

The Message, the Method, and the Madness (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

- A. Remember, Paul is here in Jerusalem, and he's addressing this crowd of Jews who, quite frankly, want him dead, because of his faith in Jesus and the way he's opening his arms to the Gentiles with this message of grace. Here's what he says . . .

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. 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." (Acts 22:1-22)

Part 2

- A. This is our second week dealing with this text.

1. And I've said we're going to be considering three things in particular: (1) The Message—what is it that Paul says?; (2) The Method—how does he say it, how does he go about trying to get his message across to these folks?; and (3) The Madness—how does the crowd respond?
 - a. We looked at that first piece last week.
 - b. We're going to take up the latter two today. So let's get to it!

(2) The Method

Method Matters

- A. When it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus with others, let's be clear: method matters.
- B. I remember back when I was at Cal Poly, there was a crusty older man who had come through and he was marching up and around the campus.
 1. And, if I remember correctly, he had this big belt or harness he had put on and to it he had attached these massive poles with these billboard-like signs up at the top of them.
 2. He had words and pictures, all terribly abrasive. There were derogatory terms for LGBTQ folks telling them they were set to burn. I believe there were Dante's Inferno-like pictures of hell with people being tortured and all this.
 3. And he was moving around the square there, barking out these inflammatory things.
 4. His whole point, it would seem, was to get a rise, stir a crowd, amass an audience—so he could then, I guess, "preach the gospel."
 5. But all he really did was yell at folks, upset them, pick a fight.
 6. I'm pretty sure the campus authorities quickly shuffled him offsite. And, no doubt, he imagined himself a martyr for it.
 - a. In it all, I assume he was trying to preach the message of grace,
 - b. but he was doing it in such a graceless way.
 - i. Method matters.
- C. The message itself, as we know, is very important. But the method may be equally so.
 1. When it comes to sharing the gospel meaningfully with other people, our goal is not merely to get the message right, it's also to get the message across—to share the message in such a way that it has a better chance of being heard and understood appropriately.
 - a. We've got to think about our method.
- D. And who better to help us with that than the Apostle Paul.
 1. I want to make two higher-level observations regarding his method as we see it here in our text . . .

Observation #1: That He Tells His Story

A. You caught that, didn't you?

1. Paul isn't just preaching the gospel at them here.
2. He's couching gospel truth in personal testimony. He tells them how he was converted, how Jesus got ahold of him, how God's grace came to transform his own life.
 - a. He's not just making statements about the Bible.
 - b. He's telling a story, his story.

B. And while, certainly, we would agree this isn't the only way to share the gospel with people in our lives, it is a very strategic and, perhaps, most effective way to do so.

1. Why do I say that? Well, I'll give you three quick reasons . . .

Reason #1: It's Personally Accessible

A. Here's what I mean by this: Have you ever wanted to share the gospel with someone but gotten stopped up because you feared you wouldn't get it right, you didn't know enough?

1. You feel like you have to have a little sales pitch with four points memorized.
2. Or you feel like you're supposed to have been trained in some specialized technique.
 - a. And you don't have that. So you don't share.

B. But listen: every Christian has a story.

1. Yes, it's true, as we'll see in a minute: sometimes you have to do a little work of reflection to really grasp your story and get a handle on how to tell it well.
2. But, in many ways, this is a much easier starting point when it comes to sharing Jesus with others.
 - a. Because it's your story. You've experienced it. You've lived it. And you just get to share from your heart about what Jesus has done for you personally.

C. We actually see this "method" (if you want to call it that) utilized all the time in the Gospels.

1. So you might think of the Samaritan woman in [John 4](#).
 - a. She encounters Jesus and his grace there in the heat of the day by that well dug just outside of town.
 - b. She doesn't know much, but she knows her story—how Jesus knew all about her sin and yet still he accepted her, welcomed her, loved her.
 - c. So that's what she shares, [vv. 28-30](#): "²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him."

2. Or you might think of that poor man ravaged by demons in [Luke 8](#), who had been living unclothed and mad among the tombs of the city.
 - a. Jesus frees him in the way only he can and, when this brother, understandably, is begging Jesus that he might be permitted to leave that place and go along now with him and his band of disciples, what does Jesus say to him?
 - b. It's a bit startling, [v. 39](#): "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." In other words: "Go tell your story!"
 - i. He didn't know much—about the Bible, about the Messiah.
 - ii. But he knew what Jesus had done for him. He could tell his story. It's an easier starting point. It's personally accessible.

Reason #2: It's Culturally Relevant

- A. As our culture has moved—from modernism to postmodernism to now what many are referring to as metamodernism—stories have become increasingly more important.
 1. As evangelist Rico Tice puts it: "Story . . . [is] the currency [of] the culture."
- B. People today aren't as much interested in our logical arguments, our rational defense of the faith, our doctrinal debates.
 1. The question of our age has shifted from "Is Christianity true?" to "Is Christianity good—is it helpful, is it satisfying?"
 - a. Of course it matters that it's true, and you'll get there.
 - b. But that's often not the first question most folks are asking. They want to hear: What difference has this Jesus fellow made in your life?
 - i. And, for that, they don't need your arguments and debates and all this.
 - ii. They need your story.

Reason #3: It's Rhetorically Disarming

- A. It's harder to argue with your testimony—because it's not just the gospel in brute fact, it's the gospel in story form, it's the gospel filtered through your personal experience.
 1. It's not just your beliefs about God, but your personal encounter with God.
- B. I suppose I might say it is a seemingly subjective and gentler way of communicating staunch and unflinching objective truth.
 1. You're still talking about absolute truth, but in deeply personal terms.
- C. Of course it will always leave open the possibility that your hearer might casually dismiss all you say as that which is merely "true for you."

1. But, nevertheless, your story very well may unleash a thousand ghosts that will haunt a person in his or her more honest moments.
 - a. “Why did such a thing become ‘true’ for them? What else could account for such a meaningful change in their life? What if there is something to it after all?”
 2. And just like that the seemingly subjective becomes a Trojan horse for the objective. The personal paves the road for the absolute.
- D. For this, you might think of that man born blind who’s healed by Jesus.
1. He’s dragged before the Pharisees and they’re questioning him about Jesus and all this.
 2. And the man just says, quite simply: “[One thing I . . . know, . . . though I was blind, now I see](#)” ([John 9:25](#)).
 - a. And, though the Pharisees don’t want to believe that Jesus, whom they consider a blasphemer, could do such good, still they can’t deny it—they can’t argue with the fact that this is the man who we’ve all seen sitting and begging along the roadside.
- E. Your testimony is disarming, because it’s personal and vulnerable and even humble before it’s ever confrontational.
1. Oh the confrontation comes, but it doesn’t barrel down the front door.
 2. It comes in unsuspected round the back!

Observation #2: How He Tells His Story

- A. But now it’s important that we see not just that Paul tells his story here, but how exactly he goes about telling it.
1. You see, he doesn’t just tell his story.
 2. He tells it in a way that’s relevant to his Jewish audience here, in a way that’s intelligible to them, in a way they can understand and see the implications of it for themselves.
- B. We see this play out here in two ways in particular . . .

Way #1: He Accents Points of Contact

- A. This was a very intriguing discovery for me. Paul’s testimony, his story of conversion, as you may well know, shows up on three separate occasions in the book of Acts—[Acts 9](#) when it’s happening in real time, [Acts 26](#) when Paul is sharing it with King Agrippa, and here in [Acts 22](#) where he’s sharing it with these Jews.
1. And what’s interesting is, though the basic outline is there in each instance, the story is never told in exactly the same way.
 - a. There are different points of emphases, influenced in particular—as I’m about to show you—by the audience he’s trying to reach.

2. So, as you might expect, as he's here telling his story to these Jews, he's going to do his best to bring out those parts of his story that might seem most relatable to them and their culture.
- B. This begins quite obviously, of course, even with the language he chooses to speak when attempting to share his story with them. He is literally "speaking the language" of the people he's trying to reach.
1. And it has quite an effect on them. Did you notice? Look at v. 2: "And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet."
 - a. Don't you see? He wasn't just speaking at them, as we are prone to do in our evangelism sometimes.
 - b. No, he was speaking their language, speaking "with them," we might say.
 - i. He was getting rid of all distance between him and them and doing his best to get on common ground, to meet them where they had points of contact.
- C. But his choice of language here was just the beginning. He does this same sort of thing all the way through. It's fascinating. Look at what he accents:
1. Notice how he starts: "Brothers and fathers . . ." (v. 1).
 - a. Right out of the gate, he wants them to remember that he's one of them. He's come from the same root and stalk of the Jewish people. There's a shared heritage and faith.
 2. To make this even more clear, he continues: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city . . ." (v. 3).
 - a. I'm a Jew from Jerusalem. You are not just my people, this place is my home.
 3. But he goes on: "[I was] 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" (v. 3).
 - a. I've been just like you, passionate for the law of God.
 4. So passionate in fact, that, like you're doing here with me, I was a persecutor of the church. "I persecuted this Way to the death . . ." (v. 4).
 - a. I've been where you are. I get it. That's a part of my story too.
- D. But it's particularly fascinating from here . . .
1. Look at how he describes Ananias in v. 12.
 - a. Back in Acts 9, Ananias is simply referred to as "a disciple" (v. 10).

- b. But here Paul, knowing his audience, chooses to accent something else about him—something that would resonate with them. So he refers to Ananias as “a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there”
 - i. He wants them to know: These aren’t just renegade Jews who have gone off the rails towards Jesus.
 - ii. These are upstanding guys, respected in their Jewish communities, serious about the law of God.
 - 2. Furthermore, look at how he summarizes Ananias’ words to him there in vv. 14-15: “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.’”
 - a. These words weren’t shared with us in Acts 9, nor are they shared in Acts 26 before Agrippa.
 - b. But they are here because he wants these Jews to know: this whole notion of Jesus and a global mission to the nations, to the Gentiles, it started with “the God of our Fathers”—with YHWH himself.
 - 3. And to just put a final exclamation point on this, he gives them in vv. 17-21 yet another detail that is not included in the other versions of his story. Here he shows how his commission to bring the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles was given to him when he had fallen into a trance while “praying in the temple” (v. 17).
 - a. In other words: “I know you value this holy place. That’s why you’re so worked up about me right now—you claim I brought a Gentile in and defiled this holy place.
 - b. But I’m telling you: my mission to the Gentiles was given to me in this holy place. I’m not here to defile the temple. I’m here to help you realize the very point of it all!”
- E. He accents points of contact, he emphasizes things that will matter to them. He’s telling his story, but with concern for his audience.

- 1. And this leads to the second thing I wanted to bring out here . . .

Way #2: He Addresses Points of Concern

- A. He uses his story to get at concerns these Jews really have, to answer questions they’re really asking.
- B. We’ve already been moving in this direction, but remember: Paul is here trying to explicitly address their accusations against him.
 - 1. After all, Paul’s whole address here is labelled at the start as his defense. Acts 22:1: “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”
 - 2. But, of course, it’s more than just a defense of himself. It’s an apologia, an apologetic—it’s a defense of his faith.

- a. As we saw back in [Acts 21:28](#), these Jews are claiming Paul doesn't care about their people, their law, their place, their God. That's why they're so worked up.
 - b. But he's here telling his story in such a way that they can see plainly: he's never stopped caring about their people, their law, their place, and their God.
 - i. In fact, as he's shown, all that he's been doing has actually followed out from such things.
- C. I love how John Stott sums all this up: "Looking back over Paul's defense, we may perhaps say that he made two major points. The first was that he himself was a loyal Jew, not only by birth and education but still. True, he was now a witness where before he had been a persecutor. But the God of his fathers was his God still. He had not broken away from his ancestral faith, still less apostatized; he stood in direct continuity with it. Jesus of Nazareth was 'the Righteous One' in whom prophecy had been fulfilled. And Paul's second point was that those features of his faith which had changed, especially his acknowledgment of Jesus and his Gentile mission, were not his own eccentric ideas. They had been directly revealed to him from heaven, the one truth in Damascus and the other in Jerusalem. Indeed, nothing but such a heavenly intervention could have so completely transformed him" (BST).
- 1. His Damascus conversion to faith in Jesus isn't a departure from his Jewish upbringing and tradition.
 - 2. It's the fulfillment of it!
- D. So he uses his own story of conversion as a vehicle to bring the good news of Jesus to these Jews—all the while accenting points of contact and addressing any points of concern they may have. It's a beautiful thing.
- 1. But what would this look like for us? How can we do the same?

How Can We Do the Same?

- A. Sharing your testimony with others, it seems to me, really involves the intersection of three stories—THE story, your story, and their story.

- 1. Let me explain those one at a time . . .

Story #1: THE Story

- A. By THE story I'm simply referring to the ultimate story, the story of God, the story of Jesus, the story of Scripture, the gospel.

- 1. There are really four main chapters in this story as we trace it through the Bible.
- 2. And these chapters provide God's answers to life's big questions.

- B. Chapter 1: Creation – We were created by God, for God, to be with God.

1. This answers questions like: where have we come from?; why are we here?; what's the point of life?
- C. Chapter 2: Fall – We left him for lesser things, we rebelled against him, we deserve his just and holy judgment for our sin.
1. This answers questions like: what's gone wrong?; why does everything seem so broken?; what's the big problem in the world?
- D. Chapter 3: Redemption – But God, because of the great love with which he loved, even when we were still dead in our sin, made a way for us to come alive through Christ. He takes our sin and our punishment. We get his righteousness and his reward—not by works of the law, but by grace through faith in him.
1. This answers questions like: how do we get better?; how do we fix the things that are broken?; who can help?
- E. Chapter 4: Consummation – God in Jesus is going to make all the wrong right and all the sad things untrue. He will usher in a new heavens and a new earth. And we will dwell once more with God as his people forever.
1. This answers questions like: where is all this headed?; is there any hope for the world?; how will the story end?
- F. So you've got to know this story. You've got to know THE Story.
1. And, of course, if you're going to know the story of Scripture you've got to be in the Scriptures. You've got to read your Bible if you're going to know THE Story.

Story #2: Your Story

- A. But then, as we've been saying, you've also got to know Your Story. You've got to know how Jesus and his grace intersects with you and your life—how he's touched you and transformed you.
- B. One thing is clear: Paul never forgot his story, his conversion, his testimony.
1. He didn't just move on from it. He wasn't ashamed of it. He didn't try to hide it or edit it out. "I don't want you to know who I was before."
 2. No, his story remained something precious to him. He's continued to reflect on it through the years. He never got over the grace that was shown him there outside Damascus.
- C. How do I know? Well, I wonder if you realize: the span of time between [Acts 9](#)—when his conversion actually takes place in history (c. 34 A.D.)—and [Acts 22](#)—when he retells his story to this Jewish crowd here (c. 57 A.D.)—is more than 20 years!
1. So over 20 years have gone by at this point.
 2. And, yet, here he is in our text telling his story like it's something that happened to him just yesterday.

- D. You realize, don't you, if you're a Christian in this room: God has given you a story to tell.
1. I don't care whether your story is dramatic like Paul's here or seemingly simple and pedestrian—it matters to God, and it should matter to you, because it's going to matter to the people you are trying to reach with the gospel.
 - a. But in order to tell your story, you've got to know your story. You've got to reflect on it a bit.
- E. To help you with this I've given you what I call the [My Story for His Glory Worksheet](#).
1. You can go home and give it a go. See if anything new comes to light.
 2. It helps give you an idea of how you might shape and share your own story with others.
- F. And, you'll notice, I use those same four chapters as a framework because, even before we've come back to God—we're still made in his image, living in his world, and we're still wrestling with those same basic questions.
1. We just don't like God's answers, at least not at first, so we try to write our own story.
 - a. This is what I was living for.
 - b. This is where things were broken, where life was hard.
 - c. This is where I was turning for help. This is what I thought would satisfy—make me right, make me happy, make me okay.
 - d. This is where I thought I was headed.
 - e. But then, like Paul on that road to Damascus—this is how that twisted up version of the story I was telling myself, collided with THE Story, the true story, the gospel. This is how Jesus got ahold of me and I was never the same!
- G. Do you know your story? Can you trace it out? Can you tell it?

Story #3: Their Story

- A. If we're going to truly operate like Paul does here in [Acts 22](#), then you see the need, don't you, for this third story—Their Story.
1. It's not enough to know THE Story and Your Story, and then just rattle that out to people without any regard for them.
 2. No, if you're going to truly reach them in this, you have to know something of Their Story. You have to know how they are answering some of those big questions.
 - a. What are they living for? What are they looking for?
 - b. Where are they suffering and struggling?
 - c. What are they hoping in? What are they turning to for help?
 - d. How can Jesus meet them with his grace like he's met you?

- i. How does their story, overlap with my story, overlap with THE Story?
- B. So you have to care about a person—ask, listen, watch, be curious.
1. And then, should God permit, you share the bits and pieces of your story that are relevant, in a way that would make some sense to them.
 - a. You don't try to unload all of it on them.
 - b. You tailor it to them, and bring out the parts that might be particularly helpful for them.

For Example . . .

- A. So, using my story as an example . . .
1. If I was talking to someone entrenched in a sort of religious legalism, thinking you get right with God on the basis of your own works—
 - a. I might talk more about that part of my story—how I was raised Catholic and fell into a lot of legalism myself, I've got to do this, I've got to do that, until grace broke through.
 2. If I was talking to someone that didn't care one way or the other about God, because they were too busy pursuing the things of the world—
 - a. I would talk about how my attempt to get all the world had to offer in college, and how it left me empty. But Jesus filled me up.
 3. If I was talking to a rationalist, a skeptic, someone who just finds Christianity too outlandish, too fairytale-like to be believed—
 - a. I would talk to them about my skepticism, how I was supposed to be banned from the dorm Bible study because I was asking too many questions, raising too many objections. Whatever you've asked, I've already asked it, and I found Jesus to be true.
 4. If I was talking to someone in the throes of real suffering and hardship—
 - a. with tenderness, with care, I might share with them how God has met me in my own suffering and used it more than anything else to bring me to himself and how I found peace and joy in him even in the midst of it.
- B. But you see how, in all of this, those three stories are intersecting:
1. I'm getting to know their story.
 2. And that influences the sorts of things I share with them from my story.
 3. And that, hopefully, brings them to consider THE Story.

- C. That's what Paul is doing in [Acts 22](#) and it's what we can do with the people we love and want to reach for Jesus in our own lives as well!

(3) The Madness

- A. I just wanted to point out here at the close the fact that Paul does all this stuff to try to get the message to them in a way that they could understand, in a way that relates to them—he brought the message of grace in a manner, with a method, that was full of grace—and yet still, at the end, it doesn't go well.
1. In fact, it looks kind of like the rowdy crowd that was surrounding that guy on my college campus back in the day, a lot worse really.
 - a. College students were just angry at that guy.
 - b. These Jews want to kill Paul: [“Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live” \(v. 22\).](#)
 2. Paul wasn't parading around with signs loaded up with profane words and images. He wasn't yelling and screaming, and trying to make a scene.
 3. He was trying to love these folks well . . . and yet still this happens.
- B. Because, listen, sharing the gospel with people in a way that they can best hear it is not the same thing as telling people what they want to hear. Do you get that?
1. The cross is still an offense to natural man.
 2. No one wants to hear that by nature they're a sinner en route to hell and they can only be saved, not by works, but by grace from outside in Jesus.
 - a. That still chafes on people. And it's going to.
- C. We try to remove every possible offense save the offense of the cross.
1. You can't change that. No method can change that.
 2. You can only try to be faithful to bring the message of grace, in a manner that is full of grace, and then you leave the results up to sovereign grace.
 - a. Salvation belongs to the Lord.
 - b. You love, you share, and you let him do the rest.