

Main Idea: If we are going to be ready to make the most of the opportunities God sends our way, we need to engage in three actions, as Paul did in Acts 21:37-22:29.

- I. We must see the opportunities (21:37-40).
 - A. Paul spoke to the commander (37-38).
 - B. Paul asked to speak to the crowd (39-40).
- II. We must speak (22:1-21).
 - A. Paul shared about his life before Christ (1-5).
 - B. Paul shared how he came to know Christ (6-16).
 - C. Paul shared how Christ changed his life (17-21).
 1. A good testimony is conversational, not preachy.
 2. A good testimony is brief.
 3. A good testimony establishes common ground.
 4. A good testimony points people to Christ.
 5. A good testimony leaves the door open for more.
- III. We must submit the outcome to God (22:22-29).
 - A. God is at work.
 - B. People will respond.
 1. Some will resist.
 2. Some will want to know more.

Application: If we know Christ...

1. We have a story to tell.
2. We need to tell the story.
3. We can begin today!

The gospel is on trial in our world today. This is nothing new, as we’re seeing in our current series in Acts 21-28. In this final section of Acts there are (according to my count) eleven trials. We see...

- Paul on trial before a Roman tribune named Claudius Lysias (23:26) in ch 21
- Paul on trial before a Jewish mob in ch 22
- Paul on trial before the Roman tribune again in ch 22b
- Paul on trial before a Jewish council in ch 23
- Paul on trial before Governor Felix in chs 23b-24
- Paul on trial before Governor Festus in ch 25
- Paul on trial before King Agrippa and Bernice in chs 25b-26
- Paul on trial before a Roman centurion, a ship captain, and crew in ch 27
- Paul on trial before local inhabitants on the island of Malta in ch 28a
- Paul on trial before Jews in Rome in 28b
- Paul waiting for his trial before the Roman Caesar himself as the book ends in ch 28

When God’s servants go on trial, is it a good thing or a bad thing? Does it mean that something has gone wrong? That’s a relevant question in light of what’s happening today in West Lafayette, and a recent law in Canada, and ongoing oppression of Jesus-followers in China, Afghanistan, and many other places. And how should we respond?

We’ll find the answer in today’s message, “*Be Ready to Give an Answer*”.

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-17

You’re sitting at your desk at work and a partner says to you, “You got a minute. I just found out my father has cancer. You know I’m not the religious type, but this news has really turned my world upside down. You lost your father last year. How did you cope?”

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2003.

You're at your locker at school and a classmate says, "Man, it's been a lousy week. Nothing's going right. I can't take it any more."

While in the checkout line at the grocery you notice the person in front of you struggling to lift a sack of potatoes to the counter, so you help her. To which she says, "Thanks, that was kind of you. It's hard to find people who really care about you these days."

What do those three scenarios have in common? They are all *opportunities*. "Opportunities for what?" you ask. They are opportunities to present Christ to people in need.

Opportunities to represent and present Christ to others are all around us. The Bible says that the Spirit of God is at work preparing people to listen. That is a given. And so is this. His plan is to use *us* to reach them.

But we must be ready. "Be ready always to give an answer of the hope that is in you. Sometimes we miss the opportunities, quite frankly, because *we are not ready*. Oh, we see the opening but just flat out freeze up.

Evangelist Leighton Ford offers this perspective, "What makes people hesitate to share their faith? Here are some of the fears that have been mentioned to me: "I am afraid I might do more harm than good." "I don't know what to say." "I may not be able to give snappy answers to tricky questions." "I may seem bigoted." "I may invade someone's privacy." "I am afraid I might fail." "I am afraid I might be a hypocrite." Perhaps the most common fear, however, is that of being rejected. A survey was given to those attending training sessions for the Billy Graham crusade in Detroit. One question asked, "What is your greatest hindrance in witnessing?" 9% said they were too busy to remember to do it. 28% felt the lack of real information to share. None said they didn't really care. 12% said their own lives were not speaking as they should. But by far the largest group were the 51% whose biggest problem was the fear of how the other person would react!"²

One of the first things I heard after I became a Christian was, "If you really love Jesus, you need to tell others what He has done for you. Be a witness." The reason I heard that counsel—and you probably heard it, too—is because it's biblical.

"You shall be my witnesses," Jesus said (Acts 1:8). Colossians 4:6 commands, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

But to give an answer, you must have an answer. To be a witness you must know how to witness. And the Lord graciously shows us how to do that in today's text.

My prayer is that as a result of this message, and the discussion to follow in our community groups, we will be better prepared to share Christ with others when we find ourselves on trial for the sake of the gospel.

We've been following the apostle Paul for weeks now in our study of Acts. We left off the last time as Paul was arrested for being misrepresented by an angry mob in the Jerusalem temple. They just about beat him to death before the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias (23:6 gives his name), intervened. He, along with a host of his soldiers grabbed Paul, bound him with chains, and carried him towards the fortress of Antonio, with the crowd shouting, "Away with him!"

Not exactly a good opportunity for a witness, some would say. Actually, to Paul it was a perfect opportunity, as we'll see.

Be ready always. What's involved in being ready? If we are going to be ready to make the most of the opportunities God sends our way, we need to engage in three actions, as Paul did in Acts 21:37-22:29.

² [Leighton Ford, Motivations of the Early Church for Witness, Good News is for Sharing, P. 25-7.](#)

I. We must see the opportunities (21:37-40).

That is, we need to look around us and *see the opportunities* God is putting in our lives to spread the gospel story.

The event we're about to study is an important one. It serves as a transition point in the book of Acts, for here Paul passes from being a free man to being a prisoner of the Roman government, a position he'll hold until the end of the book. The event also demonstrates the importance of being ready.

As our story begins, Paul is at the top of the steps, with the mob behind him. But he saw more than a mob. He saw an opportunity. So he responded in two ways.

A. Paul spoke to the commander (37-38). In the NIV, "As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander [ESV 'the tribune'], 'May I say something to you?' 'Do you speak Greek?' he replied. 'Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?'"

A couple of things Paul did surprised the commander. First, he was polite and respectful even in these tense circumstances. Second, he spoke in Greek. That caught Claudius Lysias off guard for Greek was the language of cultured, educated men, not criminals such as he assumed Paul to be.³

Actually, Lysias made an assumption based on recent happenings in Jerusalem. Barclay explains, "Somewhere around A.D. 54 an Egyptian had led a band of desperate men out to the Mount of Olives with a promise that he could make the walls fall down before him. The Romans had dealt swiftly and efficiently with his followers but he himself had escaped..."⁴ This rebel, as Lysias reports, had 4,000 terrorists that followed him. The word "terrorists" ["murderers" in the KJV] is the Greek term *sikarion* which derives from the Latin word *sica* for "dagger." There was actually a terrorist group at this time who hated both the Romans and Jewish collaborators, and used the following strategy. They would mingle in crowds, with a dagger hidden under their cloak, stab their victim, and then melt away into the crowd to avoid detection. These terrorists were especially active during Jewish festivals, like the present one, Pentecost.

The commander thought Paul was one of these terrorists, perhaps the Egyptian himself, and that the crowd had caught him in the act of murder. In verse 39 Paul denied the association, clarifying, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city." In other words, "I'm not an Egyptian and I'm certainly no terrorist. I can speak Greek because I'm a citizen of Tarsus, no insignificant city." Tarsus was a cultural center with a university rivaling the one in Athens. Paul's mention of Tarsus explained his knowledge of Greek.

What Paul did next must have shocked Lysias.

B. Paul asked to speak to the crowd (39-40). Verse 39 again, "Paul answered, ...Please let me speak to the people." Remember this is an irrational mob that just a matter of seconds ago tried to rip Paul apart. Why did he want to speak to these furious folks? Did he really think he could change their opinion of him? I don't think so. But it wasn't their opinion of *him* that mattered. What mattered is that they needed to hear the truth about someone else.

Verse 40—"Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic." In the ESV, "He addressed them in the Hebrew language."

³ MacArthur, p. 263.

⁴ Barclay, p. 158.

Paul's actions challenge me. He doesn't see a mob of people who hate him. He sees the faces of individuals who need to hear the truth about Jesus. And he doesn't condemn them for their harsh treatment of him, for he was once just like them, as he'll soon share.

He *sees* them. He sees them as they are—lost, depraved, blind, and in need of hearing the only news that can change lost, depraved, and blind people.

If we're going to be ready, we can't give way to fear. Fear causes us to freeze up.

There was a test conducted by a university where 10 students were placed in a room. 3 lines of varying length were drawn on a card. The students were told to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the longest line. But 9 of the students had been instructed beforehand to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the second longest line. 1 student was the stooge. The usual reaction of the stooge was to put his hand up, look around, and realizing he was all alone, pull it back down. This happened 75% of the time, with students from grade school through high school. The researchers concluded that many would rather be president than be right.⁵

If we're going to be ready to make Christ known, we need *gospel boldness*. That starts with *seeing* the opportunities around us and, by God's grace, making the most of them no matter what the personal cost.

Hugh Lattimer once preached before King Henry VIII. Henry was greatly displeased by the boldness in the sermon and ordered Lattimer to preach again on the following Sunday and apologize for the offence he had given. The next Sunday, after reading his text, he thus began his sermon: "Hugh Lattimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life, if thou offendest. Therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest--upon Whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God, Who is all-present and Who beholdeth all thy ways and Who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully." He then preached the same sermon he had preached the preceding Sunday--and with considerably more energy.⁶

Why did Paul speak to the mob that day? When God placed an opportunity in front of him, he *saw* it. If we're going to be ready, we too must *see*.

II. We must speak (22:1-21).

Seeing the opportunities is good, but it's not enough. Once we see them, we must make the most of them. Often, that means we must *speak*. Lost people can't read our minds. Faith comes by *hearing*. They need to hear, which means we need to speak.

When Paul spoke that day, in essence what he did was share his testimony. If you are a Christian, you have a testimony. It's your personal story of how God brought you to Himself, how He rescued you from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His dear Son. Your testimony is one of the most powerful tools you have to witness for Jesus. What makes a testimony so potent is that no one can deny it. It happened! It happened to you! Granted, the hearer can resist Christ, but he cannot escape the reality of what you are saying, for it happened!

What's unfortunate is that many Christians can't share their testimony. Oh, they have a story to share, but they've never taken the time to think it through so they can articulate it clearly. Paul's testimony here takes 2 minutes and 25 seconds to read. In less than

⁵ C. Swindoll, [March 27, 1984](#).

⁶ M. Cocoris, [Evangelism, A Biblical Approach](#), Moody, 1984, p. 126.

three minutes Paul shared the story of what the Lord did in his life, and we should prepare ourselves to do the same.

A good testimony, as Paul demonstrates, should include three components.

A. Paul shared about his life before Christ (1-5). “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.” Stop for a moment. Do those words sound familiar? They are nearly the same words that Stephen used to begin his defense some 25 years earlier, in the same city, before some of the same people, including Paul himself.

Notice Luke’s comment in verse 2, “When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic [ESV & KJV says ‘Hebrew’], they became very quiet.” Why did Paul switch from Greek to Hebrew? Because it’s the heart language of his audience. Paul speaks as a Jew to these Jews. When he later shared his testimony with King Agrippa (ch 26), the story line obviously remained the same, but he adapted it to that particular setting.

That’s one of the wonderful things about your testimony. It’s the story of what God has done to bring you to Himself. But that story is full of details, and you must be selective, for some details are more pertinent to one audience than another.

In fact, the record of Paul’s testimony appears in one form or another five times in the New Testament: three times in Acts (chapter 9, here, and chapter 26), and twice in Paul’s letters (Philippians 3 and 1 Timothy 1). And each time, Paul emphasizes different aspects of his story, depending on his audience.

Notice the first thing Paul said to his hostile Jewish audience. In verse 3, “Then Paul said: ‘I am a Jew.’” They needed to hear that. They wrongly thought he had betrayed his Jewish heritage. No, he says. I am a Jew.

He continues (3-5), “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today [Gamaliel, of course, was a famous rabbi of which they all knew]. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.”

Don’t miss how Paul used the beginning of his testimony to connect with his audience. He’s building a bridge. No, you can’t force people to cross the bridge that leads to Christ, but if you build a good bridge, you can take Christ right to them!

Paul called himself a brother, identified himself as a Jew, and told them he was trained in a reputable Jewish school. Then he shared how he used to do what his listeners were presently doing, namely, he tried to get rid of followers of Jesus. In fact, Paul exposed some very embarrassing facts from his past. *I used to arrest Christians. I used to throw them in prison. I even used to kill them.*

Those were painful memories that Paul wished he could forget. But he couldn’t. So he did something better. He used those memories of past sins to reach people for Christ, thus magnifying the grace of God.

On another occasion, when he wrote down his testimony and sent it to Timothy, he had this to say about his past (1 Timothy 1:15-16): “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”

A person cannot be saved until he or she comes to grips with his or her sin. Therefore, in sharing your testimony, be honest about your sin. Be honest that you were (and still are!) a sinner, just like they are. Of course, there’s more to the story, praise be to God, for you’ve experienced God’s remedy for sin.

And this brings us to the second component of a good testimony. First, Paul shared about his life before Christ.

B. Paul shared how he came to know Christ (6-16). Listen to verses 6-16:

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and 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 will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. “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 [note that Paul doesn’t refer to Ananias as a Christian, though he was, but in a way that would establish credibility with the Jews]. 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 fathers 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 men 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.’”

Notice once again that all Paul did was to tell a story, *his* story. He simply presented the facts of what had happened to him. His listeners couldn’t deny the facts. In the end they wouldn’t like the facts, and would hate the implications of the facts, but they couldn’t deny the validity of the facts. What they heard is what happened to Paul.

Of course, Paul didn’t just tell them about himself. He used the story of his life to tell them about Jesus. He clearly put the spotlight on Jesus.

He even included the dialogue. I said, “Who are you Lord?” He said, “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” He said, “Get up and go into Damascus.” And so on.

There’s something compelling about a story. Stories are interesting, and if well told, compelling. That’s especially true of your salvation story.

Paul knows what these Jews are thinking. He knows that the official Jewish position was that Jesus had been an imposter whose body was stolen by the disciples after his crucifixion, and that the disciples started the rumor about his resurrection. That was the position that Paul himself embraced at one time. Until one day in AD 35 when he had a personal encounter with the Person he thought was dead!

The story speaks for itself. “Fellows Jews, I know you’re struggling to believe in Jesus. I did more than struggle. I tried to get rid of anybody who said they believed in Him. Until He broke into my life, dropped me to my knees, and said, ‘Enough! I’m taking control of your life now!’”

By telling the story of what happened in *his* life, Paul was actually showing his listeners what needed to happen in *their* lives. “God told me (and he’s saying the same to you today), ‘What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name (16).’”

It’s interesting that Paul mentions baptism here. Is he saying that baptism is required for the washing away of sins? Whenever we do Bible interpretation, we must compare Scripture with Scripture, for the whole of Scripture forms the framework by which we understand particular Scriptures. And the whole of Scripture makes it clear that a person is saved, not by baptism, and not by any ceremony or work, but by a Holy Spirit produced response known as faith, specifically, faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

This is key. How is a person saved? By doing something good? No, but by calling on the One who did the good work for us. We are saved by repenting of our sin and placing our total trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished for our sin.

Where does baptism enter the picture? Baptism is the first visible evidence of an invisible faith. Notice verse 16 again (ESV), “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” What washes away sin? The baptism? No. The calling on his name.⁷ The baptism comes after the calling. The baptism is the first tangible proof that the calling is sincere and real. I say *first* because there will be other evidences, for Jesus said, “Go, make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to *observe all things I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19-20).”

And this is Paul’s story. According to Acts 9:17, he was filled with the Holy Spirit *before* he was baptized, which indicates his salvation preceded his baptism. Again, it’s the “calling on Jesus’ name,” and not the baptism that produces the cleansing from sin.⁸

In sharing his testimony, Paul shared about his life before Christ, then about how he came to know Christ. There’s one more component of a good testimony...

C. Paul shared how Christ changed his life (17-21). “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ he said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’” “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these men 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 the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

If there’s anything that Paul’s testimony makes clear, it’s this. *Jesus Christ changed him*. Prior to coming to know Christ he was a blasphemer and violent killer of Christians. But when Christ entered his life, that all changed. He went from hating to being hated, from hunting Christians to being the hunted, from blaspheming the name of Jesus to preaching it. He was a changed man, and the only explanation for this change was Christ.

Most of us in this room would call ourselves Christians, which means, we should have what Paul had, a testimony. But answer this. Do we? Do we have a testimony? Has our life really changed, and can we tell people that in all honesty?

And if it’s true, that raises a second question. Can we share this testimony? By that I mean, can we share the story of what Christ has done for us in clear and simple terms?

As D. L. Moody walked down a Chicago street one day, he saw a man leaning against a lamppost. The evangelist gently put his hand on the man's shoulder and asked him if he was a Christian. The fellow raised his fists and angrily exclaimed, "Mind your own business!"

"I'm sorry if I've offended you," said Moody, "but to be very frank, that IS my business!"⁹

Friends, if Christ has saved us, it is our business to make Him known to others, and sharing our testimony is a great place to begin. I encourage all of us to write out our testimony and practice sharing it. Here are some guidelines.

1. A good testimony is conversational, not preachy. You’re telling a story. Don’t use the pronoun “you” (as in, “*You* need Jesus.”). Use the first person singular “I” and

⁷ Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translates verse 16, “Having arisen, be baptized and wash away your sins, having previously called upon His Name.”

⁸ Wiersbe’s explanation is helpful, p. 492.

⁹ [Source Unknown](#).

“me” (as in, “When I was a young boy I thought I was a Christian because my family went to church, but then I learned from God’s Word that Jesus died for *me*.”).

2. *A good testimony is brief.* Paul shared his testimony while standing on the temple steps, and did so in about three minutes. We can share ours while standing in the aisle at the grocery store, or when we’re waiting for the ballgame to begin. That is, we can *if it’s brief*.

3. *A good testimony establishes common ground.* “I am a Jew. I was trained in the Law. Gamaliel was my tutor.” Those pieces of information were hooks that captured Paul’s Jewish audience. When you share your testimony, do the same.

There are a lot of people who go to church today that don’t know Jesus. I used to be one. I used to have religion but not a relationship with Jesus. When I’m talking with such a person, I emphasize that. It’s common ground for us.

4. *A good testimony points people to Christ.* Again, do it conversationally. “You know, I used to think that if I lived a good life, I’d make it to heaven. But then I went to a church that actually taught the Bible, and I discovered something. God sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue sinners. I learned that the reason He died wasn’t merely to give me an example. He died because I need a Savior. And He rose again to show His death was sufficient to save me from my sins.”

5. *A good testimony leaves the door open for more.* The purpose of a testimony isn’t to share everything you know about Jesus. A good testimony creates interest for more. Sometimes I’ll conclude my story by saying, “Getting to know Jesus was the greatest thing that ever happened in my life. Maybe some time we can talk more, that is, if you’re interested.”

If we’re going to be ready to maximize the opportunities God sends our way, we need to *see* the opportunities. Then we need to *speak*, and tell the story. Then...

III. We must submit the outcome to God (22:22-29).

By submitting, I mean we need leave the results up to God. And there will be results, for two reasons.

A. God is at work. In eternity past God predestined to save sinners (Eph. 1:5; Rom 8:29-30), and that’s precisely what He is doing. Two thousand years ago He sent His Son to rescue a people for His glory. Then He sent His Spirit into the world, who is at work today convicting sinners of their need for Christ (John 16:8ff.), performing the miracle of regeneration in their hearts (Titus 3:5), so that they cry out in saving faith.

We know this. God is at work. The Bible says so. Therefore...

B. People will respond. In fact, every time His Word is shared there will be a response. Not maybe. There will be. People will respond in one of two ways.

1. *Some will resist.* “No! Stop! You’re wrong! Not for me!” they will say. On the other hand...

2. *Some will want to know more.* Because of God’s sovereign, gracious work, they will show interest, and ask questions, and wonder if what happened to you can happen to them.

In response to Paul’s testimony, it was the former. Notice verse 22, “The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, ‘Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!’”

Everything seemed fine until Paul used what Swindoll calls “the G-word.” Then the listeners went ballistic. Did he just say *Gentiles*? Of all the nerve! We are *Jews*, and we

have nothing to do with Gentiles. We don't eat with them. We don't let our children go to school with them. We don't even like them! Get rid of this traitor!¹⁰

If you think about it, had Paul not uttered that one word, he might have been set free. My hunch is he knew that, but his goal in life wasn't personal safety. His goal was to know Christ and help others know Him, no matter what the cost.

They said he was anti-Jewish. That wasn't true, and he worked hard to correct that misunderstanding in this speech. But there was something he couldn't hide, something he knew would infuriate them. He was devoted to the task of reaching Gentiles, a task that he knew wasn't popular with his Jewish friends. Yet it was part of his story, because the Lord made it part of his story, so he told it.

Let that sink in. As Wiersbe explains, "Paul would rather be a prisoner than give up his burden for lost souls and for missions!"¹¹

Can that be said of us? Our assignment is to preach Christ, and then leave the results, whether good or bad, up to God. See, speak, then submit.

For Paul, here were the results, verses 23-29, "As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains."

Why didn't Paul didn't mention his Roman citizenship sooner? I don't know. Perhaps he thought it would alienate the Jews. But now he uses it to establish credibility with another audience that needs to hear about Christ. The Romans.

I sense sarcasm in the Roman Tribune's voice here. It was a crime to falsely claim to be a Roman citizen, and if a person did so they would be executed. Paul didn't exactly look like an upstanding Roman citizen at this point, bloodied from the mob's beating, clothes torn.

"I had to pay a big sum of money for my citizenship. You don't look like you've even got enough money for the lawyer fees you're going to be paying!"

To this Paul responded, "I didn't buy my citizenship. I was born a Roman citizen."¹²

And that little discovery quickly changed the mood of the Roman soldiers. As speedily as their hands could move, they removed the chains and backed off, for they knew it was illegal to scourge a Roman citizen. In fact, it was illegal to put a Roman citizen in chains without a preliminary hearing, a crime they had just committed.

So here's the question. Did Paul give a successful defense in Acts 22? You say, "I don't think he changed the crowd's opinion. It seems like he failed."

But wait. Is it our job to change people? No. It's to exalt Christ in every situation and leave the results to Him. To see, then speak, then submit.

Think about it from this perspective. It's true that Paul lost his freedom that day in Jerusalem. But he also caused a whole city to think about Jesus Christ and what He alone

¹⁰ Charles Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, p. 250.

¹¹ Wiersbe, p. 492.

¹² Apparently, Paul's father was a Roman citizen.

can do. What's more, because he spoke boldly for Jesus in Acts 22, he has opened the door for many more conversations about Jesus in the months and years ahead, as we'll see.

Let's make it personal. Campus Crusade founder, Bill Bright, observed, "Millions of surveys which we have helped to take around the world indicate that approximately 98 percent of the Christians do not regularly introduce others to the Savior."¹³

Application: If we know Christ...three things are true.

1. *We have a story to tell.* David Brainerd said, "I care not where I go or how I live or what I endure so that I may save souls. When I sleep, I dream of them; when I awake, they are first in my thoughts." Dear friends, if we know Christ, we have a story to tell!

2. *We need to tell the story.* We must see the situations, and then *speak!*

3. *We can begin today!*

In many of the songs in our hymnbook, the writers put into practice what Paul did. They tell their own stories of how Jesus saved them, and they do in a way that invites others to receive Him too. We're going to sing one of these "Testimony and Praise" songs as we respond to God's Word today. Back in the late 1800s, an American pastor named Elisha Hoffman wrote a very simple song (only one word has more than two syllables, "wondrously") called "Glory to His Name." It goes like this...

*Down at the cross where my Savior died,
Down where for cleansing from sin I cried,
There to my heart was the blood applied;
Glory to his name!*

*I am so wondrously saved from sin,
Jesus so sweetly abides within;
There at the cross where he took me in;
Glory to his name!*

*Oh, precious fountain that saves from sin,
I am so glad I have entered in;
There Jesus saves me and keeps me clean;
Glory to his name!*

*Come to this fountain so rich and sweet,
Cast thy poor soul at the Savior's feet;
Plunge in today, and be made complete;
Glory to his name!*

*Refrain:
Glory to his name,
Glory to his name;
There to my heart was the blood applied;
Glory to his name!*

Closing Song: #527 "Glory to His Name" (all four verses)

¹³ Bill Bright, president of Campus Crusade for Christ, quoted in [Why Christians Sin](#), J.K. Johnston, Discovery House, 1992, p. 140.

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*Be Ready to Give an Answer.*" This is what we see Paul doing in Acts 21:37-22:29. Take time to read again the defense he gave before a Roman tribune and before hostile Jews. What stands out most to you from Paul's defense?
2. In order to be ready to give an answer, we must first *see the opportunities*. What opportunities did Paul see in today's passage? What are some opportunities that you are seeing in your life?
3. In order to give an answer, we must, secondly, *speak*. What types of things did Paul talk about when he shared his testimony in 22:1-21? What effect did the sharing of his salvation story have on his listeners? What effect does it have on you?
4. We learned, thirdly, that when we give a verbal defense for Christ, we must *submit the outcome to God*. What does that mean, and why is it important?
5. If we know Christ, we (like Paul) have a salvation story. One of the ways we can prepare ourselves to share that story with non-believers is to share it first with believers. Have two or three people in your group share their salvation stories by following the pattern Paul gave in Acts 22.