

Building Your Faith – Acts 21:37-22:23

Passage:

³⁷ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek? ³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” ³⁹ Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.” ⁴⁰ And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

22 “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”

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

³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

¹² “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

¹⁷ “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ ²¹ And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

²² Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.” ²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,

Outline

Paul prepares to make a speech of defense to the Jewish crowd

21:37-39 – Paul talks with the tribune after being arrested, clarifying his identity and asking permission to speak

- There is tremendous misunderstanding about who Paul is and what wrong he has supposedly committed. When have you been misidentified or wrongly accused? How did you respond?
- Let's remember the accusations of wrongdoing are against Paul. Looking back at 21:27ff, what are the accusations made against Paul?
- Paul is given permission to speak to the crowd. Some commentators write that this is an unusual allowance. If you had been the tribune, how would you have responded to Paul's request?

21:40-22:2 – Paul begins his speech of defense to the Jewish crowd in Aramaic/Hebrew

- Paul made his speech in either Aramaic or Hebrew (which one depends on how you understand the Greek word *hebrais* that Luke uses in 22:2). Greek was as well known by the crowd as Aramaic (and better known than Hebrew at the time). Why do you think Paul chose to speak in the language he did? What affect did that have on the crowd?

Paul begins his speech of defense with an introduction and narrative of the facts

- Paul is accused of 1) apostasy of the Jewish faith by abandoning works of the law and teaching others to do the same and 2) bringing a Gentile into the Temple (past the court of the Gentiles). When someone refutes accusations of wrongdoing, he could utilize several "genres" or strategies. Consider some of the possible approaches. How would you describe Paul's approach in terms of "genre" or strategy?
- In formalized defense speeches, the speaker provides a defense in five parts: an introduction, the narrative of facts, the presentation of proofs, rebuttal of accuser's arguments, and a conclusion. In Paul's speech, he is allowed time to only present the first two parts. How would the facts presented in his speech have been helpful in refuting the accusations of wrongdoing?
- The accusations against Paul are not immediately concerned with Paul's trust in Jesus Christ, but rather Paul's supposed apostasy toward the law. Why would Paul share about his encounters with the risen Jesus—his conversion and his call to the Gentiles—as the primary facts of the case? Why would he not rather have directly refuted the accusations of failing to follow the law?
- Throughout the millennia since Jesus, many accusations have been levied against Christians, some accurate (e.g. Christians claim a dead man came back to life and is God to be worshipped) and some fabricated (e.g. Christians are cannibals because they consume the body and blood of Christ). What are some of the things Christians have been accused of in the past and today? When have you faced "accusations" of some sort related to your faith? How did you respond?
- Paul's personal story is a main element of his defense. Have you ever shared your faith story to explain or defend your trust in Jesus? How did it go? How did the conversation partner respond? If you were asked, could you share parts of your faith story to explain why you are a Christian? What parts would you share?

22:3-5 – Paul shares his Jewish credentials of education and history of zeal against the Way

22:6-16 – Paul recounts the story of his conversion and call

22:17-21 – Paul shares about his calling from God to go to the Gentiles

The crowd interrupts Paul's speech of defense

22:22-23 – The crowd responds by riotously interrupting Paul's defense