



#55

JESUS AND YOU

ACTS 21:37-22:21

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I believe we see 3 tremendously important things in this passage! Let's walk through it, then apply it.

ACTS 21:37-22:21 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."

- **There were many who claimed to be the Messiah before and after Jesus.** One was such a man from Egypt, who, about three years before, had brought a band of men into the wilderness, and then sought to attack the Romans inside Jerusalem. About 400 were killed and 300 captured. These Roman soldiers thought Paul must have been this very man, an assassin! They were wrong
- **What's at stake is not so much Paul's behavior as it is the Church's;** Christianity is on trial and charged with being anti-Jewish.

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: 22:1 "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.

- **Though Paul has just been beaten;** standing in front of this mob bloodied and bruised, he does two brilliant things: 1) He uses an Orators gesture (motioning with his hand) and 2) he speaks in Aramaic (in the Hebrew language) which was the lingua-franca of the day in Israel. **Therefore they listened to him!**

& 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.

- **First, Paul presents himself**—who he actually is. He's Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, but then he was trained in Jerusalem under a prominent Pharisee named Gamaliel, he himself is a Pharisee, and a strict one at that!

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.

- **Paul is saying,** "I am committed to the facts! It doesn't matter as much what I think or what you think—it matters what is true, and we know that what God says is true!"
- **In addition he's saying,** "I'm as serious as any of you for the truth and God's glory! I wasn't just a strict Jew and Pharisee, I even persecuted this Way (Christianity) through death and imprisonment for all bearing the name of Christ Jesus. **He points them to the High Priest and all the leaders**—they *KNEW* this was true.

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.

- **Up to this point Paul is not only a non-Christian;** he is as anti-Christian as you could dream! As Osama Bin Laden was to Americans, so Paul was to Christians.
- **But something happened:** Paul was confronted by the resurrected Jesus. He's not talking about a psychological experience or something that happened in his mind—he was knocked off his horse and blown away by the glory of Jesus—he realized he was on the wrong side of the facts. Jesus IS the Lord; IS the King; He is the messiah! The other men with him saw this as well, though they didn't "hear with understanding."

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.

- **Paul's blindness is reminiscent of how God says he will judge those who rebel against Him in Deuteronomy 28:28-29** "28 The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, 29 and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways."
- **"What shall I do?" says Paul,** much like the men in Acts 2 say to the Apostle Peter.

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.

- **Jesus also appeared to Ananias, a Jewish-Christian, and told him to go to Paul.** Ananias doesn’t want to—can you blame him? He knew about Paul and knew that he was actually coming to damascus to kill him!
- **But he goes and delivers the message Jesus tells him to**—he tells Paul how Jesus is going to use him. He also tells him what he needs to do, though Paul already must know.

16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

- **How should we respond to who Jesus is (God, the King) and what He’s done to reconciled us to Himself through His life, death, and resurrection?** 1) We’re called to put our confidence in Jesus to wash away our sins! Baptism doesn’t wash away sins, Jesus does—and only through trusting Him are we clean. Notice he says, you wash away your sins by calling on His name. To call on someone’s name means to place your confidence in who THEY are and what THEY’VE done (In the name of the King).
- **And what is Baptism, then?** It is an outward showing of an inward reality! Because, by grace, you are calling on Jesus’ name, your sins are washed away! Therefore we, in obedience to Jesus, are baptized in water!

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.’

- **They didn’t care that Paul was obviously committed to the truth**—he had even partook in the stoning of Stephen, who was a Christian in Jerusalem (Acts 7-8).

21 And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

- **The Jewish people largely rejected the gospel—though not all of them.** They especially rejected that the Jewish Messiah would save not only Jews but Gentiles! As we will see, they get pretty heated when Paul mentions Gentiles.

Q. What can we learn from this—how can we apply these truths to our lives?

A. Something about: 1) The Gospel, 2) Living a Life that Eternally Matters, 3) Having true Confidence.

THE FIRST THING WE CAN LEARN IS ABOUT *THE GOSPEL*

1. IT DOESN’T MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOU’VE DONE: THE GOSPEL CAN BE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

- **“Euangellion”** is the greek word that we translate “Gospel.” **It means** “Good news that brings joy.” It’s not advice on how to live your life; it’s an announcement of what has been accomplished in history through Jesus. However, it’s not simply “News” like little Timmy got an A for coloring inside the lines; Rather...
- **Gospel means earth shattering, eternity changing, everything is different for the better News!**
- **Do you know the difference between good news & advice?** Imagine you are diagnosed with near terminal cancer. When you visit your doctor, she tells you you need to undergo Chemotherapy (that’s advice, sure). Now imagine on your next visit your doctor tells you someone has developed a cure—just swallow this pill and you’ll be cured (that’s good news). “How did someone develop this cure?” we should ask: “Well,” says your doctor, “there was this man who gave every penny he had for research and even died to make this cure possible for you. Only at great cost to him can you be healed.”
- **The latter part of this illustration get’s pretty close to the heart of the Christian Gospel.** Because of our sin—because we have preferred other things to God, and lived as if we are king—we have a terminal death sentence hanging over us. We deserve death—and any kind of advice we can follow will only delay the inevitable.
- **But in steps Jesus...** Though all we have to offer God is our unrighteous, *look at verse 14*—Jesus is the Righteous One! He was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin. And this Righteous One, gave every spiritual penny he had, dying on the cross, paying our debt to God—The Righteous One took our unrighteous on Himself and was judged for our sin as our substitute!

Q. Why? **A.** So that we may “call on His name” & “wash our sins away.” Forgiven/Righteous/Adopted!

• **As Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:24-25** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

• **It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done; Jesus is enough for you.**

1. To those of us who think we or someone we know is outside the reach of Jesus grace—*look at PAUL! By the grace of God, through faith in Jesus and what He's done, Paul's sins are washed away!*

• **As Charles Spurgeon thundered in his day**, “No one is so great a sinner that Jesus is not a greater Savior!”

2. To those of us who think we or someone we know can achieve a righteousness through their works—*look at all these Jews! These are the most moral and ethical people alive, yet they need to be washed.*

• **No one is so *disoriented* they cannot be washed clean; no one is so *together* they don't need to be!**

Now, as you may have picked up on, I said the gospel CAN be good news for you.

• **NOTICE THIS: Jesus enemies will not prevail:** He will judge those who reject him for their rebellion and sin, or He will convert them. **He even can turn persecutors into preachers! Sinners into saints!**

• **We are not called to passive indifference:** Ananias tells Paul, “Rise!” We are called to active obedience: to “call on the name of Jesus”—he takes sins away! And be baptized, showing you now belong to Him and are clean because of Him!

Q. Is your confidence for your righteousness before God in Jesus alone? Have you been baptized?

Again as Keller notes, “For the gospel all you need is need; all you need is nothing.”

• You can *KNOW* that you are clean before God *RIGHT NOW*. Place your confidence in Jesus and wash your sins away. If you know you have a great need because of your sin, and you cling to Jesus, you have the smile of God.

• He looks at you and says, like He did to Jesus, “You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased.”

THE SECOND THING WE CAN LEARN IS ABOUT **LIVING A LIFE THAT ETERNALLY MATTERS**

2. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR HOW YOU'RE WIRED: IN CHRIST, YOU'RE SPECIFICALLY GIFTED FOR JESUS' MISSION

• **When Jesus washes your sins away & adopts you into His family, He gives you Himself** through the God Holy Spirit. You're filled, sealed, made holy, and gifted to take part in God's great story!

• **In his letter to the church at Corinth**, Paul points out three major things about Christians and the global mission of Jesus. 1) We are all given spiritual gifts by THS. 2) We are the body of Christ—His representatives in the world, working together, each doing our part. 3) At the beginning of the letter he points out that these gifts of the Holy Spirit are sometimes just enrichments of our talents. Meaning this: Spiritual Gifts are not always supernatural things; sometimes they are things we are naturally good at or possess, and God takes them and empowers us to use them for His glory!

• Look at Paul here! He was already a teacher with orator skills...He was brilliant and bilingual...He had a great memory... He was a leader... Paul was specifically gifted for Jesus' mission to love God and love his neighbor. **AND, IN CHRIST, SO ARE YOU.**

Q. What are you good at? The Holy Spirit intends to use you through those things!

• **It doesn't matter if it's more visible or behind the scenes. We're all gifted, & we're all needed!**

• **As Dr. Keller rightly says**, “There are some needs only you can see. There are some hands only you can hold. There are some people only you can reach.”

THE FINAL THING WE CAN LEARN IS ABOUT **HAVING CONFIDENCE/BOLDNESS FOR JESUS**

3. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOUR PERSONALITY IS: YOU CAN BE AS BOLD AS PAUL FOR JESUS

- Q. Are you like me and, looking at Paul, wonder how on earth he is so stinkin' bold?
- Q. What's his secret? How did he use his specific gifts for Jesus even in the face of harsh persecution?
- **I think we're tempted to think Paul was just stronger than we find ourselves most of the time. NO!**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 9 But [Jesus] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Q. So what was it, then? **A.** I think the answer is right here in verses 14, 15, and 16.

- When you know Jesus is the Righteous One (and you're counted righteous in Him); when you know through Him your sins are washed away (you are totally forgiven!); and that King gives you a job to do, you can be as bold as a lion. Because it's not about your strength; it's about His.

As one commentator put it,

"When you know, through Jesus, God smiles at you; all other frowns become inconsequential."

To the degree that you are gripped by the good news of your gracious King, you will be bold for Him. You can use the gifts He's given you for His glory and others good no matter the consequences!