

# Acts 21:37-22:30

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] And one of the things I'm looking forward to in heaven is I want to meet the people who divided the Bible into chapters.! I want to ask what on earth were they thinking?!

These events took place. You can go to the place where these events happened. Acts 22 took place in the year 57.

And we're not dealing with fairy stories. This isn't Rapunzel. It's not Shrek. It's not Goldilocks and the Three Bears. It's not Toy Story. These are historic events that took place on God's earth.

And we're going to look at chapter 22. And over the next few weeks we're going to see that what Luke does in the writing of Acts is he shows us Paul speaking for himself.

And tonight Paul speaks in front of a murderous mob. And next week Paul will speak in front of a Jewish council, a Supreme Jewish council in the fortress of Antonia. Next to the temple in Jerusalem. And then Paul will speak to Felix.

[ 1 : 2 1 ] And then before Festus. And at last he'll speak before Agrippa. Our people have just come and grabbed Paul in the temple with a view to killing him.

So of course you don't kill people in temples. So do you notice what they did? They shut the doors. They dragged him out and then they shut the doors. They thought that he had brought into the holy precincts of the temple Gentiles.

It's untrue of course. But they're out to kill him. And they're in the act of killing him when the Roman garrison intervenes. And the force of the mob is so great. The soldiers, you remember, they carry him above their heads.

So he's out of the reach of the mob. He's put down. He stands on his feet. And he says to the commander, 21 verse 37, can I speak to you? And of course this Roman commander is astonished because Paul speaks in perfect Greek.

The man who's intervened, he thought, I thought he was some Egyptian kind of insurrectionist, a revolutionary. Who seems to be very well known. And he did last come to the surface.

[ 2 : 3 6 ] We thought you were the man we'd been hunting for. And that the Jews were in the act of killing him. But the fact that this man speaks to him in perfect educated Greek leaves him speechless.

Can you speak Greek? Aren't you the Egyptian that we arrested, we were looking for a few times ago? And Paul says, doesn't he, I am a Jew. That must have fascinated him straight away.

If he was a Jew, what on earth was all the fuss about? Why were the Jewish people trying to kill you if you are a Jew? I am a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia. It's fascinating, isn't it, that Paul describes himself in that way.

I'm from Tarsus and Cilicia. It's a city, it's no mean city. And I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. People who doubt the Bible say, well this is an evidence, isn't it, that surely this is just a made up story.

Surely the commander who's just stepped into this baying moor wouldn't let him speak. But stranger things have happened. And this is the Roman Empire, although it's Judea. And the Romans are in charge.

[ 3 : 4 7 ] And he doesn't know anything about this man. And if there are going to be charges against this guy, well he obviously doesn't know him. He's got to get some evidence, some facts. Besides, he's a little bit astonished, isn't he, that he is an educated man.

To you that he is. It's all in the providence of God, of course. So he allows the man to speak. And we have one of those references, isn't it? If I was going to write a PhD, do you know what I would write?

I would write it on Paul's hands. They seem to be everywhere. Paul's hands. Like I can't get why Luke keeps talking about his hands. So there he is in front of this great crowd. They're buying for his blood. He stands on this makeshift pulpit. And then we read he motions with his hands. I'd love to know what the motions were. I think they're this motion. I don't know. There's great silence.

He speaks to them in the Hebrew language. He speaks Greek. He speaks Hebrew. Paul speaks to the murdering mob. And he tells his story. Do you have a story? Every single one of us has got a story to tell tonight, haven't we?

[ 4 : 56 ] What's your story? Paul tells his story. He says, this is what the Lord has done for me. I want you to see, first of all, the aim of his story.

What is Paul aiming at? What is Paul trying to do is he stands on the steps and he waves his hands and he speaks in the Hebrew language. He waits for the crowd to go quiet. Why is he telling a story? If Paul is trying to defend himself, he's actually not doing a very good job.

He doesn't make any references to the accusations that are against him. If he's giving his testimony to set the record straight, actually, he doesn't do a very good job of it. Because he actually speaks about God sending him to the Gentiles and that incenses the crowd.

Who think that he's brought the Gentiles into the temple. That's why this all kicked off in the first place. And if he's trying to evangelize them and win them, his testimony is a bit strange.

Because nowhere in Acts 22 does he appeal to them. Nowhere does he speak about repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. So why is he telling the story? Try and get your head into this.

[ 6 : 11 ] What is Paul's aim? It seems to me that Paul's aim was to show the Jewish crowd in front of him and the Gentiles behind him that there is someone to reckon with.

That there is someone who is above them, who is greater than all of them. And who is Lord of all. And there is somebody who is the Lord of the Jews. And there is somebody who is the Lord of the Gentiles.

And there is someone who is the saviour of the Jews and the saviour of the Gentiles both. Paul's aim is to lift up Jesus Christ. To make him great in the eyes of the people.

And to speak about the Lord Jesus in such a way that they would have great thoughts about him. Even if they don't come to submit themselves to him. He is standing on these steps to glorify Jesus Christ.

It is the aim of any sermon, isn't it? It is the aim of any opportunity that you might have this week. It is to speak of Jesus Christ. Why might God give you that opportunity in your school, in your workplace, amongst your neighbours, at the school gate?

[ 7 : 22 ] Why might he do that? Well, so that you might lift up Jesus Christ. Paul was given this opportunity to show that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

And he is rich. He is generous. To all who call upon him. Whether you are a Jew or whether you are a Gentile. Let's look at the content, secondly. Three points in the content. Three points to the content.

So look at verses 1 to 5. And his first point is really simple. It's this. Where you are now, I have been. Where you are now, he says to the crowd, I've been.

It's more than that, but it is that. It's where you are now, I have been. Even more so. Amen. Men and brothers, fathers.

Hear my defence. That I know make before you. When they heard that he was addressing them in Hebrew, they become even more quiet. And he said to them, I am a Jew.

[ 8 : 26 ] And why were they trying to kill him? They thought that he was an unfaithful Jew. He says, I'm a Jew who was born in Tarsus and I've been brought up in this city. The crowd is suddenly becoming more attentive.

He says, I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, the greatest Jewish teacher of the first century. And Paul had been his personal student. He had all the qualifications, all the credentials any Jew would have wanted.

He says, I was taught according to a strict manner of the law of our fathers, verse 3. And I was jealous for God as you are today. Where you are, I once was.

Where you are, I have been, but even more so. You are jealous for the law, I was more jealous. You are doing what you're doing for God.

Well, what I was doing, I was doing for God. You're doing what you're doing because God's law had been insulted. Where you are, I have been. Verse 4, I persecuted the weight of the death.

[ 9 : 34 ] It's exactly what they were doing, isn't it? Remember this morning, they were binding, they were delivering to prison. They were wanting to kill. He says, I bound and I delivered to prison both men and women.

Well, actually, what they were doing is they were trying to kill him. I wonder if in verse 5 he spots a high priest in the crowd. And then as he glances, he spots the elders. And he says, as the high priest and the whole council of the elders can bear me witness from them, I receive letters. They know who I am. And I journeyed towards Damascus and to take those who were there and bring them in chains to Jerusalem to be imprisoned. It really is, isn't it, a wonderful thing to be a Christian.

When the atheist comes to say to you, and you're speaking with the atheist, and they say, well, I just have times where I don't believe in God.

We can say, can't we? I've had those thoughts myself. When people say, I don't believe the word of God. I don't believe the Bible is the word of God.

[ 10 : 44 ] We're able to say, well, I've struggled with that. When people say, it's just a fairy tale, we can say, there have been times in my life when I've thought that.

All Christians can say to those who are not Christians, I've been where you've been. The non-Christian cannot say to the Christian, I've been where you have been, where you are. We've been where they are, haven't we? We've been in unbelief. We've been in error. We've been stubborn. People who sit in sermons, I'm deliberately trying to think of anything to distract them. In the church I grew up in, there was a beautiful pipe organ behind the pulpit. It had 46 pipes. In the middle column, in the fourth pipe along, there was a kink in one of the pipes.

I would study how many pipes there were, how many it would be until I got to that kink, that one there. Maybe you're here now, and you're in this sermon, and you are desperately trying hard to think about something else.

[ 12 : 02 ] Do you know those feelings in a sermon where your conscience pricks you, and you'll do anything but to think of what's being said? Where you are, we've been.

Where you are, I've been. Second point is, and the Lord Jesus intervened in the content. Look at verse 6, now it happened. He was in unbelief. He was stubborn. Some of us were worse than the worst we've met.

The Lord Jesus intervened and tells this story. Verse 6, his conversion is sudden. It is visible. It is dramatic. It is audible. It is witnessed. Let me really be clear here. Not all conversions are like that. In all likelihood, your conversion isn't like that. If you are a covenant child who's been brought up in the Christian faith, it's unlikely that your conversion is like that. But nonetheless, in every person who's trusting in the Lord Jesus, we can say that there was a moment when the Lord Jesus intervened.

Paul says, I fell to the ground. I heard a voice I'd not heard before. What did the voice say? Saul, Saul. Why does he hear the voice say, Saul, Saul?

[ 13 : 09 ] Well, we know, don't we? Because the Lord Jesus Christ knows his sheep by name. I've never heard in a sermon, Paul, Paul.

I've never heard that. Paul Levy. Paul Levy. I've never heard that. But I've heard a voice speaking right to me, my conscience. For all of us who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, there was a time when the message that came generally came to me particularly.

There is a time for every Christian where the message that went out to everybody comes to you individually. Personally.

There was a time when the message, which seemed so blunt, became sharp. Why are you persecuting me?

So I answered. Can you see the strangeness of how he answers? What does he answer? Who are you, Lord? Lord? Who are you, Lord?

[ 14 : 21 ] When that great call comes from God, our consciences know very well who's speaking. Your conscience tonight knows who's speaking to you. It's the most terrible thing, isn't it, when we know that Jesus Christ is speaking to us and we remain stubborn and hard-hearted and we deliberately refuse to listen.

Paul knew who was speaking. Who are you, Lord? Such a funny question. Why did he call him Lord if he didn't know who he was? It's because he did know who he was.

He asked, who are you, Lord? It was because he did know who he was that he asked, who are you, Lord? I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Tells us those who were with me, they saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

It's often the case. People who sit side by side, they hear the same sermon, one is converted, the other one isn't. They go to the same Hope Explored course, they sit next to each other, they hear the same great talk, they engage in the same discussion, one is converted, one isn't.

They sit in the same Sunday school class and one believes and one refuses to believe. Maybe tonight as you hear God's word, God is speaking to you and doing his work in you, but the person next to you, he's not doing his work in.

[ 15 : 45 ] They're hearing something, but they're not having dealings with the living God. A Christ who's intervening, what should I do, Lord? His heart is being changed, isn't it?

That's the last thing he would have said a few moments ago, to say to Jesus of Nazareth, Lord, and then to say to him, what shall I do, Lord? To call him Lord suggests that he is God, it is God's name, and to say, what shall I do, Lord, it suggests submission.

There's a desire there, his heart's being changed. That I am not going to go the way of trying to murder Christians, but I'm going to go your way now, from now on. He's been converted by Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 10. He tells us, listen to him in verse 10, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, rise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.

And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand of those who were with me, and I came into Damascus. There I met one Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, well spoken of all by the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing by me, said to me, brother, receive your sight.

[ 16 : 58 ] He was told that God the Father had chosen him. Again, what have we seen in Acts? I think we have seen this choosing again and again and again of God in eternity that is played out in time.

If God the Father had not chosen him, he would never have been converted. And he wasn't just seeing Ananias' face, he was seeing the just one.

He saw the Lord Jesus by faith, he's hearing the voice of his mouth, he's in fellowship with Jesus Christ, Jesus intervened, and then he's baptised. His sins are forgiven, he calls on the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ intervenes.

That's the content. Where you were, I once was. Where you are, I once was. Jesus intervenes. The third part of his gospel is that it is, and again, this pattern of acts to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Paul begins his speech and says, I am a Jew. They needed to know that. When he talks about Ananias in verse 12, he says, as a devout man, according to the law, he was a Jewish person.

[ 18 : 12 ] All the early Christians were Jewish. And now he mentions something that's not mentioned anywhere in the Bible from verse 17 on. Not long after his conversion, it's about three years, sometimes after his conversion, he's in Jerusalem.

And this converted Jew, where was he? In the very temple from which he'd been kicked out. And what was happening, Paul is in the temple, verse 17, he was praying and he was in a trance.

I don't know what really that means. I don't know what kind of spiritual experience that is. He certainly doesn't say anywhere in the Bible that we need to have that experience.

And once more, God is dealing with him, isn't he, as a converted man. Make haste, get out of the temple, because they, that is the Jewish people, will not receive your testimony concerning me. And he has the audacity to argue with God.

Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another, I imprisoned them, beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

[ 19 : 23 ] Lord, they know what I used to be. And he said to them, go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. The point has been made. Those early believers were Jewish.

Stephen the martyr was Jewish. Christian church was born in Jerusalem. The message is for Jewish people. But it doesn't stop there.

He was traveling with the Jews to Damascus to arrest Jews who would dare believe. But now the Lord has intervened and has saved him and is sending him to the Gentiles. The Lord of salvation to the Jews is the Lord of salvation to the Gentiles.

The pattern, it seems to me, of the New Testament is to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. That hasn't changed. We need to think in London, how does that apply? How do we take the gospel to Jewish people?

They have the promises. They have the covenant. The Messiah is theirs. There's a veil over their eyes. Of all people, they are the most privileged and yet they refuse to see and we have their Messiah.

[ 20 : 40 ] And he's the saviour of the Jewish people and he's the saviour of the Gentiles. There is no other saviour for the Jews. There is no other saviour for the Gentiles.

It is Jesus Christ and all must hear this message too. The same Lord is rich to all who call upon him whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Three points. Where you are, I once was, the Lord Jesus Christ has intervened and this message of this Lord is to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

Let's look at the manner, the aim, the content and the manner. Did Paul hide the truth that was unacceptable to his hearers?

Did he? No. He knows, doesn't he, that the moment that he mentions the word Gentiles, the riot will start again and it did.

Certain things that we say will be offensive. They will be offensive to the people that we speak to. Our job as Christians is not to go through life offending people and we are not to deliberately offend people.

[ 22 : 01 ] But there are things in our message which are offensive that are never to be hidden. And if you hide them, you are not preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that the same saviour saves the Gentiles in the same way by the same work that he saves the Jews. And a Jewish preacher is commanded to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and he knew that would make them furious but he didn't hide it.

There are things that we have to tell people don't we? That is God's truth and they will object to it but we tell them nonetheless. Did he use complicated words?

No, he was simple. Did he practice his routine in front of a mirror like a performer, like an actor? No, he didn't. He's factual, he's serious, there's a sincerity, there's a simplicity about the way Paul preaches.

He tells it as it is and as it was but there's a further point. By what sort of person?

[ 23 : 22 ] When the riot starts up again, what do they do? Verse 22, they listen to him. They listen to him up until this word. Which word? Up to this word they listen to him. Verse 22.

He said to me, go for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. There's the word. Up to this word they listen to him. Then they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow for he should not be allowed to live.

They're so angry they tear their clothes throwing them up in the air, throwing dust in the air. The commander orders Paul to be brought back into the safety of the barracks. And it says there, doesn't it, he should be brought back into the safety of the barracks in order to be examined under scourging.

If I was preaching to the first century congregation at this point there would be a sharp intake of breath. Everyone would grow silent. Because everyone would know what scourging was in the Roman Empire.

There's a pillar or there's a table and on one side of the pillar or the table there are metal rings and on the other side of the table or the pillar there are metal rings.

[ 24 : 37 ] Someone's wrists were put into those kind of chains and their ankles put into the other. And so they cannot move their back. They're stretched over either a pillar or over a table and their back is bare.

Here comes a centurion or a Roman officer with a little stick but attached to this little stick are cords. Little cords of cloth and the cords have things attached to them and those things are teeth, nails, bone, pieces of metal.

And he would whip the person stretched out in front of him to get information out of him. After two or three strokes the back would be broken up like a piece of meat, bleeding flesh.

It's a way of making people talk. Many people died under scourging. Our Lord Jesus Christ was scourged. And that's what Paul is facing.

He's put over this pillar, he's tied down, he's about to be scourged. But listen to this, God does not call us to be a martyr if we don't have to be one.

[ 25 : 50 ] There's more to it than that. Paul is a Jew but he's also a Roman citizen. It is against the law of Rome to bind or to tie or to chain or to hang up any Roman citizen who is uncondemned.

It was against the law of Rome and he was a Roman citizen. And if a military man took it upon himself to bind or scourge a Roman citizen which was forbidden, he might lose his life.

His own life could be taken as a punishment for degrading a Roman citizen. That's how strict Roman law was. Look how Paul comes out at verse 25. But when they'd stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, is it lawful for you to flog a man who was a Roman citizen and uncondemned?

When the centurion heard this, he absolutely panicked. He went to the tribune and said to him, what on earth are we about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen. Here comes the commander.

He comes into the room. He says, are you a Roman? Yes. Again, it's a shock. Perfect Greek, perfect Hebrew. He's also a Roman.

[ 26 : 52 ] This rabble rouser, this man who's caused absolute carnage that day. I'd buy my Jewish, my Roman citizenship with large sums of money like people do today.

I had to obtain that citizenship. I wonder how much you paid. Paul says, I was born a citizen of Rome. Paul's integrity here shines through, doesn't it?

If he endured the scourging and he might have lived, just think of the credit that would have been his. He would have been a sort of martyr figure. This man could have potentially been executed for doing it.

Here's the integrity of Paul shining through. this testimony, this story about the Lord Jesus Christ. The man who's saying to them, where you are, I once was.

And then the Lord Jesus Christ intervened. This man is saying he is Lord of all and this gospel is for the Jew first and then for the world next. And this man who spoke factually, seriously, honestly, is a man of integrity.

[ 27 : 56 ] And that's what makes his testimony so sincere and so powerful. And so here we are, 2000 leaders.

Do you have a story? Can you look the unbelieving crowd in the eye tomorrow morning and say, well, where you are, I once was.

Can you stand up and say, the Lord Jesus Christ intervened? Do you honestly believe that the gospel is for the Jew first and for all the world?

And when you speak of Jesus Christ, is the aim to lift him up instead of making yourself sound good or making yourself the answer?

Let's pray.