

Paul's Personal Testimony

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[0:00] Acts chapter 21 and verse 37. We'll be reading through chapter 22 and verse 30. And Paul answered, I am a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city.

Please let me speak to the people. Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. And when they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said, And went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

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.

[2:02] 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. 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 as 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.

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.

[3:14] 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. The crowd listened to Paul until he said this.

And they raised their voices and shouted, Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live! 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. And 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?

[4:28] 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.

The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priest and all the Sanhedrin to assemble.

Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them. Personal testimony can be a powerful tool of persuasion.

Maybe you've been bored on Saturday and flipped through the channels and found an infomercial. And what is it? It's just one testimonial after another, isn't it?

[5:29] Of people who have tried this product. I'm Jane, 31, mother of four. And I was so weak and sick all of the time. Pain in my joints. Moody and depressed.

And then I started taking the Kick-A-Boo Joy Juice. And ever since that, my pain is gone. I have energy to burn. And you ought to try it as well.

And then there's Bill and Joe. And all of them have their stories. And personal testimony of what this product has done. It can be persuasive. Well, whatever you think of those infomercials, a personal testimony of conversion to Jesus Christ is a powerful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

You remember the personal testimony of the man born blind whom Jesus healed. He was brought before the Pharisees who were so critical of Jesus.

And there in John 9, this man gave a simple testimony. Short and sweet, but what a punch it packed. I was blind. Now I see.

[6:36] And Jesus did it. Isn't that wonderful? Personal testimony. Or think of the personal testimony of that Samaritan woman whom Jesus sat down on the well and talked to.

And John tells us there in John chapter 4 that she went back into town and told the people about Jesus. And John says they came pouring out of the town to Jesus.

And that many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I did. And they came and heard because of her testimony.

And then they said, we believe all the more now because we've heard him ourselves. Well, the account of Paul's conversion to Jesus Christ is given to us three times in the book of Acts.

And it's given in great detail. We have it first in chapter 9, if you'll remember, where Luke told us how the apostle Paul was converted.

[7:36] Here in chapter 22, Paul is giving his own testimony to the thousands of hostile Jews gathered at the temple. And again in chapter 26, we'll hear Paul give his testimony before King Agrippa and Governor Festus.

Now such repetition should be an indication of the importance of this testimony, particularly Paul's testimony and how it impacts the whole message of the book of Acts, of Christ building his church. This testimony has a very important role to play. Paul's conversion has a very important role to play in the church being built. But it's also an indication of the importance of personal testimony in our own witness of the gospel of God's grace.

So what is a testimony? A testimony is the gospel personalized. It's the gospel personalized. Let me tell you what the Lord has done for me.

For me. Now, do you have a personal testimony? If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you do. Let's see what we can learn from Paul's testimony this morning.

[8:57] There's a background to it that gives shape to Paul's testimony. Yes, it has the basic same characteristics as we'll see from chapter 22 and 26.

But this particular background gives a particular shape to the way Paul gives his testimony.

Remember, the background is that Jews from Asia, probably from Ephesus, where he had enjoyed such success in preaching the gospel, had come to Jerusalem.

There they are at the Feast of Pentecost. Paul's there. And they see him in the temple and they shout their charges. They falsely accuse Paul and stir up all of Jerusalem into a frenzy.

Here's their charges. Men of Israel, help us. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against three things. Our people, the Jewish people, our law, the Mosaic law, and this holy place, the temple.

And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place. So those were their charges. They're not formal charges. They're just accusations.

[10:06] They skipped the trial. Indeed, they begin to kill him at once. Guilty until proven innocent. Shoot now and ask questions later.

This is mob justice, and that's what Paul was receiving in Jerusalem. They only stopped killing him when the Roman soldiers came and rescued him.

So Paul's defense, he's going to give his defense. Verse 1 tells us that. Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense. And his defense will be his testimony.

And we need to keep remembering that his defense is given against these three charges. He's speaking against the Jewish people, the Mosaic law, and the temple in Jerusalem. And his defense

will prove that there's no truth to any of these charges against him, but will prove that he is a faithful Jew, upholding the law, and is not against the temple.

And yet, he's not merely out to defend himself so much as to testify to the gospel of God's grace. And we'll see him doing that. He lays hold of this trial, if you will, this accusation as an opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[11:25] Remember, he's got a pulpit. He's on the top steps of all the way down these two flights of steps that look over the temple complex, people packed below him.

He's got an audience, hundreds of, or thousands of angry Jews. He's got a message, his own personal testimony of the grace of God, and now he's got their attention because he motions and they get quiet, and then he starts to speak in Aramaic, and they really get quiet.

That was their dialect of the Hebrew language, the dialect spoken in Palestine. And so they're shocked. We have before us a man who speaks our language.

He's one of us. Well, Paul could not have planned such an evangelistic rally, and he gives his testimony. There's three parts to his testimony, and I would say there should be three parts to yours as well.

The first is his life before conversion to Christ. Then secondly, his conversion to Christ. And third, his life after conversion to Christ. So before, his conversion, and after.

[12:33] We look first at his life before conversion to Christ. This is his BC life. Life as it was before I met Jesus Christ. And he begins, I am a Jew.

So again, the accuser said, he's against our people, the Jews. And he says in Aramaic, their own dialect, I am a Jew. He's identifying with them.

I'm one with you. I'm not against you. I am one of you. And though I was born outside of Palestine, in Tarsus of Cilicia, I was brought up in this very city of Jerusalem, which accounted for his command of the Aramaic language.

And then he tells of his upbringing in Jerusalem. It was of the strictest orthodox tradition, thoroughly trained in what? In the law of Moses that you've just said that I'm out to speak against.

No, no, I was trained in the law by the most honored rabbi, a Pharisee named Gamaliel. I'm not speaking against the law. Furthermore, I was just as zealous for God and the law as any of you are today.

[13:42] Well, how zealous had they been today? Well, they'd come within an inch of killing Paul in the name of Jehovah. Yes, I was just as zealous for God as any of you are.

Because I persecuted the followers of this way, he says, and hunted them down to their death in prison, beating both men and women. In fact, I was so zealous that I took this persecution to foreign cities as far away as Syria, Damascus.

In fact, all of this is verifiable. I mean, if I'm giving a defense, don't just believe me. Check with the chief priests and the council. They know all about it.

In fact, I got letters from them to go up to Damascus. So he's giving his defense. So this is the summary of Paul of his past life before Christ saved him.

He was very religious. He was very wrong. He had a great knowledge of the Bible, lots of zeal, but he was greatly deceived. It was zeal without knowledge.

[14:51] He was murdering men in the name of serving Jehovah. In other words, he was a great sinner and an enemy of Jesus Christ. Now that's where Paul's testimony begins.

Not a self-righteous man looking down his noses at these gathered before him like, how could you dare be doing what you're doing to me?

Condemning them. No, he's a man who never forgot what he was before he met Jesus Christ and was saved by him. And it's there.

Each time he gives his testimony, he remembers who he was before God saved him. We find it in his letters. He doesn't hide it. He owns it to his own shame.

I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, he writes in 1 Timothy 1. In 1 Corinthians 15, I don't even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

[15:52] And here in this account, verse 20, when Stephen was being stoned, I gave my approval and guarded the cloaks of those killing him. And it was that that made Paul and kept Paul humble and it was that that made the grace of God amazing to the apostle Paul.

He never forgot what he was before Jesus saved him. Now, brothers and sisters, this is where your testimony begins as well. All of our stories begin here.

your past life before knowing Jesus Christ. I wonder, have you forgotten what you were? Now, some of you were saved older in life and you cannot forget that for the life of you.

You remember well what you were before Jesus saved you. But some this morning would say, you know, I was so young when I was converted.

You know, it's been so long ago. Well, the Bible was written to remind you of what you were before Jesus saved you.

[17:06] That's one of its purposes. Ephesians 2, 1-3. As for you, you are dead in your transgressions and sin in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Titus chapter 3. At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy.

We were hated and hating others. So the lesson is, let the Bible remind you, Christian. Let the Bible help you remember what you were before Jesus saved you.

John Newton, would you tell us why when writing about God's grace, you speak of it as amazing grace? Well, he would say, that's quite easy.

[18:16] It's because it saved a wretch like me. Once I was lost, but now I am found.

I was blind, but now I see. And he never forgot what he was before Jesus saved him. A lost and blind, sinful wretch.

He tells us he was 22 years old, working on a slave ship, gambling, sexually immoral, dabbling in witchcraft, a profane mouth that caused even sailors to blush.

And he wasn't content just to sin himself, but he did all he could to lead others into drunkenness and sin with him. He later called himself a ringleader in blasphemy and wickedness.

But at age 22, the Lord saved him and then called him to be a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, Newton wrote his testimony of conversion in a series of letters to a friend telling what he had been before Jesus saved him and then how the Lord had saved him there at sea as he nearly lost his life in a storm and called on the Lord and how Jesus saved him by his grace.

[19:38] Well, those letters to his friend, he didn't just keep to himself, but he started to pass them around and eventually they got published. And thereafter, the people in Newton's congregation looked at their pastor in a different way.

You can imagine. Newton writes, the people stare at me since reading them and well they may. I am indeed a wonder to many, a wonder to myself and especially I wonder that I wonder no more. Now, you may not have lived as Newton lived before Jesus saved you. You may not have lived as Saul of Tarsus lived before your conversion, but you had the same wretched heart as theirs. You were just as blind to the glory of Christ and your need of the gospel. You were just as lost and helpless and condemned and could not save yourself.

And if you're well acquainted with your own heart and what the Bible says you were before Jesus saved you, then you too will be a wonder to yourself that you are a Christian.

[20:55] You will pinch yourself at times and can it be that this is true of me, that I'm saved, I'm right with God, that I'm forgiven all my sins and I have heaven to look forward to rather than hell forever.

A wonder, a wonder. And especially I wonder that I wonder no more. So as Paul looks down on the teeming masses of Jews in the temple, he saw that the wonder is not it is not that they are not saved.

No, the wonder is that I'm not still lost like them. The wonder is not that they are persecuting me, but the wonder is that I'm no longer persecuting Christians with them.

The wonder is that I am preaching the very message and name I labor to stomp out from the earth. And so grace only remains amazing when we remember what we were before Jesus saved us. so that's where our testimony begins. And when we don't forget that, it not only keeps us worshipping a God of amazing grace, it also keeps us gracious toward others who are still living a life of sin and sometimes are very obnoxious in their sins.

[22:19] It keeps us gracious. Just think of the scene here as Paul's preaching and giving his testimony. He's not talking as we have testimonies at the other end of this bill.

He's not giving his testimony before a church that's rejoicing in what Christ has done for the one giving the testimony. No, no. He's giving it before a mob of enemies that had just called for his death and nearly beat him to death.

So if you can picture the scene, I see him with a bloody nose standing there on the steps, a puffy face. They were hitting to kill him, not just knocking him around a bit.

They were killing him. They began to kill him. And so with bloodied nose and puffy face, Paul is speaking to the very ones who had just shown such sin and anger against him.

And he says, brothers and fathers, listen to me. I've got a message for you about forgiveness.

Doesn't it remind us of another bloodied face and puffy face hanging on a cross looking down and saying, Father, forgive them.

[23 : 30] They don't know what they're doing. It is a remembrance for us of what we were before Jesus saved us. It's that that keeps us gentle and keeps us meek before other sinners.

Newton writes, a company of travelers fall into a pit.

One of them gets a passerby to draw him out. Now he should not be angry with the rest for falling in, nor because they're not yet out as he is.

He did not pull himself out. Instead, therefore, of reproaching them, he should show them pity. A man truly illuminated will no longer despise others.

Then Bartimaeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick and beat every blind man that he met. Why are you still blind? As if he had something to do with his own sight.

[24 : 35] And why are you still living in sin like that? How could you ever do this and do that? No, because we remember that we didn't want to be saved.

We didn't come up. We didn't initiate the plan of salvation. We didn't even want to be saved. We didn't crawl out ourselves. He saved us. And the reminder of what we were keeps us gentle toward them.

So Paul's identifying with his hearers. I was once doing exactly what you were doing. I can't condemn you. How could I do? I did worse than you. And so in our testimony to each and every sinner, we must take our place right alongside of them.

Guilty, vile, and helpless we. We don't speak as those with a holier-than-thou attitude. How could you? How dare you? We rather say, me too.

Guilty me. Vile me. Helpless me. Oh, but spotless lamb of God was he, the righteous one, dying for the unrighteous. I was so bad that if I got what I had coming, I would be damned to eternal torments in hell.

[25 : 46] But you see, that's just it. Jesus didn't give me what I deserved. He took what I deserved and gave me what he deserved, eternal life, forgiveness, full pardon.

So that's the first part of the testimony from Paul, from you, from John Newton, of what we were before Jesus saved us, before our conversion.

The second part of testimony is his conversion to Christ, and he gives us the details of how it happened. I don't need to spend much time. We've seen it back in chapter nine, about noon near Damascus as he's going there to arrest Christians and drag them back to Jerusalem.

He says, I was ready to pounce on the flock, and suddenly the shepherd of the flock met me, introduced himself to me, and arrested me.

A bright light from heaven took me right to the ground and left me blind, and then he spoke my name, Saul, Saul. Why are you persecuting me? Who are you, Lord?

[26 : 50] And he identified himself, I'm Jesus of Nazareth. Now there is no mistaken who's talking to him. There's a lot of Jesuses in the world, still have people named Jesus, Jesus, and so on.

And Jesus was not the only Jesus in his own day. Many had that name. But there was only one Jesus of Nazareth. And that's the one that Christians claimed is the eternal son of God, and that Paul had said is a phony, false, lying Messiah, deserved everything he got on the cross, buried, and that was the end of him.

Oh, his followers spread the lie that he's alive, but it's all a lie. And now suddenly, here he is, this Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, and went to a cross, and had the notice board above him, Jesus of Nazareth, posted there.

The one who suffered and died under Pontius Pilate was buried and raised again and ascended into heaven. He is now speaking to me. I'm in big trouble. What shall I do, Lord?

And he told Paul to go to Damascus, where he would be given his assignment. Needless to say, it was a different assignment than the one that Paul had brought himself to Damascus to fulfill.

[28:17] Well, it was an assignment given through Ananias, and it's interesting that we learn more about Ananias here than we did in chapter 9. And again, I'm showing you how his defense, his testimony, is shaped by the accusation.

So Ananias came to me with a message from the Lord. Ananias, a devout observer of the law. Now that should ring bells with you. Paul, you don't care about the law.

Ananias, a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews there in Damascus, though he was also a believer in Jesus. And that devout observer of the law said to me, brother Saul, receive your sight.

And not gradually, but instantly, I could see. And then he gave me my assignment from the Lord, the God of our fathers. There's not some different God than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses, the God of the Old Testament.

No, it's that God. The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one. What a name for Jesus. He's the only righteous one.

[29:27] And if we're ever to be righteous, it must be in him to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth. Now, this takes us right back to the source of Paul's conversion.

God's choice. God, the God of our fathers has chosen you not to destroy you for your persecuting of his people, but he's chosen you to be a witness who would tell the things that you have seen of the Lord Jesus, the righteousness, Messiah, and the things that you will hear, the words from his mouth, and to be a witness then to all people of what you've seen and heard.

That's your assignment. Now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name. Whose name? This righteous one who spoke to you on the road to Damascus, Jesus of Nazareth.

And so calling on Jesus' name was an act of faith in Jesus. Just as Paul would later write in Romans 10, quoting from Joel, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And Paul calls on the name of the Lord. Paul trusts in the name of the Lord and is saved. And baptism was the outward sign of what happened inwardly.

[30:54] His cleansing from sin that comes through faith in Jesus' blood because there's no other way for sins to be cleansed. Not by baptism, not by any other right, but only the blood of God's Son that cleanses from all sin.

And baptism was the outward sign of that inward cleansing. And so Paul is baptized as a believer, trusting in Jesus who has his sins cleansed.

Now what can we say about this second part of Paul's testimony? Well, one thing he makes very clear is that his conversion is all of grace.

The fact that he's a Christian now is just all of grace. Clearly Paul was not seeking Jesus Christ and salvation in him, was he? If anything's clear on the face of it, it's that.

He wasn't seeking Christ and looking to him for salvation. No, he was in the act of breathing out slaughter against Christ's church, which the Lord tells him is persecuting Jesus himself.

[32:05] When you touch my church, you touch me. What you do to the church, you do to me. He's not seeking salvation. He's seeking Jesus to stomp out his name from the earth and to stomp out his people.

There in Damascus, he was in the fast lane to hell and Jesus was the one who sought and found him and humbled and brought him to repentance and faith.

Just as the Lord says in Isaiah 65, 1, I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me. Paul wasn't asking for Jesus, was he? And I was found by those who did not seek me.

Paul was not seeking Jesus, but he found him. And that's grace, you see. That's amazing grace.

The reason Paul was a Christian was all God's fault, and that's the second part of every testimony. Paul would later tell us that this is not only true of him, but it's true of everyone who is saved, that there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

[33:14] You see, many will say, okay, there's none righteous, nobody's perfect, yeah, I agree, nod the head, but when Paul says there's no one that seeks God, oh, but I remember seeking God, I sought the Lord.

If you ever sought the Lord, it's because he first sought you, and he overcame every bit of resistance in your heart on why you didn't want Jesus of Nazareth to be your Savior and King and

Lord, and he worked upon you and enabled you to repent and believe and showed you the glories of Jesus Christ so that you came most willingly to embrace him, but no man is born seeking God, no man of his own initiative seeks God, rather as Paul goes on to say, all have turned away, they together become worthless, they don't seek him, they turn away from him and turn their back to him, so salvation, it wasn't our idea, we didn't even want to be saved from our sins, it's God's idea, it's God's initiative from first to last, sinners seek God like a criminal seeks policemen, they're running from him, but God in grace seeks and arrests, and overcomes our resistance, and makes us willing to repudiate our past, and to embrace

Jesus and a whole new life in him, grace all over it, so I wasn't seeking him, but he sought me, and when he found me, it was not to damn me, but to offer me forgiveness through himself, the righteous one, that too is grace, isn't it, amazing grace, he didn't give me what I deserved, so in giving our personal testimony, we must not only say what we were before we came to Christ, and then we tell, in telling how we came to Christ, and conversion to Christ, we must make it clear that it's all of God, the one who seeks and saves that which is lost, sinners running from him, and then thirdly, the third part of the testimony, his life after conversion to Christ, life before Christ, and now life after coming to

Christ, in other words, no one who's converted to Christ can go on living the same way, it's just impossible, they have a new master now, they have a new heart, they have a new life, they have new desires, new purpose, new assignment, and Paul's now a witness for Christ, whereas before his whole purpose was to destroy the name of Christ, so how can he live the same, how can he be the same, it's impossible, his chief purpose is now to testify to the gospel of God's grace, so what does he do, as soon as he's converted, and we got this back in chapter 9, he starts preaching there in Damascus, he's saved one day, and the next day he's debating with the Jews and proving that Jesus is the Messiah, and seeking to convince them from the Old Testament scriptures, and he's baffling the Jews there, and so they seek to kill him, the Jews in Damascus seek to kill him as a traitor to their cause, and so day and night, that walled city of Damascus, they set a guard there by the gate, and if Paul even thinks about leaving this town, he's going to be killed at the gate, but Paul is made aware of their plot, and so he's lowered in a basket, threw a hole in the wall, and makes his escape, and later he makes his way down to

Jerusalem, and when he gets to Jerusalem, he continues to preach Jesus as the Messiah, and we pick up the story here in verse 17, he says, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, accusation, Paul speaks against the temple, Paul defiles the temple, not so, I go to the temple to pray, and that's what I was doing, and there in the temple, in a trance, I saw Jesus Christ who said to me, quick, leave Jerusalem immediately because they will not accept your testimony about me, and you know that's exactly what happened as you read back in Acts chapter 9, because as he was talking and debating with the Greeks and Jews, they also tried to kill him, but Paul wasn't ready to leave, he felt a burden for these Jerusalem sinners, and he wants these now as he's standing on the steps and speaking to this

[38:10] Jerusalem sinner crowd, he wants his hearers to know that it wasn't his own decision to leave Jerusalem and to go preach to the Gentiles. Paul made his case to the Lord as to why he wanted to stay in Jerusalem.

He says, Lord, 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 them.

That was just some 25 years earlier, and he's saying, Lord, these men know what I was, and now they need to hear from me about this Jesus, and he feels something of a debt to them.

I led them astray. I said Jesus was a false Messiah, and they know all about that. Now, let me stay and give the truth to my countrymen here at Jerusalem.

But the Lord says, no, go, go, go immediately. They won't accept your testimony about me. Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

[39:20] And that's as far as we get in Paul's testimony. He probably had more to say, but say it, he could not. And before we go on, just notice what a change Jesus makes in his saved people. If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old is gone. What he was before Christ, that man's dead. There's a new man here. Behold, all things have become new.

Nothing's the same when you know Jesus. The whole world is a new world. Paul goes from being a persecutor of Christians to being a Christian who is persecuted.

Talk about a change. Even willing now to die for the gospel. He's now preaching the very message he sought so long to abolish from the earth. And the lesson should be clear then, that converting grace leaves no one as it finds them.

Now, it changes them forever. And that's what should be seen in your testimony. Do you have such a testimony of conversion? Not only what you were before Christ and how Christ came and brought you to the awareness of your need of him and to faith and repentance, but a testimony that includes the after.

[40 : 36] What's happened since then? Since Christ has saved you, are you a new creature? Are the old things passing away? Are all things new to you?

Does your life make clear that you're now following a new master? And where he leads you follow and that you have a new heart with new taste buds? You have a new desire for Jesus and his word and his people and his day, his worship.

All this is new to you because of the grace of God in conversion. A new purpose to live, not for yourself, but for him. A new fruit coming from your life, of Christ's likeness, a new ethic, his law, not your own desires.

And this part of our testimony is equally to the praise of God's glorious grace because it's he who works in us, both the will and the power to do the things that please him.

Well, we're still living in part three, aren't we? So this part of your testimony should be growing. It should be fresh. It's not just, you know, 20 years ago, 50 years ago when I came to Christ, you know, my life changed.

[41 : 49] No, no. There's something fresh. Christ is in you. His spirit is in you. He's producing this new fruit today. It's not just a static thing.

It's an active thing. It's not just a past thing. It's a present thing. We live in this third part of our personal testimony. It ought to be as fresh as the fresh mercies of the new day coming from our Savior.

Well, these are the essential elements in Paul's testimony, and they are the same essential elements in the testimony of every one of us. Life before conversion.

Conversion, experience to Christ, and then after. When Paul quoted to his hearers that day the words of Jesus telling Paul to leave Jerusalem at once because these Jews would not accept his testimony about Christ, his hearers must have gulped.

They must have bit their tongues a bit at that point. Paul's leaving us was the Lord's judgment upon our unbelief. That's what Paul was telling them.

[43 : 02] The Lord told me to leave because you guys wouldn't listen to me. Gentiles. That wasn't easy to take. But as soon as Paul said the word Gentiles, that did it.

Instead, he was to go far away to the Gentiles and to invite them to enter the kingdom of God that the Jews would not enter through Jesus Christ, the gate. Gentiles, they will be offered something that you have refused and they will come.

So as soon as they hear this word Gentile, the crowd is done listening, the dust starts flying, the coats come off as if to stone him, the riot resumes and the chant is struck up.

Rid the earth of him, he's not fit to live. Rid the earth of him, he's not fit to live. So the riot had started, why? Because Paul had supposedly brought Gentiles into the holy place of the temple, defiling it.

And then the riot was calmed down as Paul gave his defense. But now as he speaks again of God's grace to the Gentiles, the riot resumes. Interesting.

[44 : 23] Not only refusing the gospel themselves, but angry that the Gentiles should get something instead of them.

now think of this from the Roman commander's perspective for a while. He saw a riot and he comes down from the fortress of Antonio and comes in with his soldiers and they stop beating him to death.

What's he done? Why are you treating him this way? One says one thing and another says another and when Paul speaks to him as he's taking him up the steps and Paul says, well, what did he say to him?

He said, may I say something to you? And he said, do you speak Greek? Oh, you mean you're not that Egyptian terrorist that led a bunch of terrorists out into the desert? You see, he had no idea who Paul was, what he had done.

But he thinks, well, maybe by listening to him, I will be able to find out what he's done, that the people are so angry. So Paul asked for an opportunity to speak to the people.

[45 : 31] He said, sure, go at it. And lo and behold, he switches language. Now he speaks, Paul's speaking in Aramaic and the poor commander hasn't a clue what he's saying to the people.

But he sees the people all quieting down and listening with rapt attention. And then all of a sudden the dust is flying again and the coats are off. And what's going on here?

Why are they so angry with him? He doesn't understand. But he does understand the anger of the Jews and he sees it in their eyes and their actions.

And he's determined to find out what it was that Paul had done that made them so angry. So he ordered Paul into the barracks for questioning. And he's got ways of getting information from prisoners.

We call it enhanced interrogation techniques. It's just torture and interrogation. Simple and plain. The torture was meant to put the prisoner in a talking mood so that he would get to the bottom of the truth quickly.

[46 : 36] So the prisoner would be bent forward over a low pillar and have his hands and feet locked in that position. And then a soldier would stand on either side with a short whips, with leather strips, studded on the end with pieces of glass and metal and bone.

And then they would alternately whip the prisoner. And once his back was skinless and laid open, then the interrogation would begin and the questioners would start flying to him.

Now, what is it? What have you done? And if they didn't get what they were after, there was more. And it would go deeper and it would hurt more. So as they began to stretch Paul out over the short pillar, he asked the centurion in charge of the interrogation just a question of procedure.

He just wants to know, is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen before he's been found guilty? Of course it wasn't legal. In fact, they would be in hot water if they ever flogged a Roman citizen who was not found guilty.

And so the centurion runs off to the commander. What are you going to do? He says, this man's a Roman citizen. And the commander is no less alarmed and he comes running to Paul and asks him, tell me, are you a Roman citizen?

[47 : 58] Yes, I am. I am too, but I paid a big price for money. I was born a citizen. And as soon as he said that, the interrogators just became invisible. They just withdrew immediately and the commander himself was shocked that he had almost flogged a Roman citizen before proving him guilty.

So Paul was unchained, kept in the barracks overnight for his own protection. But this commander is still frustrated. He still doesn't know what Paul has done to anger the Jews.

And he's determined to find out. And so the next day he orders the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews to assemble. And he personally brings Paul to stand before them where a formal charge could be made against him.

And we must leave Paul there until next week. But don't miss how the Lord saved his servant from that flogging. He used Gentiles to save his servant.

He used the Romans. Romans. He uses godless governments to build his church and protect his servants. He used the Roman justice system to bless his servant Paul.

[49 : 14] And this too is God's grace. Theologians call it God's common grace because it not only goes to those who know Jesus, but God's common grace is something shown to even pagan idolaters like these Romans that worshipped other gods and idols.

angels. And yet it's God's grace. He teaches men, even unconverted men, to come up with good rules of justice, such as the idea of being innocent until you're proven guilty.

We didn't come up with that in the United States. Much of our legal system rests on the foundation of the Roman system. I think we could even prove that the Romans were borrowing it from the law of Moses.

So we find judicial systems that should just remind us that we too have God to thank for a system of justice that is, no it's not perfect, but it's a whole lot better than most live with in the world today.

And it's grace, it's God's grace, and we ought to thank him for it. God's grace. And those imperfections in justice should just be reminders to us that one day the Prince of Peace is coming, and he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with his truth.

[50 : 36] And then there will be no wrongs, every wrong put right. Well, we've been encouraged again this morning by Paul's example to find in every situation an opportunity to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

Even when we're being accused, he somehow finds a way to talk about his Savior and what he's done for him. But we should also be encouraged by the result, or what we might say here is the lack of results.

I wonder if all you're witnessing is successful. You say, no, I don't always have success. Well, neither did the Apostle Paul, did he?

Think of a helpful comparison. 35 years earlier, it's Pentecost, just as it is here for Paul. Only then, 35 years ago, it's the Apostle Peter speaking to thousands of Jews at the temple.

And at the end of his preaching of the gospel, 3,000 Jews believe, are baptized and added to the church. Now here, 35 years later, it's Pentecost season, and the Apostle Paul is now preaching at the temple to thousands of Jews.

[51 : 49] And at the end of it, he's not baptizing new converts. He's just escaping with his life. It doesn't appear to be a successful evangelistic campaign, but we don't always see what God is doing with his word in the hearts of people.

We don't always see at the time of our witnessing what God is doing with his word in the heart.

George Whitefield, I close with this, was preaching outdoors at Exeter. And a man was in the crowd who had loaded his pockets with stones, fully intending to throw them at the minister.

This was outdoor preaching. You could do that sort of thing. And he waited for the opening prayer to end. And then he reached into his pocket and he pulled out a nice stone and he held it in his hand waiting for the opportune time.

Whitefield announced his text. The man waited a bit too long because God's word came home to his heart like an arrow and stuck fast in him.

And then the stone dropped out of his hand. Little did Whitefield know as he stood there and preached that day what God was doing with the double-edged sword of his word out there in the crowd.

[53 : 15] Only afterwards did the man tell Whitefield, Sir, I came to hear you this day with a view to break your head. But the spirit of God through your ministry has given me a broken heart.

And he proved to be a true convert and live for the Lord Jesus as an adornment to the gospel to his dying day. And so it is with your witness and your testimony. Not every testimony ends with baptisms and conversions.

And we see that with Paul. But we little know at the time what God may be doing with his word. And may only find out later the wonders he has done.

Who knows the end of the story for everyone in the crowd that day as Paul was preaching? Yes, they all were chanting and throwing dust. But who knows here and there what God was doing? Did some man go home with an arrow in his heart that day that he thought about this Jesus that Paul spoke about and about the mercy that he had on him?

If anybody deserved hell, it was Paul. And he had mercy on him? Maybe there's mercy for me. Who knows what God did with his word? You know, heaven will show what he did.

[54 : 29] You may meet people and as you talk with them in heaven and find out their testimony, they will tell you I was one of those in the crowd throwing dust that day. Oh, but I left with more than dust on my clothes.

I left with an arrow in my heart that I couldn't shake until I came to Jesus Christ and found forgiveness in him. So keep sowing the good seed, brothers and sisters.

You may be sowing what others will come along and water and another will come along and reap. Or you may be watering what others have sown and that others will come along and reap.

From time to time you may get to reap. But in heaven we will all rejoice together at a sinner who's been saved from endless torments and brought into the everlasting joy of the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. We thank you, Lord, for the account of Paul's life and the way that you saved him, a hell-deserving sinner.

[55 : 36] And we ask you, Lord, to open our eyes. We confess we get cataracts, we get hard of seeing, and we can't see and remember what we once were.

Thank you for your word that makes it so clear. That what we were deserved eternal punishments in hell. And thank you for what Jesus, your son, has done for us, the righteous one being damned in the place of the unrighteous.

He took our punishment and he gave us his righteousness and his blessing. And we thank you that he sent his spirit to live in us and so that we're new people, we're changed people.

We pray you'd go on changing us and making us men and women of grace. Singing of amazing grace and showing amazing grace of God to others.

Take the words that these folks are scattering throughout the week in their homes and in their workplaces and their schools and lives. And use that gospel seed to bring forth true conversions to the Savior.

[56 : 44] We thank you for your great salvation to us in Jesus' name. Amen. One verse.