

## **The Power of Your Story**

### **Acts 22:1-21**

I'm reminded of this story that I want to begin with about this guy. His name was Fred, and he wanted everyone that he worked with to know Jesus. And so he came up with a plan, and he decided, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to live my life as this Christian. I'm going to do everything right and have joy. I'm just going to set an example of what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus. And I hope that as I live for Jesus each and every day, and people are watching me, eventually somebody will ask me a question and ask me what's different about me.

So weeks went by, and months went by, and even some years go by. And finally, eventually, the day finally comes when somebody, one of his coworkers, says, hey, Fred, I've been watching you. And Fred's pumped. He's like, yes, this is the moment. Thank you, Lord. And the guy says, Fred, I've noticed there's something different about you. And Fred is thinking, God, thank you for answering my prayers. I'm going to get to witness to this guy. And the guy says, Fred, can I ask you a question? Yes, you can. And the guy says, well, Fred, are you a vegetarian?

So all of this time has gone by and Fred has lived differently, but he's never told anyone the reason that there's something different about him, what's different about his life. And so they don't know. And there comes a time, in fact, sooner rather than

later, when we need to speak up and tell people, use our words to say, this is the difference. It's Jesus that makes the difference in my life.

As we read Acts 22:1 - 21, we'll examine Jesus and how we can share our personal stories—what we call our testimony. How do we share our testimony effectively? Paul gives an example in Acts 22.

If you remember from last week, what's happening here is that Paul has incited the crowd. They are riled up. It's this angry mob and they want to kill Paul. So the soldiers come to arrest Paul and in arresting him, they're really saving him from certain death because the crowd wants to kill him. As he's being arrested, he asked the soldiers, "can I speak to the crowd?" And they give him the permission to speak to the crowd.

Now we're going to get to see, what does Paul so desperately want to tell the crowd? And the first thing we see is that Paul leads with love. It's his love for his own people that compels him to speak up and talk about Jesus.

And so in chapter 22, verse one, he says, *brothers and sisters, listen now to my defense. When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.* So Paul starts with love. He connects with them. And it's important that we understand how important it is to touch a heart before we ask for a hand. If we want somebody to listen to us, they need to know that we care about them.

In fact, many times we say people don't care. how much you know until they know how much you care. And so Paul loves his people, so he's willing to risk death to share with them. Why would he want to talk to this crowd that wants to see him dead? Why not just let the soldiers rescue him and save his life? Well, the answer is he's got this great love and this passion for his own people to know Jesus. And Paul was willing to face death to save as many people as he possibly could or to allow Jesus to save them. He was saved.

He knew the power of the gospel and the good news and what it could do in their lives if they could only calm down, listen, and respond to the gospel. You can hear his love and his passion that flowed from his heart as he addressed the crowd, even though they had just attacked him and they were crying out for his blood.

His words that he spoke, he said, brothers and fathers. He wasn't charging them with anything, accusing them with anything. He wasn't shouting out against them. Instead, he addressed them as family. He called them brothers and fathers. And that word fathers was the official title for the leaders of the nation. And many of them were there, gathered there, wanting to kill brothers

He invoked that close relationship, a family, a family of the Jewish people. He identified them, connected with them, related to them, and was really revealing his own feelings in his heart,

that love that he felt for them as brothers and fathers. And he spoke in their language. He spoke the Aramaic language that they, that's what we call your heart language, grew up speaking.

Then he shares about his life before he met Jesus. We see him talking about his former life. This is his BC, before Christ.

In verse 3. He says, *then Paul said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under... and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison. as the high priest and all the council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

So now as Paul's telling this story of his life, he's telling his testimony, it's been... about 25 years since he came to faith in Christ. Some of them might've known about Paul's past, but many of them didn't even know who he was.

And he starts by sharing his roots, where he came from, his background, and even the advantages of his heritage in his life. He says, I'm a Jew, not a foreigner. I'm as much of a Jew as you are. He was saying he was born as a Jew in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem.

So that he could be educated at the feet of Israel's greatest teachers of the law. He was brought to Jerusalem when he was still very young, so he could get the very best education that there was. He was educated in the strictest laws of the teachers. He was actually a Pharisee, one of the small group of men who totally dedicated their lives to living out and following the law. And he was zealous, passionate, extremely passionate toward God in keeping the law. He claimed to have never broken the practice and customs of the Mosaic Law. And he was as much a practicing Jew in keeping all the law and all the customs as anyone who was listening to him.

And then he shared... The early part of his life, which was hostile in opposition to Christianity, he wanted to wipe out Christians. And he even was sort of confessing, hey, I was involved in ending their lives in murder. And then he tells about how he met Jesus on the Damascus Road in verse 6. We see, His conversion says about noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and I heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord? I asked. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. He replied, my companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

What shall I do, Lord? I asked. Get up, the Lord said, and go into Damascus. There you'll be told all that you've been assigned to do. And my companions led me by the hand into Damascus because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. So Jesus

himself appeared to Paul and saved Paul. Paul says this happened around noon. He says Jesus was Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was from this despised little part of the world there in Nazareth as a Nazarene. And yet he was the Lord of all of heaven.

Those around him heard this voice, but they couldn't understand what it was saying. And the bright light that Paul witnessed caused him to go blind. So Paul is, he's talked about his former life. And he shared his conversion and talking about being born blind. The idea was he was physically blind, but this was a picture that he had been so spiritually blinded.

Then we see what happened to Paul when he met Jesus and he surrendered to him as Lord. So his new life here in verse 12, it says, a man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very moment, I was able to see him. Then he said, the God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth.

You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. So Paul starts with talking about Ananias, someone who could say, "yeah, this is someone who Jesus has changed." Ananias was a man of high character, and he never would have helped Paul if Paul was still evil and opposed to Christ, opposed to God.

But then we see Paul's call and his commission to serve God. Paul told them exactly what God had told him to do. And this was the emphasis on him seeing and knowing and hearing from God personally and his call to reach out to people everywhere. And that's true for all of us as believers, as followers of Jesus.

God wants us to know him first. No matter who we are or how important our mission is, we start by getting to know Jesus, to know his will. What is his will? Who is he? Who is Jesus? How does he save us? What is his word to us, the Bible, that we begin to understand that.

We know that we have a personal relationship with Jesus, hearing his voice, knowing him personally, talking with him through prayer and being guided and led by his spirit every day. And then we go out and we're able to be a witness personally to the people around us. It's kind of overflows from within that personal relationship we have, then it can shine out of us.

Paul was told to be baptized, you know, right then be baptized as a sign, as a picture of what has happened inwardly in his life. Now he's to be baptized as an outward picture. And he was, you know, it's this question, what are you waiting for? Some people we wanna wait for all the sun, moon and stars to line up before we're obedient in that first step of obedience of following Jesus in baptism. But you don't have to wait. Once you've trust in Jesus, then you can go public with your faith through baptism.

Now, baptism doesn't save you, but it is an outward picture of what Jesus does for us.

Then we see why Paul is, what his life's about. We see that his life is all about living to tell people about Jesus. And so Paul gets specific instructions from God through a vision. This happens about three years after he becomes a follower of Jesus in verse 17. He says, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. Quick, he said, leave Jerusalem immediately because the people here will not accept your testimony about me. Lord, I replied, these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then Jesus said, go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

Paul is praying and he falls into this sort of trance-like state. And he was so consumed about his love for his people, but how much they hated him. And in this trance, in this vision, Jesus told Paul to get out of Jerusalem because they wanted him dead because he was preaching the gospel of Jesus. And Paul was pushing back against Jesus. what Jesus was asking him to do. He said, no, I'm uniquely qualified to reach the Jews because I had been enemy number one of Christianity. And now I've been changed. So now they're going to believe that this is real Christianity. But, you know, it was kind of wishful thinking

because the Jews wanted, they saw him as a traitor and they still wanted him dead.

Jesus commanded Paul again in very clearly, no uncertain terms. He says, go. Paul's mission was not to stay at home. It was to go to the Gentiles, to those who were not Jews, those in the rest of the world. And so our call as a follower of Jesus is the same. It's we've got to fulfill our call no matter what it is, no matter what direction Jesus sends us. We go wherever he sends us and understand that not everybody's going to love us. Not everybody's going to listen to the message, but still we go where and when he sends us.

Paul still at this point, 25 years later, he's still saying, "no, I want to reach the Jewish people." And they're still not listening. They weren't listening to him at that point. And too many people try to stay at home, maybe in an area where it's comfortable. And, you know, God is calling them to go.

In my life you know i'm still in the state of Texas. Praise God. But i grew up in Grand Prairie, Texas. I've always had that that heart or that idea in mind that wouldn't it be great to to win Grand Prairie to Jesus. To Arlington, my hometown, and my people. But God sent me here to Hays County and this is the mission field that he has sent me to to reach the people who are here. And this is the home that he's called me to.

We're going to talk about how can we tell our own story and our story, your story of what Jesus has done in your life is powerful

Because people are interested in your life and in your story, and they can relate to certain aspects of your story. And nobody can argue with your story. They can't say, that didn't happen because you know it happened because you were there. It happened to you.

Let's talk about how you can tell your story. And our personal testimony, if you think of it in the big picture, sometimes it's hard to figure out, well, what would I tell somebody if I was going to tell them my story of what Jesus has done in my life? So I want to help you and give you the parts of what you would do. Maybe you can take some time and even write some of these things down. It starts with an introduction where you would introduce yourself. Maybe it's somebody you already know, or maybe it's somebody that you've just met, but they may not know your background. So you'd begin to tell some of your family background or your cultural background to connect with the people you're sharing with.

Then you're sharing what I would call the BC, your life before Christ. What was your life like before you met Jesus? And you can share about the struggles that you had, the emptiness you felt, the questions that you had. Maybe share a little bit about what was really important to you at that time. What was your attitude about life? What was your attitude about God? And what was it that you were putting in the place of Jesus God in your life. Maybe it was a substance, maybe it was a relationship, things, you know, work, all the different ways, or it could be, you

know, hobbies, anything that you might have been trying to fill that void with that was not effective.

Now, you know, some people, we feel like, "well, I don't really have a testimony because I didn't go out and sow my wild oats." It doesn't matter what it was that your life was like before. You don't want to glorify your past. You know, you're not trying to make it sound like you're the worst human being that ever lived. You're just telling here is my life.

There are going to be some people that can relate to certain parts of your life. And then we're talking about the cross, right? How did you meet Jesus at the crossroads? And it could have been a specific event. It could have been an encounter or just a gradual realization in your life that you needed Jesus. And what led to that? What led to you realizing you needed Jesus in your life? How God was able to get your attention? You can share that.

Specifically, what did you do when you took that step to follow Jesus? How did you pray and what did you pray and ask God? And then you can talk about the change in your life. What's happened in your life ever since? Those positive changes that Jesus has made in your life, has he's given you peace, joy, and purpose in your life? Maybe there's been some change in your relationships and a change in just your general outlook on life, okay? So you would talk about those things.

We're really getting to the AD section, your life after meeting Jesus. How has this relationship continued to affect and impact your life? And then after you share that, you would wanna draw the net and wrap up your story with an invitation for them to take that step to trust in Jesus. You could ask a question like, what parts of my story can you relate to?

What is your spiritual background? What is your church background? And does what I said, does it make sense to you? Do you have any questions? So you'd ask that. And I want to give you some more ideas about how to effectively share your testimony.

As you're sharing your story, you want to make sure that you're being real and authentic. Share from your heart because people can spot a phony from a mile away. And you don't have to pretend that since you trusted in Jesus, everything's perfect, that you don't have any struggles or questions. God's going to use you when you're willing to be transparent about your life.

I would say also about being transparent, I wouldn't try to make your past life sound worse than it actually was either. I've seen people who've done that, and it turns out that they were just making things up. Just be honest, be real, and keep it simple. Avoid what I call Christianese, avoid Christian jargon or the ways that we phrase things in the church sometimes, Normal people don't understand it.

Like when we say, you need to get into the word. Well, what are you really trying to say? You're trying to say, read your Bible, right? And if you do use Bible words, then you might need to explain them so they'll understand. Like if you say, you need to be born again. Well, what are you saying? You're saying you need to come alive spiritually by trusting in Jesus, right? Don't overcomplicate it. Don't make it super long. You don't wanna bore anybody with this powerful story of your life.

So you might have a three minute version and a five minute version if you have more time and maybe even a 10 minute version. But then also be relevant, like connect your testimony to the real questions and needs that people are asking. And instead of trying to focus on what you did, focus on God, focus on what God is doing and showcase his faithfulness in your life.

Now, when you have a story like this, believe it or not, it's good to sort of practice telling it. You may practice sharing your testimony, you know, in a mirror or with a family member. Would you just listen to my testimony? I want to share it with you. And so it's not the first time you're sharing it when you're sharing it with someone else that who really needs to hear it and be sensitive to their needs.

Are they tracking with you? And you don't have to just overtalk. You can stop, pause. And get feedback as you're sharing so that you're really connecting with someone.

As you're using your story, your testimony to reach people, I just want to encourage you with a couple other thoughts.

Know who you're speaking with. Understand who they are, where they're coming from. And really, that means we think of witnessing and sharing our testimony as us doing all the talking. But, you know, God gave you two ears and one mouth. So you can listen more than you talk.

You know, it's been said, "seek first to understand and then be understood." So you can know your audience. Be looking, be on the lookout for open doors and for opportunities. Be ready to step through them when the door opens.

You can ask God to open doors for you to share your story and that God is moving in their hearts and opening their hearts and their minds to receive what you're sharing with them.

And as you share your story, don't be ashamed. Don't be shy about it. Don't be afraid to step out in faith and share your story when the opportunity comes and then don't just share the story and walk off and leave them.

Exchange numbers. Offer to give them some resources. Invite them to church, some ways that they can continue to grow. You don't want to leave the baby on the doorstep. A new believer, you want to continue to follow up with them. Maybe they don't respond right then, but they may have some questions that come up that they would be willing to ask you later on.

Trust in God's timing because you can remember that ultimately you can't save people. It's God who is doing the work. The Holy Spirit works in people's lives and you can trust Him with the outcome.

You may be one who's just part of the process that God is using in someone's life to lead them to a point where they're trusting in Jesus. You may be just planting some seeds, but you wanna continue to be faithful to plant those seeds and to speak up.

I just want to encourage you to not downplay your story. Your story is important. Your story matters. What Jesus did in your life, it is a miracle. And God can use it to work a miracle in someone else's life.

So I want to challenge you to be intentional, to look for opportunities today to share your testimony, to help someone else come to know Jesus. And as you do that, God can use you. I'm telling you, there's nothing else like being used in the process by God to see someone's life change, to see their eternal address changed.

Once you do that, you're gonna catch the fire for it. You're gonna be looking for more opportunities and God can use you to see many people's lives change. What I like to say about that is, that I want to fulfill my maximum redemptive potential in my life to lead as many people as possible to come to know Jesus. And you can do that too.