, etc.; Pharisees, the Pharisees were, of course, the strict legalists; Essenes, Essenes were kind of the...the far outs. In fact, the Qumran community was apparently an Essene community. They were kinda far out. The people who worked with the law, they were scribes, etc., etc. Then you had the fourth group, the Zealots, super-nationalistic, anti-Roman, super-pro-Jewish, extremely legalistic. Paul says, "I was one of those, so don't accuse me of being anti-Jewish." He was as Jewish as anybody standing in front of him that day, and there were thousands of people there.

Now, do you see what he's doing here? You see, what he's doing is establishing some kind of ground to win these people to hearing. Now, look what he does. To add to this touch, he gives this at the end of verse 3, he says this, "I was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." You know what he actually does? He justifies their motives for their beating of him. He says, "You know, I know why you're beating me up. Because you think this is pleasing to God. Why, I used to be zealous for God just like you." Look at verse 4, "I also persecuted this Way unto the death." You see, now this really is an interesting approach. What he does is justify their motives. "I was like you. I had that same zeal for God that you have. I had that same zeal for Judaism. I was the most right-wing, unbelievably orthodox character that ever was in Judaism."

Why, in Galatians 1:13, he makes this statement, "For you have heard of my manner of life in time past, how that I, beyond measure, persecuted the church of God and wasted it, and I profited in the Jews' religion above many of my equals, being more exceeding zealous. I was more of a Zealot than most of my contemporaries." Paul says, "Don't mess with my motives. Listen, I was Jewish to the core." Now, do you see what this does? All that he has said so far, they will agree to and acquiesce to

and say, "Isn't that great? Oh, how terrific. What a terrific guy. What are we doing this to him for?"

Just to make things even more devastating, this is fantastic. Verse 4, he says, "I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." See the term this Way? What does that represent? Christianity. Christianity became known as the Way. It's easy to understand, isn't it? Jesus had said in the last night before His death, "I am the Way." And Peter had said, "Neither is there salvation in any other." You know, people always say, "Well, the thing I don't like about you, you think Christianity's the only way." Well, and I always have a stock answer. I say, "Well, that's fine. You don't think I should say that." "No, you shouldn't." "All right, then I'll tell you a lie. Christianity is not the only way. Do you like that better? It isn't true."

I could be...I'd be most happy to say, "You could believe anything you want." Oh, wouldn't that be great, that anybody could...only problem is, they'd all go to hell, 'cause it isn't true. Christianity is the only way. So I'd just as soon tell the truth. So Christianity became known as the Way. You know why? They were accused of the same thing we're accused of, being narrow minded. There's no more narrow minded thing in the world than Christianity. We're right, and everybody else is wrong. That's right. It's true...No more narrow minded person ever lived than Jesus Christ. Everything He said was right. Anything that contradicted Him is wrong. Everything in the Bible's true. Anything that contradicts it it's wrong. That's simple enough. You say, "Boy, that's narrow." So it's also true...

That's how God's world is, you know. You...you say, "Look, fella, if you jump off that building, you're gonna get killed." "Well, I don't know. I mean I could go right. I could go to the left. I could go up. I could go off at an angle." No, you'll just go down. There's only one way. Poom, ping, it's over. "Well, I don't like that attitude. Why can't you be more conciliating and allow for some options?" There aren't any options, fella. That's how it is. So it isn't Christianity. I'm not being hardnosed. It's truth, so speak the truth. Don't be ashamed of it.

All right, so what is he saying? He says, "I used to persecute this Way." He uses the nickname that Christianity had gained. It's, incidentally, several places in the book of Acts: chapter 9 verse 2, I think chapter 19 verse 9, verse 23, chapter 24 verse 14. But several other places, too, you'll find indications that they nicknamed Christianity, and sometimes they called it the Way.

So watch what happens. Now, to add to the power of this, he says, "I used to do just what you are doing. I used to persecute Christians all over the place." And they're probably thinking, "Boy, this is amazing." See? Then he adds this. This is unbelievable. "As also...verse 5...the high priest does bear me witness." What a tremendous shot that is. "If you have any doubt about my zeal for Judaism, why don't you ask the high priest?...Wow...The...the most revered guy in all of Judaism, he'll tell you how Jewish I was." Yes, it's true, friends, he did do that. Now he can't impugn his...

So what does he do? He calls in the high priest to be his witness. This is a brilliant thing because, you see, if they persecute him, they are really in violation of the high priest, at least at this point. Then he said, "If that isn't enough, why don't you check with the Sanhedrin? All the council of the elders." You say, "Well, how in the world did they know his zeal?" Because, "It was from them that I received the letters unto the Jewish brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them who were there bound unto Jerusalem to be punished." You see, the... this persecution thing that Paul really spearheaded was supported by the whole Jewish hierarchy. The high priest hated the Christians. The...the Sanhedrin hated the Christians. Paul hated the Christians. So the Sanhedrin gave Paul the power to go get the Christians. So they gave Paul papers where he could take these papers to Damascus, hand these papers to the Jewish brethren, thereby extraditing the Christians, hauling them back to Jerusalem to punish 'em. They were extradition rights...

Just like today, you know, when a law officer wants to go to Arizona to get a prisoner, he's gotta have an extradition paper to get him out of Arizona into California. Same thing. If you're gonna go to Damascus and get these Christians, bring 'em to Jerusalem to punish 'em, you've gotta have papers that are official, so they gave the paper. What's he saying? He's saying, "Your own religious leaders, the uppity-ups, the mucky-mucks of your own government and religion will tell you that I was, in every sense, a Jew with a zeal surpassing the zeal of my contemporaries. Never impugn my motives." So, you see, on the first part then, he defends his motives. He is not anti-Jewish, not in any sense of the word. That's his pre-conversion conduct.

Now, starting in verse 6, he takes the second tack in his testimony and gives the circumstances at his conversion; and we'll just begin to look at these and not go very far; but look what he does. Having then stated that his motives were never anti-Jewish, never, he then proceeds to show what happened in his life to change it. Verse 6, the circumstances at his conversion; and, incidentally, in this, he gives all the glory to God, all of it. "It came to pass that, as I made my journey and was come near to Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me."

Now, I want you get the picture. He is going to Damascus for the purpose of extraditing Christians to haul 'em back to be punished. He is not going to a revival meeting. He does not have a clandestine meeting with some Christian. He is not searching around to try to get exposed to Christianity. He is on Christianity's tail trying to rub it out. He is not trying to find out how he can meet Jesus. He is trying to destroy everybody who names the name of Jesus. That's what he said here. "I was going to Damascus to bring Christians back to punish them; and there I was, minding my own business, walking down the road; and right out of heaven comes this light." And, incidentally, it adds a footnote that isn't in chapter 9; and I'm not gonna go into all the detail of his conversion; because we covered that in four different messages in Acts 9. So if you wanna get that, you can do that; but I won't take the time to go into every detail, just to cover the things that weren't covered earlier and point out some highlights.

The earlier text didn't tell us it was noon. Why does it say it was noon? Because the significance of the light would've been all the more intense because of the fact that it was noon. At high noon, the eastern sky, I mean that sun is hot, and it is bright, and it is intense; and, by adding that fact, he indicates to us the tremendous intensity of that other light, and that's important. Incidentally, in chapter 26 verse 13, it indicates it was even brighter than the sun; and that's not just the sun behind a cloud. That's the sun at high noon.

And so he says, "That light was intense, and I fell to the ground," verse 7. You say, "What was that light, John?" I think it was the glory of Jesus Christ. I think it was blazing Shekinah glory. You say, "Why do you think that?" Verse 11, "I couldn't see for the glory," he says...It was the blazing glory. God is light, and God reveals Himself throughout the Old Testament in light. The incarnation, a special time when Jesus Christ was revealed in flesh. The Second Coming revealed in flesh again, a special designation here that the Shekinah, the glorious light of God is revealed to Paul, and he falls to the ground. Brighter than the sun. He is blinded. Not the blindness of darkness, no; but the blindness of light. His eyes are so lit up with those sparkling little things when you've been blinded by the flash camera, only a million times like that, that all he could see is the flashing sparks of glory that are left; and, thus, for three days, was able to concentrate on nothing but the image of Jesus Christ in light that God had blazed before his eyes.

Well, anyway, when that light came, he hit the ground. "And I fell unto the ground; and I heard a voice saying unto me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" Man alive, can you identify with what he must have been thinking? "Ohhhhh," you know. I mean with a mouthful of dirt, laying flat on the ground, blind as a bat, and all that light flashing around in his eyes; and, all of a sudden, someone outta heaven says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Boy, that's scary.

"And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?'" And he knew deity, but he wasn't too sure about personhood. "Who art Thou?" And the answer came. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." Can you imagine all those people standing there listening to that?..."Jesus of Nazareth. Did you hear that? Jesus of Nazareth, talking to him outta heaven...Jesus of Nazareth was a charlatan. He was a fraud. He was a conman. He was a huckster. He's a phony Messiah. They executed him for blasphemy. What's he doing talking outta heaven?"...

And just to make sure you don't get the wrong Jesus, it's Jesus of Nazareth, something that wasn't indicated in chapter 9 when Luke originally gave us the writing of his conversion, and I'm sure Paul gave that an extra, "Humph," you know. "I'm Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." You see, the despised Nazarene was the Lord of glory. Now, you see, up until this point, Paul just says, "I...I was just minding my own business, folks. I mean don't blame me. If you're gonna impugn somebody, how could it be God? If you don't like what I am, I didn't do this to me. God did it."

"Why are you doing this to Me, Saul?" verse 7 says; and you know what? Paul adds this tremendous corroboration, verse 9, "And they that were with me saw the light and were afraid." Now, he says, "Look, if you don't believe that this happened, you find those guys who went with me to capture those Christians, and they'll tell you that it happened." You see what he does? He draws in further testimony, further potential witnesses for the corroboration of his story. So you know what he's done? He has really put the burden of proof on the people. All they gotta do is check out his motives with the high priest and the Sanhedrin, and they can check out the fact of his conversion and the dramatic events of God's intervention in his life by simply asking anybody who was with him on the road to Damascus; and he musta had a pretty healthy entourage if they were gonna haul a buncha Christians back as prisoners...

You say, "What are those other guys doing while that was going on?" Well, they all fell down on the ground. You can believe that. Chapter 9 verse 7 says they hit the dirt, but they got up; and the Bible says that they heard the noise, earlier in chapter 9. Here it says they didn't hear the voice. What it means is they could hear the sound thundering out of heaven, but they couldn't distinguish the articulation. God wanted them to know something happened, but God wasn't dealing with them, in particular.

And so they were good to give testimony. They could...all they would've had to have done, those people woulda found one of these people and just said, "Did this happen?" "Oh, man, you wouldn't have believed that light. I couldn't believe it. It was something bigger than the sun," and this and this and, "and we hit the ground, and all of a sudden we heard this thunder out of heaven." It was at least corroboration, and it says, "They were afraid, but they heard not the voice of Him that spoke to me." When God speaks directly, God speaks directly. It isn't for public consumption. So God was dealing directly with him.

They saw the light. They were stunned in fear. They got up while Paul still was lying in the dirt, because God was still talking to him. Jesus Christ was communicating. "And I said... in verse 10, and I think this is the best thing that he coulda said... 'What shall I do, Lord?'" That's the best thing to say. "What do I do now?" And the answer came. "The Lord said unto me, 'Arise and go to Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.'" You know what I like about this? It teaches the sovereignty of God. If you ever have any doubt about who initiates salvation, just remember the conversion of Paul. God initiated this, and God never does things out of consistency with His nature.

When the Bible says that, "No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him," then God will be consistent with that. I mean here is a guy who is going one way. God invades his life, and the guy hasn't even enacted his will, except to say, "Who are You, and what do I do?" And God is already reversing his entire life. Salvation is an act of God. Don't ever forget it. You acknowledge it every time

you pray for somebody's conversion. You're saying, "God changed him."

And I like the fact that it says in this verse, "It will be told you all the things which are appointed for you to do." God had chosen him. God had appointed his destiny. This is God's plan. I'm telling you, one of the most exciting concepts in the Bible is to realize that I am a part of an eternal plan made by God. Fantastic.

Well, he says, verse 11, "When I couldn't see for the glory of that light, being led with the hand of those that were with me, I came to Damascus." So he goes wandering into Damascus to hear what he's been appointed to do. He hadn't done anything yet. Do you know he's not even converted yet? He hasn't even inactivated his will, and God already is giving him his whole layout on his destiny before he's even made a statement of his faith...That's sovereignty, folks.

Well, He leads him into Damascus. Verse 12 says, "And one Ananias," dear Christian man. Some say he became the bishop of the church at Damascus and was later martyred in a horrible death; but "Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews who dwelt there, came unto me." I like that. Now, you say, "He coulda said, 'Ananias, one of the great Christians of Damascus.'" And they all woulda gone, "Booooo, who cares? We don't wanna hear any Christians, about any Christians." No, he doesn't say that. He just bypasses the fact that he's a Christian for the moment. He says, "A man according to the law, very devout, having a good report of all the...what?...the Jews." You know why he says that? Because he wants the people who are hearing him below him to know that this Christianity was not something concocted by a bunch of anti-Jewish people. He was pro-Jewish. It was Jesus of Nazareth, whom they knew to be Jewish, that spoke to him. It was Ananias who was a devout Jew, who was involved. So far, the whole thing is Jewish.

You know, it's amazing how Christians get accused of being anti-Semitic. Happens all the time. It isn't true. The completion of all that Judaism means is in Christ. That's all we're trying to announce. Anyway, so "Ananias came to him. Ananias was a devout and godly man, in good report of all the Jews. Came and said, 'Brother Saul, receive thy sight!'" God gave him the power to do that, to announce that miracle, and God gave him his sight. "The same hour I looked up upon him." The first person he saw after the blindness was Ananias.

"And he said," now watch this. Now, Ananias said a lot of things. Some are recorded in chapter 9. Some are recorded in chapter 26. Some are recorded in 22, but whatever is recorded meets the context and the situation. If you wanna take the total speech of Ananias, you put all three passages together. But for this time, he picks out a certain thing that Ananias said. "He said, 'The God of our fathers hath chosen thee.'" Not a different God. You get the point? It's the God of Israel. It's a devout Jew. It's a zealous Pharisee. See, this whole transformation is all involving features of Judaism. "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee." There you have the indication of salvation from the standpoint of God's sovereignty. That's what it says in Ephesians chapter 1, "We are chosen in Him before the

foundation of the world."

So "God chose you, that you should know His will, see the Righteous One." That's an Old Testament name for Messiah. You can check it out in Isaiah chapter 32. I think it's verse 1, and in chapter 53, verse 11. He says, "I want you to know My will, see My Messiah, and hear the voice of His mouth," and verse 15, "Be His witness."

Oh, here's Paul. He hasn't said a word. He's just hanging around. God's giving him all this information. The point is this: the God of Israel chose and transformed the life of Saul. Now, do you see what he's saying? That's his testimony. God did this. God did it. He hasn't so far even responded, and doesn't until verse 16, which we'll see next time.

Now, lemme close with this. What is Paul telling us here? Now, listen. What is he telling us about giving a positive testimony in a negative situation? Watch. No. 1, accept the situation is from God. No. 2, what? Create an opportunity. Watch No. 3. Do everything you can to win the audience...Find common ground. One of the most important things in sharing your faith is to be conciliatory. Is to somewhere along the line establish some point of contact...some kind of gentleness, some kind of saying, "Well, you know, I understand how you feel."

You know, for example, I was speaking to a Jewish person one day, and he was really just super-pro-Jewish, and I just started by saying, "You know, my...the dearest friends in all the world to me are Jewish. The people I love more than anybody else are all Jewish." He said, "Is that right?" I said, "Absolutely." I said "The...and I spend more time with Jewish people than any other people." He said, "Is that true?" I said, "Absolutely." I said, "You know who they are? Abraham, David, Jesus, Paul, Peter, dearest people to me, and every one of 'em is Jewish." And I had an opportunity to share on account of that simple, conciliatory approach. It is important in giving a positive testimony in a negative situation that you win the confidence and trust of the people, that you don't barge in like a bull in a China closet, stomping all over everybody.

Look at Paul's greeting, verse 1 of 22, "Men and brethren and fathers." Look in verse 3 how he maximizes similarities. He maximizes the way they are the same...then he says, "I understand your motives. Boy, I understand how you feel. I used to be exactly like that." Have you ever done that in sharing Christ? "You know, I understand you, because, you know, I was the same way. I thought the same thoughts and did the same thing. I was just like you were, and you know what happened? I got smart and came to Jesus." No. "You know what happened? All of a sudden," and you come to the next point. The next point in giving a positive testimony is to tell what God did when He invaded your life. "And then you know what happened? I was going about doing what I was doing. All of a sudden, God began to move in my life." See?

So, No. 1, accept the situation is from God. No. 2, create an opportunity. No. 3, when you get that opportunity, be loving and conciliatory, and do everything to win their confidence; and No. 4, when you begin to talk about the transformation, talk about it from God's side. "Here is what God did."...Well, may the Lord give us opportunity for that. We'll take some more points from this next time.

Father, thank You for giving us the opportunity of study this morning and opening our hearts to the Word of God, to the truth of God. We thank You for the example of what we've seen, the life of the apostle. We pray that each of us might be in, first of all, right relationship with You, and then accept the opportunities to share the truth that we know so well and love so deeply with those who need to hear. Help us to be willing to be positive and confront the system boldly for Thee and for Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

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