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REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul in Route to Rome, Part 3

Paul Delivers His Defense in Jerusalem

Acts 21:37-22:11

April 27, 2008

I. **Paul Prepares to Speak**

II. **Paul Delivers His Defense**

a. **He Relates to the Crowd**

b. **He Speaks of His Encounter with Christ**

c. **He Declares the Glory of Christ**

- ◆ During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ was referred to by many names: Rabbi, Master, Lord, God, Teacher. Yet, upon reflection of the ministry of Christ, He can also appropriately, be referred to as the supreme *educator*. Certainly, for many, this may sound like one is reducing Christ to the level of a “good man.” Yet, when one understands the true meaning of the word, it begins to make greater sense.
- ◆ The word, *education*, literally means “to lead out of.” Consequently, not only does Jesus Christ perfectly fulfill this description, but so do many throughout the Scriptures whose actions ultimately point to the work of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ For example, Joseph lead his brothers out of famine-stricken Canaan and into the fertile Egyptian delta.
- ◆ Moses lead God’s people out of Egyptian bondage and [back] into the promised land – Canaan.
- ◆ Esther lead her people out of a death sentence and into freedom.
- ◆ And in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul [especially here in Chapters 21-22], sought to lead the Jews out of enslavement to the Law and into Christ – the fulfillment of the Law.

- ◆ Yet, each of these “leadings out” point to Jesus Christ. For it was Christ, through the Incarnation, who lead us out of darkness and into light. He lead us out of sin and death and into life.
- ◆ In fact, as Augustine, wrote in the 3rd Century, it was the Human Nature of Christ, which we can see, that led us to the Divine Nature of Christ, which we cannot see.
- ◆ Consequently, in his defense before the Jewish people, Paul bears witness to how Christ “led him out” of darkness; giving us today yet another example as to how we are to bear witness to the work of our Savior in our individual lives.

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I. Paul Prepares to Speak

- Luke writes, in **Verses 37-38**, “As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, ‘May I say something to you?’ And he said, ‘Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?’”
 - The Roman commander, here, was Claudius Lysias. He was an honest, open-minded, albeit pagan, soldier.
 - Then, Paul asked Lysias if he could speak. Paul’s “language was in polite, polished Greek, and the tribune was amazed that he would speak Greek in the first place.” [John Polhill]
- Then, in **Verse 38**, Lysias reveals that he had assumed that Paul was a certain, infamous Egyptian.
 - The Egyptian in question was likely a revolutionary that even Josephus wrote of. About three years prior to this scene, an Egyptian insurrectionist, claiming to be a prophet, gathered together about thirty thousand men in the wilderness. The false prophet then led these 30,000 [according to Josephus] “dupes” (*epatemenon*) from the wilderness to the Mount of Olives, promising them that the walls would fall at his command, just like the walls of Jericho. Then, according to the Egyptian, they would be able to easily overcome the Roman army in the city.
 - However, rather than the walls crumbling to the ground, the Roman procurator of Judea, brought in thousands of troops, killing at least four hundred of the “dupes” and took another two hundred captive.
 - The Egyptian leader/impostor then fled along with thousands of others back into the wilderness. In fact, during this time, it was not uncommon for false prophets to arise and lead their followers into the wilderness, promising signs, wonders, and miracles.

- This incident highlights political unrest and tension that marked this period of time in Jerusalem’s turbulent history. [NOTE: Interestingly, Luke speaks of four thousand men; whereas, Josephus speaks of thirty thousand. The truth is probably closer to Luke’s number as Josephus is known to have, at certain times, exaggerated his numbers.]
 - Also, here Luke refers to the followers of the Egyptian false prophet at *sicarii*, that is, terrorists. Their name [*sicarii*] is derived from the Greek word for “dagger” [*sica*]. The reason for this is that the *sicarii* terrorists were Jewish zealots known for mingling in and among the crowds in Jerusalem, especially during the Feasts/Festivals, and murdering their pro-Roman political enemies by stabbing them with daggers. Then they would stealthily disappearing into the crowds.
 - In fact, these terrorists had murdered the former high priest Jonathan [a pro-Roman Sadducee] and made other pro-Roman Jews their targets.
 - Consequently, the Roman commander, Lysias, had, understandably thought that Paul was either the Egyptian false prophet himself, or one of his followers [given the chaotic nature of the crowd].
- Then, in **Verse 39**, “But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.’”
- So, rather than an obscure Egyptian terrorist, Paul demonstrates that he is actually a cultured, Hellenistic Jew.
 - He does so by stating that he is “a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city...”
 - According to Darrell Bock, “Paul’s home town was known as a cultural center of Hellenism, rhetoric, and Stoic philosophy.”
 - During the first century, Tarsus was one of the great cities of the Asia Minor southern coast.
 - It boasted a population of several hundred thousand and was also known for its textile industry and was a center of trade.
 - Not only this, but it also claimed a rich literary and philosophical tradition.
 - Therefore, not only did Paul’s eloquent Greek, but his place of origin, dismissed any idea that he was an uneducated, itinerant brigand.

II. Paul Delivers His Defense

- After stating his place of origin, Luke writes, in **Verse 40**, “When he [Paul] had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when here was a great hush, he spoken to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,”
 - This is a fascinating scene, as Paul’s simple motion brought a hush over the crowd.
 - F.F. Bruce writes, “His securing their silence with a characteristic gesture of his hand is probably intended by Luke to bear witness to the power of his personality.”
 - Then, Luke writes, “...he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect...”
 - One can imagine the impact this must have had on the crowd. Paul, once again, spoke to them “on their level” in a manner in which they would have understood...in their own language.
 - Most scholars today agree that the language of first-century Jerusalem would have been Western Aramaic. Furthermore, this would have been not only the language of the Jews in Palestine, but the language of non-Greeks in Western Asia as well.

a. He Relates to the Crowd

- Then, in **22:1**, Paul begins to speak, saying, “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.”
 - Paul opens his defense by addressing his hearers as “Brethren and fathers.”
 - This is the same address that Stephen used in his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:2.
 - In so doing, both Stephen and Paul were demonstrating a connection and relation with his hearers. Paul was not simply some radical insurrectionist, he was a Jewish brethren.
 - Then, Paul says, “...hear my defense...”
 - The word for “defense” here is *apologia* [Greek, ἀπολογία].
 - It is the root for our word *apologetics* [which is the field dedicated to “defending” the Christian faith from attacks outside the faith].

- Yet, in the classic, “apologetic” fashion, Paul does not “apologize” nor does he become “defensive” because of the false accusations made against him.
 - Consequently, rather than passionately denying the false charges made against him; Paul passionately *affirmed* what he *did* believe.
 - In fact, he does not even address the particular charge that sparked the riot – that he dishonored the temple by bringing a Gentile into the sanctuary. Instead, he clearly demonstrated his commitment to Judaism.
- After Paul addresses the crowd, Luke writes, in **Verse 2**, “And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet...”
- Then, Paul said, in **Verses 3-5**, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.”
 - Paul begins by stating the most important truth the crowd needs to hear: “I am a Jew.”
 - Yet, Paul does not end there. He is a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and brought up, raised, in “this city”, that is in **Jerusalem**.
 - In other words, he was not just another Hellenistic Diaspora Jew. He was a pedigree Jew, raised in the Holy City.
 - Yet, there is more. He was educated by Gamaliel, “strictly according to the law of our fathers.”
 - Acts 22:3 provides the only reference in all of the New Testament to Paul’s education at the feet of Gamaliel.
 - Gamaliel the Elder was the leading rabbinical scholar of the first century. His teaching was representative of the school of Hillel.
 - It would be difficult to describe, in modern-day terms, the significance of Paul’s education under Gamaliel. The only equivalent may be if someone attempted to establish his educational credentials by appealing to his multiple degrees from Harvard.

- Thus, given his background and education, Paul was undoubtedly a Pharisee...a strict, law-abiding Jew (Galatians 1:14; Romans 10:2; Philippians 3:6).
 - In fact, there is a subtle irony here: Paul's life prior to his conversions was marked with a zealous commitment to the law that exceeded those listening to him [and accusing him of violating the Law]!
 - Notice, as well, that Paul states that he was “brought up strictly...according to the law of *our* fathers.”
 - This was, yet again, an attempt on the part of Paul to show his relationship and connection with his audience.
- Next, Paul explains that he not only was educated under Gamaliel, but he “persecuted the Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify.”
 - These words are consistent with the entire testimony of the Book of Acts. Further, it is possibly that reference to “death” is a reference to Stephen.
 - There is, once again, a bit of irony here. Paul is saying that he once bound Christians, putting them in prison. Yet, he says this while he himself is bound.
 - Yet, even in this testimony, Paul, demonstrating his commitment to the Law, states that “the high priest and all the Council of elders can testify” to what he is saying. In other words, Paul demonstrates his commitment to the Law by offering up credible witnesses, in accordance with the Law, in order to authenticate his testimony.
 - In contrast to the crowd, Paul clearly demonstrates his commitment to and consistency with, the Law.
- Paul, then, continues, “From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.”
 - Here, Paul begins to transition into his Damascus Road Experience.
 - In order to show his zealousness to the Law, Paul relays a specific incident. He took letters from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to Damascus, with the intent of [going out of his way to persecute the Christians] bringing them back to Jerusalem in order to persecute, and possibly even kill, them.

b. He Speaks of His Encounter with Christ

- Luke, then, writes, in **Verses 6-7**, “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”
 - As Paul begins, “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all me...” In other words, **as Saul was pursuing the Christians with all of his might**, Christ appeared to him.
 - Damascus is about 150 miles from Jerusalem. This would make it about a 6 day journey. As Luke states, Paul and his entourage had almost arrived in Damascus when Christ revealed himself to Paul.
 - It was as though Saul was going 100 mph and as he was moving, Christ appeared to him. Christ did not slowing calm Saul down, put him in a ‘neutral’ position; rather, as Saul was ‘breathing murderous threats’ and passionately pursuing the people of God, Christ appeared to him.
 - This demonstrates one of the most powerful truths concerning our salvation. It will also powerfully influence Paul’s writings as well. God does not save us ‘after we come to our senses concerning Him.’ He does not slowly woo us into gradually believing in Him. Rather, we were all dead in our trespasses and sins, and at that very moment, when we were at enmity with God, He saved us.

Ephesians 2:3-4: ‘...even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...’

Romans 5:8: ‘But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’

- Therefore, it is obvious here that **Saul was not seeking after Christ** when Christ revealed Himself to Saul. Rather, of course, Saul was seeking to persecute the people of God.
- This, too, demonstrates a timeless Biblical point: no one seeks after God [**Romans 3:10-18**].
- Notice as well, that, consistent with the theme of the Book of Acts [the universality of Gospel message – beyond geographical Jerusalem], that, as with Abraham and Moses, the LORD revealed Himself to Saul **OUTSIDE JERUSALEM!**
 - The fixation the Jews had on the Temple, here in Acts 21-22, seems to indicate that they believed that God was specially and supremely present inside the structure of the Temple.

- Yet, Paul’s testimony, if true, demonstrates that God specially reveals Himself OUTSIDE Jerusalem and the Temple.

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- Luke also states, in **Verse 6**, that it was ‘**about noontime.**’
- Recall another great act of God in Exodus 10:

Exodus 10:21-23: ‘Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings.’

- Just as God demonstrated His power over the sun in the Exodus by turning the sun black, so Christ demonstrates the superiority of His glory to the sun, the brightest object in the created order, by outshining it at noonday!

The glory of Christ powerfully outshines even the Middle Eastern sun at noonday!

**In other words, when God pursues His people, NOTHING is able to stop Him: not a stubborn will, not a violent heart...not even the brightness of the noonday sun!
In fact, God created the world in order to reveal His glory...certainly not to conceal it!**

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- This encounter with the brightness of the glory of Christ influences Saul, later the Apostle Paul, for the remainder of his life. In fact, the glory of Christ which Paul sees is nothing short of the *Shekinah* glory of God. As he writes in 2 Corinthians 4:

2 Corinthians 4:4, 6: ‘in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.’

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- Notice, as well, in **Verse 7**, what happens to Saul once Christ revealed Himself to him: “he fell to the ground...”
- So powerful was the revealed presence of the risen and exalted Christ that Saul could not even stand.

○ One scholar [Walker] writes that Saul laid ‘prostrate at the feet of his conqueror.’

- This certainly calls to mind the account in 1 Kings 8, when the ark of the covenant was brought into the Temple in Jerusalem:

1 Kings 8:9-11: ‘There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that **the priests could not stand** to minister **because of the cloud**, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.’

- **Not even the brilliant, Gamaliel-educated, Saul, the passionate, zealous persecutor of the Church could stand in the presence of the glory of the risen and exalted Christ!**
- He was **immobilized**. So often in our lives, God, in order to use us, immobilizes us...takes us to the end of ourselves, that we might fully rely on Him.

‘For what other thing can befall man, but that he must lie prostrate and be, as it were, brought to nothing, when he is overwhelmed with the present feeling of God’s glory?’ John Calvin

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- As Saul fell to the ground, he heard a voice, in **Verse 7**, saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’
 - There is a bit of irony here. The last person to see the resurrected and exalted Christ was Stephen, and Saul played a role in his death.
 - It is quite significant that Jesus said, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **Me**?’
 - Certainly, at this point, Saul denied the validity of the claims of the early Christians that Christ had been raised, ascended and sat at the right had of the Father in glory. In fact, Saul, at this point, simply believed, no doubt, that Jesus was a blasphemous Galilean who had died justly because of his sins.
 - Yet, Jesus asks Saul, ‘Why are you persecuting **Me**?’
 - This answer to this fundamental question becomes clear when we begin to understand the nature of our **covenant relationship in and with Christ**. When we are regenerated and believe, we are united with Christ in an eternal covenant.
 - This relationship is, as is so often the case with New Testament truths, rooted in the Old Testament.
 - In **Genesis 12**, we read of God’s words to Abram, and the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant. In this Chapter, the LORD tells Abraham [Genesis 12:3], ‘And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse...’

- In other words, in the Covenant between Abram and the LORD, the enemies of Abram become the enemies of the LORD. So closely are the two [Abram and the LORD] associated or united that to curse one is to curse the other.
- **So it is with our covenantal union with Christ, the seed of Abraham and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.**
- Augustine wrote, ‘it was the head in heaven crying out on behalf of the members that were still on earth.’
- Our union Christ is clearly revealed throughout the New Testament, primarily in the writings of Paul Himself [1 Corinthians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 12:2; 13:5; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2; 3:17; 5:30; Colossians 1:27; 1 John 5:20] (* there are countless other Verses as well).

Therefore, Christ’s words to Saul reveal that, because of the union of the early believers with the resurrected and exalted Christ, attacks on them by Saul were just as ‘serious’ as attacks upon Christ Himself. So, it is with us today. When we are believers in the LORD Jesus Christ, we are covenantally united with Him so that He is personally offended when we are attacked or attack other believers.

- It is significant that Paul relays the fact that Jesus refers to Himself as “Jesus of Nazareth.”
 - This designation underscores Christ’s earthly roots...**His human nature.**
- In **Verse 9**, Paul reveals the greatest difference between his account and Luke’s in Chapter 9.
 - Here, in Paul’s first-person account, the Apostle states that his entourage saw the light, but did not understand the voice.
 - However, in 9:7, the men with Paul hear the sound, but see no one.
 - Yet, in both accounts, the LORD makes the same theological point: **Paul’s Damascus Road Experience was accompanied by witnesses; therefore, it was verified at true in accordance with Old Testament Law.**
- Then, in **Verse 10**, Luke writes, “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.’”

- Up until this point, Paul had related to his Jewish hearers. Now, he was shifting to demonstrate the fulfillment of the Law in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Also, up until this point in Paul’s testimony, he was heading to Damascus with the intent of persecuting Christians; now he is heading there with a completely different purpose: to obey the command of Christ – the One he was seeking to persecute]!

c. He Declares the Glory of Christ

- Finally, in **Verse 11**, Paul states, “But 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.”
 - One of the immediate effects of Christ’s revelation was that it blinded Saul.
 - To a modern-day, Gentile reader, the reason for this may seem unclear. Some may think that the blinding of Saul was simply a result of the brightness of light [which was, in fact, the physical cause according to Paul in **Verse 11**]; however, this level of understanding misses the true significance of the point of what Saul was experiencing.
 - Saul was a Jew of Jews, a Pharisee of Pharisees. He knew the Scriptures; yet, he had missed the very point of the Scriptures – that they pointed to Christ.
 - Yet, it is quite possible, even probable, that the reason for Saul’s blinding was to reveal that **he was under the curse of breaking the Law, apart from Christ.**

Deuteronomy 28:28-29 states: ‘The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; and **you will grope at noon**, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.’

- In other words, one of the Old Testament **covenantal curses** [for breaking the covenant] was **BLINDNESS**.
- Not only this, but, Deuteronomy 29 states that ‘you will grope at noon.’ It is likely no coincidence that this is the time when Christ revealed Himself to Saul.
- Paul most certainly would have considered his current state of blindness, in light of the Old Testament Law. Thus, he likely realized that the blindness was a result of reject Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Law.
- Hence, it would have most likely been the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, in light of the Old Testament Scriptures [Deuteronomy 28:28-29, specifically] that

led Saul to Christ. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, the Old Testament pointed the Way to Christ.

“If we ask what caused Saul’s conversion, only one answer is possible. What stands out from the narrative is the sovereign grace of God through Jesus Christ. Saul did not ‘decided for Christ’, as we might say. On the contrary, he was persecuting Christ. It was rather Christ who decided for him and intervened in his life. The evidence for this is indisputable.’

John Stott

- ❑ Ultimately, through Paul’s testimony, the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified, for He is revealed as the One who lead Paul out of darkness and into light!
- ❑ So is our mission today: we, who have been called out of the world and into the Kingdom of God, are to call others out of the world to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. We do so only through the faithful proclamation of God’s Word and the preaching of the true Gospel message.
- ❑ Read **1 Peter 2:9-12**.