



**Sermon Text: Acts 21:40-22:29**

*Sermon Date: October 7, 2018*

1 Peter 3:15 states that we should always be “prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in you,” yet to do so “with gentleness and respect.” In our text, we see Paul doing that.

### **WHAT PAUL SAID**

Instead of simply seeking to defend his reputation, Paul seizes the opportunity to defend the ministry of the gospel by sharing what Christ has done in his life. He follows a clear pattern by speaking of his life before Christ, highlighting his encounter with Christ, and then explaining his life after Christ.

- **The Man Paul Was (verses 3-5).** Speaking to a devout Jewish audience, Paul outlines his Jewish credentials. He was born in Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem, pupil of the famous Gamaliel, a devout Pharisee whose fervor for orthodoxy led him to staunchly oppose Christianity. Paul honestly shares his testimony, neither glossing over his credentials or ignoring his past sins.
- **The Messiah Paul Met (verses 6-11).** Paul now recounts how Christ Jesus met him and revolutionized his life. While Paul is on the road to Damascus to seek out and capture Christians, Christ sought and captured Paul. Once again, Paul’s honesty and humility are evidenced in his testimony. Knocked to the ground, the proud, ultra-educated Pharisee is forced to physically experience his spiritual state—blind to the light of the Messiah. The story of every person’s salvation is always that Christ sought us; not that we found Christ, but that He found us. When we share our testimony, the credit for our salvation must always go exclusively to Christ.
- **The Mission Paul Received (verses 12-21).** In the final aspect of Paul’s testimony, Paul recounts how Christ commissioned him for service. Paul crafts his testimony so that it is clear that the accusations brought against Christianity (and his ministry) are baseless. The same God who once commissioned Moses has commissioned Paul. The long-anticipated “Righteous One” is the very one Paul met on the road. Paul doesn’t stand against Moses and the Prophets, but he stands in agreement with them.

### **HOW PAUL SAID IT**

It wasn’t just what Paul said that is admirable; it is how Paul said it. What we say is essential, but how we say it is also important.

- **Paul’s Kindness.** Speaking to a crowd that just beat him and screamed for his death, Paul does not scream back. He speaks to them humbly and respectfully. If we can’t share our story with kindness, gentleness, respect and humility, then I don’t think we really understand the gospel.
- **Paul’s Courage.** Instead of sprinting to safety, Paul courageously speaks to the crowd. And in his speaking he doesn’t skip the unpopular parts of his testimony. As Tony Merida says, “We need both truth and love. Only churches that love people and stand firmly on the gospel against the winds of culture will have anything to offer this broken world.”
- **Paul’s Clarity.** Paul shares his story in a way that the crowd would see their reflection in his testimony—their sin in his sin, their need in his need, their Savior in his Savior. We want to craft our testimony so that the gospel truths embedded throughout it are seen as universally true and applicable.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Are you “prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in you”? How can you prepare yourself?
3. Why is a personal testimony a powerful tool for communicating gospel truth in our current, cultural climate? What must you guard against when you share your testimony in our culture?
4. Look over the handout “How to Craft An Evangelistic Testimony” as a group.

## Crafting Your Evangelistic Testimony

In the book of Acts, Paul uses his personal testimony on two critical occasions to gain a hearing for the gospel (Acts 22 & 26). While both of these circumstances were less than ideal, Paul was able to capture the crowd's attention by sharing his personal story. Yet it was clear that Paul wasn't simply sharing *his* story, but his personal encounter with *the* Story of all-Creation -- the story of God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

This is our goal. We want to be able to craft our personal testimony so that we are able to gain a hearing and share the hope we have in Christ. To do this properly, we should follow some simple guidelines.

### 1) Be Clear

Paul's testimony in Acts 26 follows a clear structure. He began by sharing his life before Jesus (26:4-11). He then shared his personal encounter with the truth of Jesus (26:12-18). Lastly, he spoke about his life after his commitment to follow Jesus (26:19-23).

It is wise to use a similar structure in our personal testimonies. This simple structure will make our testimony easy to follow. More importantly, it will allow the truth of the gospel to be grasped more clearly – that we were sinners who deserved to die; that Christ Jesus has died and rose in our place as a substitute; and that we have trusted in him and have been rescued by him.

### 2) Be Honest

Paul's testimony presented an honest picture of his life, both before and after he encountered the risen Christ. Our testimonies must be honest too. Be honest about who you were before Jesus, not glossing over or exaggerating your sinfulness. In the same way, be honest about the person you are as a follower of Christ; that you are far from sinless, but that God is transforming you from the inside out.

Being honest means that if you weren't saved in a jail cell after a bloody brawl in a bikers' bar, then you don't pretend like you were for the sake of an 'exciting' testimony. God doesn't use an exciting testimony any more than he uses a boring one, but He delights to use an honest testimony. So be honest.

### 3) Be Purposeful

Paul shared his testimony for a purpose – so that others would embrace the rescuing grace of Jesus Christ. In 26:28, King Agrippa asks if Paul is trying to persuade him to be a Christian in such a short amount of time, and Paul responds, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." Paul's purpose in sharing his testimony was that they too would follow Jesus.

This must be our goal as well. We want to share an *evangelistic* testimony, so our aim is always for our hearers to see themselves in our story – their sin in our sin, their need in our need, and their Savior in our Savior. Therefore we want to craft our testimony in such a way that the gospel truths embedded throughout are properly seen as universally true and applicable. In our morally relativistic, individualistic age, we must exercise deliberate caution that our testimony isn't interpreted as merely *our* story, but our encounter with *the* story of God.

**YOUR LIFE BEFORE CHRIST:**

Key Theological Truths: God’s holy standard; you lived a life defined by disobedience and sin against God; you didn’t see yourself the way the Bible presents you to be

False Assumptions to Expose: that you are a ‘good person’; that God doesn’t judge or that He grades on a curve

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**YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST:**

Key Theological Truths: Your inability to save yourself; Christ’s perfect life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection; repentance, faith, and obedience to Jesus as Savior and Lord; justification by faith alone

False Assumptions to Expose: that good works will save you; that ‘believing’ in Jesus is just mental agreement with facts

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**YOUR LIFE AFTER CHRIST:**

Key Theological Truths: Your new, transformed life with Jesus; on-going struggle with sin; your new allegiance to Christ

False Assumptions to Expose: that Christians think they are perfect; that becoming a Christian doesn’t have to result in a changed life

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**Example:**

I grew up in a Christian family, attending church regularly from the time I was a baby. When most people looked at me they thought I was a really good kid. I never got involved in the party scene or got in trouble with the law; I was respectful and kind. In fact, I thought I was a pretty good person too, and I looked down on other people. But as I read the Bible, God began to show me all kinds of sin in my own life – pride, self-righteousness, lust, and anger. I learned that God wasn't going to judge me according to the standard of other people's behavior, but according to His perfection. Jesus said that we must be perfect just as God is perfect (Mt. 5:48). In fact the Bible says that whoever keeps the whole law of God but fails at just one point is guilty before God (Jam. 2:10). As I looked at my own life in light of God's standard I saw that I failed, and that I could never make myself perfect like God required. God showed me that I had broken His commands and that I was guilty and deserving of punishment.

Yet as I read the Bible and went to church, God began to show me something else. I learned that Jesus Christ, God's Son, was sent by God to save people like me. Jesus lived the perfect life that God requires and willingly died on the Cross as a substitute for sinners. I began to see that Jesus took my punishment on the Cross and died for me the death that I deserved. And that by raising Jesus from the dead, God accepted the sacrifice that Jesus offered for my sins. God was willing to forgive me for all my sins and give to me all of Christ's obedience if I would submit my life to Jesus.

And then one Sunday during church as the pastor encouraged us to put our trust in Jesus for our salvation, God opened my heart to truly understand what that meant. On that Sunday all these truths I was learning clicked into place. I turned away from living my life like I always had – thinking I was a good person while clinging tightly to my secret sins – and I put my only hope in Jesus and what he had done for me on the Cross. On that day, I submitted my life to Jesus and pledged to follow him in obedient love. By turning from my sins and embracing Jesus as my Savior, God forgave me of all of my sins and give me new life with Him.

It has been many years since that Sunday, but I am still striving to follow Jesus with obedient love. I still struggle with sin. I still lose my temper and think self-righteous thoughts. I am far from perfect. Yet even though I'm not perfect, I am different than who I was. God has slowly but surely been changing me from the inside out, enabling me to live a life that is pleasing to him. As John Newton, the man who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, once said, "I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. And by the grace of God, I am what I am."

[Insert person's name], thank you for letting me tell you my story about what God has done in my life. But I want you to know that what God has done to me, He will most certainly do for you. Do you want to learn more about the forgiveness that Jesus offers?