



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 22:1-30

Acts

"Defense of the Faith"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Acts chapter 22, and we're going to look at the entire chapter, verses 1 through 30. This is really the final section of the book of Acts. It is a section that really deals with Paul's journey to his destination which is Rome, the capital of the empire. He will go there as a prisoner. And as we've seen the past week in our study, he was in Jerusalem. He was in the temple. He was carrying out an act of worship when he was recognized by Jews from Asia, probably from the city of Ephesus where Paul had a very significant ministry. They seized him; they called for help; they accused him of various crimes against the Jewish people, against the law, against the temple, and a riot erupted and Paul was only narrowly, at least from our perspective, rescued by the Romans. And so he has been taken up to the fortress, the barracks there, which was located next to the temple near the court of the gentiles. And there was a large gathering of Jewish people, a mob of people there. And Paul asks permission from the commander to speak to the people. That's where our text begins. What I'm going to do is begin with verse 40 of chapter 21, and then read through verse 30 of chapter 22.

"When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying, 'Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.' And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they

became even more quiet; and he said, '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, **bringing** and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the 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. But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very **great** 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?" And I answered, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 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." 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. A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!" And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, "Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me." And I said, "Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who

believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him." And He said to me, "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles." ' They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!' And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?' When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.' The commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.' The commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' "

And what he means by that is he acquired it by use of a bribe. They didn't sell citizenship, but someone could offer a bribe to an official and gain that advantage in that way.

"And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.' Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the privilege of being together again this Sunday morning. We thank you for the privilege of having your inerrant Word in our possession and being able to read it, read it publicly as we have, and then for the added blessing of

spending some time considering its meaning together. We praise you and thank you for that. And yet we confess our inadequacy to understand the things that we have read. We need to be taught not simply by a human teacher, but most importantly, fundamentally, most necessarily, we must be taught by a divine teacher.

And you and your grace have given us that teacher. You have given every believer in Jesus Christ the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who dwells, literally, within our hearts. What an amazing fact that is, Father. And He is our teacher. He's been given to teach us all things, and we pray that he would teach us this morning as we look into this testimony of the apostle Paul and consider it

Because its significance is not only for him; it is not only the story of what occurred in his life, but, fundamentally, it's what has occurred in the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. It is a story of grace. And I pray that as we look at it together you would teach us these things and encourage us. Build us up in the faith. Give us a greater understanding of who we are and who you are and what we have become by your sovereign grace.

Bless us spiritually, bless us materially. We pray for the material physical needs of this congregation. We pray for the sick. Bless them. We pray for encouragement, that it be given to the saints who get discouraged, Father, through the hardships of life. But give encouragement.

Give safety to those who are traveling. Bring them home to us safely. Bless our nation. You have blessed us abundantly in the past, you are blessing us in the present, and we pray that you would bless us in the future. Give us good, wise leadership that there may be peace in this land in order that your church might prosper. To that end, teach your people your truth and build them up in the faith.

We pray for our meeting this evening. We pray that as we return to this place tonight, you would bless all of us who assemble here and who participate in the worship of the Lord. May it be edifying for each of us and honoring to you. And we pray that for our

time together now as we sing our final hymn and then as we spend time in study together. May it honor you and be helpful to us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] In 1 Peter 3:15, Christians are told to defend the faith. "always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you." We are to be witnesses. In fact, we see that from the very beginning of the book of Acts. Christ commissions His people to be witnesses in "Jerusalem and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth." That's what we're to do.

But sometimes that seems like a daunting task. After all, most of us aren't seminary professors or scientists, and hardly feel able to defend the faith against objections that we are not equipped to answer. That's one reason that we need to be students of God's Word. We need to apply ourselves to that so that we will be adequate and able to meet the challenges that we face, but still, recognizing our inadequacy and the need to improve. And, really, recognizing the fact that we'll never get to that point where we feel particularly adequate for the challenges that face us, because, eventually, we're always going to meet someone a little smarter and a little more clever, and someone with a question that we're not fit to give an answer to.

But still, having said that, every believer is to be a witness. Every believer has a testimony to give. Every Christian has a story of grace to tell about his or her conversion. And the church has a rich history of that. Augustine gave his story in a book, the *Confessions*, which is his spiritual autobiography. In fact, it's the first book of its kind.

John Bunyan did the same with *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. C.S. Lewis wrote *Surprised by Joy*. Multitudes of others have told their story in a church service or in a private conversation with a friend. Some of the stories, some of the accounts of conversion are more dramatic than others. Some people are saved out of

hedonism as Augustine was; some out of atheism as Lewis was. Others are saved in childhood like I was.

Everyone's story is in some way different, but all are the same in that every testimony is the story of a sinner saved by grace, a brand plucked from the fire. The change in your life, what you have become by the grace of God is a great witness and defense of the faith. It was one that the apostle Paul used himself. Twice in the book of Acts we read of his giving an account of his conversion. He gave it in chapter 26 before the Roman governor, Festus, and King Agrippa, and he gives it here in our text in chapter 22 before the Jewish crowd at the temple.

He tells his spiritual story, though not directly as a witness to grace but as a defense of himself. That's what he calls it in verse 1: My defense. In Greek it is the word, *apologia*, from which we get our word, apology. It is his answer; it is his formal defense against the charges that have been made against him. He had been accused of speaking against the law of Moses; he had been accused of speaking against the Jewish people and against the temple, of defiling it.

As a result, there was a riot. The people seized Paul; they almost killed him. He was rescued just in time by the Romans and carried to the barracks. But Paul was not satisfied with escaping. He wanted to explain himself; he wanted to defend himself to the people. He asked permission to do that.

The Roman commander gave him the permission. And so standing on the steps of the Roman fortress, looking over this Jewish crowd, the multitude of people, Paul begins to address them. He makes his defense, and he makes his defense, basically, in two points. First, he demonstrated that he was a devout Jew. And, secondly, he explained that his message would differ from what they believed.

His message was not his own. It was not his invention. It was a message that was revealed to him from heaven. What he said was intended to give the lie, to the false charges made against him. It was

a defense of himself. It was a defense of the faith, given in a personal way in his personal testimony.

And it answered a question that must have been on the minds of some of the people in that audience, if not many of those who were there. Because there must have been a number of people gathered in that court of the gentiles looking at the apostle Paul, who had known him years before; if not known him personally, knew him by reputation. And they must have wondered, "How could this man with such a high standing in Judaism, this man with a seemingly bright future as a leader among the Jewish people, a great rabbi to come and an implacable foe of the Jesus movement, how could this man suddenly become a follower of that same Jesus?" Well, the answer to that is sovereign grace.

That's the answer that Paul gave for what happened to him and for who he was. That is the essence of his defense of the faith. But to give it, he had to get their attention. He did that first with a wave of the hand, which calmed the crowd. But the silence became deeper still when Paul began speaking to them in the Hebrew dialect, in Aramaic rather than Greek. It arrested their attention.

Because the man they considered an enemy, a man they considered as hostile to them and their traditions and their way of life, well, he knew their language. He was speaking to them in their language, and so they listened. Paul did everything he could to build rapport with the crowd. He diffused an angry situation and showed that he was not an enemy but a friend. And there's a lesson in that example for us.

We will never give a good witness if we begin with arrogance or anger, by offending with an attitude of superiority. As we go through the text this morning, I will emphasize the fact that salvation's of the Lord. It is His work, His doing. He accomplishes His work. We cannot do that.

But we are to give a witness and give a witness in the right way. God uses that. That's his means to bring people to the faith. And

we're not to stand before people or address people with an improper attitude, an attitude of superiority or anger. That just closes doors.

Paul didn't do that. Paul serves as an excellent example for us. He spoke their language. He spoke to them with respect. He addressed them as "brethren and fathers," and he meant that.

It was a genuine statement. It was an attempt to say that he was not some hostile alien who'd come in their midst. He was one of them. He knew them. He was their brother.

He makes that clear from his story, from his life which he then reviews for them. "I am a Jew," he said, "born in Tarsus of Cilicia," so a Jew like many of them who had gathered there for the feast day there in the temple, people who had come from the Diaspora, the gentile lands. Paul, too, had been born in the gentile lands. He was from the Diaspora. But unlike many of those Jews, he had been brought up in this city, he said.

That is, he spent his formative years in Jerusalem. He was exposed only to Jewish influences. So the critic that might have said, "Well sure, he's born in Cilicia, he's born in Asia Minor. He grew up in a gentile city. That accounts for his anti-Jewish sentiment and his prejudice against them."

Paul is showing that's not the case, not to gain anti-Jewish feelings in a gentile environment. He did not grow up in a gentile environment. He grew up in the city of Jerusalem surrounded by Jewish influences. And when it came time for him to receive a higher education, he didn't return to Tarsus which had one of the finest universities in the ancient world. Instead he stayed in Jerusalem and got the finest Jewish education that one could have.

He was trained, educated under Rabbi Gamaliel. We met Gamaliel earlier in chapter 5. He was the leader of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, one of the greatest teachers of his day, one of the greatest rabbis of his day. In fact, he was known as the Beauty of the Law. In the autobiographical account that Paul gives in Galatians chapter 1, he speaks of his education as well.

And there he states that he learned very well under Gamaliel. In fact, he advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries he said. I don't know if Paul was being modest there. It may be that he was and what the real meaning of that is he advanced beyond all of his contemporaries. He was the bright light, the rising star of Gamaliel's students.

He had a bright future. And he was "zealous for the ancestral traditions," he says. Paul was not ashamed of his heritage. In Philippians chapter 3, he gives us more information about himself. And he says of himself that he is "a Hebrew of the Hebrews."

So no one who knew Paul's background could question his Jewishness or his devotion to it. He was a legal scholar and an activist, a zealot like many of them, he says. In fact, more so. His zeal was so great, it boiled over into persecution of the church. Gamaliel was more tolerant. And he gave counsel to the Sanhedrin back in chapter 5 to show moderation in the way it dealt with this new movement.

You'll remember what he said. He said, "if this is not of God it'll go away." And he gave a few examples of rebels who had come on the scene, men who made a name for themselves and gathered a following. What they did came to nothing. If this is not of God it'll come to nothing.

But he says, "If this is of God, there's nothing you can do about it. You can't stop it." And so he counseled moderation. But Paul was not of that mind. As a young rabbi, he saw the challenge of the church differently from his professor and probably more clearly than Gamaliel did.

He knew the Christian faith was completely different from Judaism, and it was a genuine threat to it. Not a threat in terms of hostility, but a threat in terms of the idea of the theology of it. That's suggested in the name that it went by. It was called The Way, which is a reference to Christ who spoke of Himself in that way in John 14:6.

"I am the way and the truth and the light. No man comes to the Father but through Me."

He is the way, and it came to be known as The Way. Christianity is completely different from Judaism, from Hinduism, from paganism, from every religion under the sun. It is not about law keeping. It is not about earning our passage to heaven. It is not about our personal merit which can commend us to God.

Just the opposite; it's all about Jesus Christ and His merit which He imputes to us. It is all about who He is and what He did, and freely receiving the salvation that He accomplished on the cross. And because it is completely different from all world religions, it excludes all of them as false. They are all dead ends. Christianity, Christ, is the exclusive way.

Peter made that very clear when he spoke to the Sanhedrin back in chapter 4 of the book of Acts, in verse 12. And there he said of Christ, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." The name of Moses won't save you. No salvation in Moses or in the law. Salvation is in this one person who God has sent into the world, His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul understood that. When he was a Pharisee, he understood that this was an exclusive way. It is the narrow way. He saw Jesus and the gospel as a threat to Judaism. And so he says, in verse 4, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons."

Paul was ruthless in his zeal and determination to destroy the faith. It was all a matter of public record. He points that out, that the high court, the Sanhedrin could verify everything that he said. He had been closely associated with the priests and the council. He became the chief inquisitor of the council in persecuting The Way.

He went to Damascus with letters from the high priests authorizing him to arrest disciples who had fled there, and return them to Jerusalem in chains. But it never happened. As he approached

Damascus about noon, a very bright light flashed around him. He fell to the ground, and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Stunned, Paul asked, "Who are You, Lord?"

And he was given the answer that shook him to the very core. "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." Suddenly, Paul realized that the one he had hated as a heretic, a false Messiah, a dead criminal wasn't dead at all. He's alive. He wasn't false; He is the Christ; He is the Messiah; He is God. He is the Lord who was speaking to him directly from heaven.

Now, the Lord didn't speak to anyone else. There's a company of men here on the way to Damascus, just outside the city. And the Lord didn't appear to all of them and begin to plead with all of them to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to look to Him, none of that. The others were there. They saw the light.

They were aware of the phenomena that accompanied Paul's conversion. They could testify that this wasn't an hallucination in the hot Syrian sun. It happened. It really occurred. Paul's companions were witnesses.

They saw the light; they heard the sound. They heard the voice, but they didn't understand it. This conversation was particular. It was between Christ and Paul alone. Christ had come for him, and Paul surrendered to Him.

The light of Christ's glory had its effect upon him. It blinded him, and so he had to be led into Damascus by the hand. And there he waited to be told what to do. In Damascus, there was a disciple, a man named Ananias. Paul describes him in verse 12 as being "devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by the Jews."

So there was nothing in his conversion that would support the charge against him of being anti-Jewish, against the law or against anything that surrounded the Jews, their traditions. Just the opposite; this first contact with a Christian was with a man who was respectful of the law and the traditions of the Jews. It was a devout man that the Lord sent to Paul to restore his sight and to give him his commission,

to tell him of his mission in the world, his ministry. When he arrived, he told Paul to receive his sight. Then he told Paul God's plan for his life, that God had appointed him "to know His will."

Now, I'm going to return to that word, "appointed." It's a very important word in the whole message that Paul is giving here. But that's how he describes God's relationship with him. God had appointed him to know His will, appointed him to see and hear the righteous One, and appointed him to be a witness to all men. Now He doesn't mean a witness to all men in the sense of *all men* without exception but all men without distinction.

In other words, you will be a witness to the Jew as well as the gentile. You'll be a witness to kings as well as to subjects, a witness to free men as well as the slave, the male, female, all kinds of people. That's going to be your ministry. It's going to be a broad one. You are to be a witness of these things to all men.

And he said, in verse 16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." That can be translated, "Wash away your sins by calling on His name," by believing in Christ. That is the meaning of the statement. It's similar to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 6:11, where Paul writes, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

By calling on His name, by believing in Him, we are justified, we are forgiven. We become new creatures in Christ. Then we confirm that spiritually cleansing that has taken place through faith with baptism. Baptism doesn't cleanse us. Baptism only confirms the spiritual reality that has taken place. It is a witness to that event in our life.

Well, Paul did that. Later, we read, he "returned to Jerusalem." And when he returned to Jerusalem, he went to the temple, which was not a place we would expect him to have gone if he despised the temple or had defiled the temple, as he was accused of doing. He went there to worship; he went there to pray. And while he was

praying in the temple, he had a vision in which Christ reconfirmed his mission.

He "fell into a trance," into an ecstasy, as it's described. And he saw the Lord, who said to Paul, "Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me." So from that, it's clear that it wasn't Paul who had ill will toward the Jewish people. It was they who were against him. Paul had a great love for his people.

He wanted to stay in Jerusalem to speak to them, even risk his life for them. He tried to make a case for doing that in verses 19 and 20. "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' " It seemed to Paul that this was an ideal time and place for him to give the gospel.

He was in Jerusalem. The people there knew him. It wasn't that long after he had been the legal persecuting arm of the council. They would have known him well by reputation. He was well known in Jerusalem, and he felt this was a good time for him to give a witness.

What could be more convincing than a persecutor becoming a convert. Now, that's the way we think, and it makes sense. Paul's plan is rational. His conversion is compelling. No greater conversion recorded in the Word of God or in history than the conversion of the apostle Paul.

It is a compelling conversion, a compelling story. But unbelief is not rational. It is not reasonable. As Paul himself would later write in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them," which means he is not able to understand spiritual things. If unbelievers were rational about Christ and could be convinced and converted by reasonable argument and evidence, than the Jews would have been converts.

They were blessed beyond other people. The people of Jerusalem had been blessed in that middle part of the 1st century with the teaching ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, with His presence, with His character, with all of the miracles that He did. And we just have a small number of them recorded in the Gospels. He did multitudes of miracles. They saw all of that.

They even were witnesses to the greatest miracle of all that took place: the resurrection. And after He departed this world, His spirit was poured out, and the apostles continued with that ministry, with that teaching, and with the doing of miracles. They saw all of that. And yet, they had largely remained in unbelief. They were not receptive to the truth.

So as reasonable as it would seem for Paul to stay, it was not God's plan. What is rational in our minds is not always God's will. He is infinitely more rational and wise than we are. He is absolutely reasonable. He knows the future and controls it, and it is always wisest to follow God's will. His will may not fit well with the way we perceive things and the way we've charted out our future, but it's always best to follow God's will.

He had a different plan for Paul. He had a different field of ministry for him. It wasn't the field of ministry that Paul had chosen. If the choice had been left to Paul, he'd gone to his people, not to the despised gentiles, the refuse of mankind. He would have gone to his own people. He loved them.

God had another plan for Paul. And without prolonging the conversation, the Lord told him, in no uncertain terms, to leave. "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles." We know the rest of the stories. The church leaders escorted Paul out of town.

They put him on a ship for Tarsus. He spent some time there. Later, he went to Antioch where he had a significant ministry. And then from there, began his missionary journeys west to the gentile lands. But Paul never got that far in his testimony.

He was suddenly cut short when he mentioned the word, "gentiles." That word was like a spark in a barrel of gunpowder. Their resentment suddenly blazed up again and they went wild. They screamed "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" In other words, they said, "Kill this man."

They were very demonstrative and they tore off their robes, they threw dust in the air. The riot was on again. So the situation was once more out of control. And so the commander ordered Paul inside and he began to interrogate him. He probably didn't understand Paul's speech. He was probably a Greek man who would have known Greek and probably Latin.

But this speech was given in Aramaic, and he most likely did not understand that. And so he assumed that Paul had made some inflammatory statement from the reaction of the crowd, that he had provoked the riot. And so to find out the truth about Paul, who he was and what he had done, he ordered that Paul be flogged, scourged. It was interrogation by torture. All Paul had done was say the word, "gentiles."

He took great pains to pacify the crowd. He spoke in the Hebrew dialect. He used Jewish terms; referred to God as the God of our Fathers. But when he said that God had sent him to the gentiles, it all came apart and the riot was on. And we might ask ourselves, "Why was that?"

What was so offensive about the gentiles? It wasn't just that Paul would go to them. The Jews did that. In those days, they were actively engaged in proselytizing gentiles. Jesus spoke of that in Matthew 23 where he speaks of the Pharisees crossing land and sea to make one proselyte. There was a great deal of that kind of activity.

But that was making gentiles into Jews. Evangelism is different. It was calling gentiles to salvation without first making them Jews. That is what offended the crowd because it meant that Judaism was not necessary. It meant that gentiles were equal to Jews

because they both come to God in the same way: through Christ, not the law.

So nothing had really changed in Jerusalem in the 20 or so years since Paul was in the temple praying when Christ appeared to him and told him to leave. The people were still unreceptive. The fault was not with Paul. He was a loyal Jew. He was respectful of the law, respectful of the nation and the temple.

The message he preached was not his own invention. It was from heaven. But the Jews closed their minds to all of that because they hated that message. They were zealous for the law. They were zealous for human works. They were zealous for personal merit.

They saw themselves in a special relationship with the Lord God, which they do have as His chosen people. But they saw themselves as having merit in and of themselves. So they rejected what he had to say. Now, that is not a distinctively Jewish failing. Later, in chapter 26, Paul will preach basically the same message.

He will give his testimony again but before a mostly gentile audience. And it is a gentile, the Roman governor Festus, who stops him and calls him mad, insane. "Paul," he shouted, "You are out of your mind." So whether it be a Jew or a gentile, "a natural man," Paul said, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand it." That is the condition of all those to whom we witness.

So the power of your witness ultimately is not in your power of persuasion. It's in the power of God. Only grace can deliver people from their prejudice against grace. And Paul's entire testimony was about grace, sovereign grace. How else can we explain his conversion?

It's the most remarkable conversion in the Word of God, the most remarkable conversion in history. He was a self-righteous Pharisee, brilliant, confident, zealous, on a mission to destroy the church, to blot out the name of Jesus Christ from the earth, when he was suddenly converted to become the greatest missionary in the

history of the church. The only thing that can explain that is the resurrected Christ and His power to radically change a person, go to the very root of a person and change that individual. It wasn't Paul's genius or his learning that brought him to the knowledge of Christ. It was Christ intervening to stop him dead in his tracks, turn him around, change him completely.

He says that. This theology of grace is all through his testimony. When Ananias came to Paul, he first worked a miracle and then gave him God's message. Paul was physically blind and was made to see. Paul didn't give himself sight.

Paul was blinded and he was miraculously healed. It was a kind of parable, an illustration of what had happened to him spiritually. And it is an illustration of what has happened to every one of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. We are all born spiritually dead. We are all born spiritually blind until God gives us light, until God gives us sight, until he gives us spiritual understanding, and then gives us the power to respond to that understanding through faith.

That's regeneration. It's the work of the Holy Spirit which He performs through the preaching of the Word of God, through the preaching of the gospel. He gives life where there is death. He gives faith where there is unbelief. It is all His doing.

That was seen in Paul's life, and that is grace. It was illustrated in the miracle that Paul experienced. But grace is then clearly declared to be the reason for what had happened to Paul. In verse 14: "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth." Why did Paul see and hear the resurrected Christ?

Why did he learn the will of God, and not those other men who were there? Why did he learn of the gospel of salvation and believe in it, and become what he became? Because he was appointed. Literally, that word means to take into one's hands beforehand. And the idea of it is to choose, to plan, to purpose, to determine.

And so it expresses a personal appointment by God. And it indicates that God had Paul in His hands long beforehand, that He had taken Paul into His hands from the beginning, from all eternity. Why? Why Paul? Of all the men of the earth, of everyone who existed, why this man?

Why did He appoint Paul? Well, it wasn't because Paul was such a good man. It wasn't because Paul was seeking Christ. He certainly was doing that. He was persecuting Christ. He was seeking to destroy Christ's church when God saved him.

When this happened, when this conversion occurred, Paul was an implacable enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ. But that is who Christ came to save. Paul says that. Paul has much to say about that in the book of Romans. In Romans 5:10, he writes: "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son."

That is grace. God doesn't save the good, He saves the bad. He doesn't heal the healthy. He gives life to the dead. God didn't choose us because of our good work or because of some foreseen fate. There is no such thing.

"There is none who seeks after God. No, not one." And so if God looks down through the corridors of time and chooses those who believe, none will be chosen because none will choose, none will seek Him. He elected sinners, unconditionally, from all eternity, out of their ruin and their rebellion. And Paul is an example of that. What greater example of grace, sovereign grace, than the apostle Paul.

Salvation is all of grace. It is out of His grace. He put His hand on Paul. He put His love upon him from all eternity and He saved him, chose him for salvation. God saw the apostle Paul, and God saw him from all eternity.

Paul was always in God's mind. And when He saw him, the Paul that was in His mind was a dead, rebellious Paul that He chose, just as all humanity was. And out of that fallen wrecked humanity, God chose a multitude. And He sent His Son to die for Paul and for His people. And at the right time, the Holy Spirit was sent to apply that

salvation to Paul and bring him to life and bring him to faith and bring him to the Savior.

And Paul would be a witness to that the rest of his life. That's what he was commissioned to do, commissioned to preach. He was sent to preach what Jonah had proclaimed centuries before, that "salvation is of the Lord, not of man." But the natural man does not want to hear that. The natural man wants to take some credit for himself, see some merit in himself.

He rebels against it. That's what happened in the temple. That explains the riot that occurred. Paul's testimony produced a riot because it was about grace. And then Paul was nearly flogged as a result of his testimony, which was a brutal form of examination under torture.

And the scourge that was used had pieces of metal or bone implanted in the thongs. So the straps of the instrument, which when applied to the back of the victim, would tear the flesh open; sometimes produced death very often. And if not death, then permanent disability. But as Paul was being stretched out for the flogging, he spoke, and he spoke with complete composure. "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

The centurion who was in charge of this, who was overseeing it knew, of course, that it wasn't legal to do that. Citizens were exempt from flogging. So he went to the commander and he informed him that Paul was a Roman citizen. The commander came immediately and asked Paul if it were true. "Are you a Roman?" And Paul said, "Yes."

Evidently, Paul didn't have the look of a Roman citizen about him. He'd been roughed up by the mob. And Roman commander here, the tribune suggests that in his statement. He said, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money."

And the point was disparaging, it seems to me. "Citizenship must come very cheaply if people like you are receiving it." That's the idea of what he's saying. But Paul had another surprise for him. His citizenship wasn't bought, which means it wasn't obtained by

means of a bribe. Paul inherited his. "I was actually born a citizen," he said.

Well, that means that either his father or his grandfather had acquired citizenship. We're not told how that happened, how Paul came into this privilege. It's been suggested that his father or grandfather had rendered valuable service to a Roman governor or general, perhaps Pompey or Mark Anthony, who were very active in that part of the world at that time. But he had citizenship. Not purchased.

Something even better. He was born a citizen. And this revelation caused the commander great fear for what he had done. For what he'd almost done in scourging him, but what he had done in putting Paul in chains. Well, now he was responsible to protect Paul, and he's very aggressive in doing that which is quite an irony.

The very people who crucified Christ would protect his apostle. The very people who had been instrumental in the death of our Lord would now bring the Lord's servant to Rome, Paul's appointed destination, and they would do it at their own expense. And through it all, Paul would be given many more opportunities to speak the gospel and defend the faith. He would stand before Jewish leaders, he would stand before gentile rulers. He would teach the Scriptures and he would give his personal testimony.

That is how we give an account for the hope that is in us. It's very good to be apologetically equipped, to know the position of the opposition. It's very good to know scientific facts. It's helpful in order to be able to answer false charges. But we should not feel that we cannot witness unless we control all of the information.

We will never be able to control all of the information. As I said earlier, we'll always need someone who's smarter than we are, who knows something we don't know and can throw a difficult question that we can't answer. But we shouldn't be discouraged by that. We have a testimony. We should be witnesses.

We can do that. We should do that. One of the greatest witnesses in the Bible was given by the blind man in John chapter 9. You know the story. He was sitting there; the disciples and our Lord walked by, and they want to know, "Why was this man born blind? Was it his sin or the sin of his parents?"

Jesus said, "It was neither. He was born blind in order that he would bring glory to God." And then Jesus healed the man. Before the man really knew what had happened, Christ was gone. The Pharisees arrived on the scene and they began to interrogate him. They knew more Bible than he did. They were scholars.

This man was not a scholar. They tried to intimidate him; they tried, aggressively, to convince the man that Jesus was a fraud, he was a lawbreaker. He certainly was no prophet, certainly not the Christ. Why, He's healed on the Sabbath. He's broken the Sabbath. He's a bad person.

And they continue along this line of argument. Finally, the man said, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." That was his testimony. He couldn't say more than he knew, but he knew that.

Jesus had changed him. Jesus had made a blind man see. And the enemy couldn't deny that, just as the mob in Jerusalem couldn't deny Paul's testimony. He was a changed man. Whereas he had been a zealot and a killer, Christ had changed him into a lover of Jews and gentiles alike, a self-sacrificing man.

And no one can deny your testimony. Give it, but give it as Paul did, as the blind man did, as a witness to grace alone, to sovereign grace. He makes the blind to see, as you see today if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, because He made you to see. But there may be some here this morning who don't have that testimony. You are still spiritually blind.

You've never understood the way of salvation. But you may sense your need of it. You know that you are guilty. You feel it.

You know that your life is out of line with what it should be, out of sorts.

You know, as you look at your heart and you consider yourself carefully, that you are a sinner. The gospel is for you, and it is free. The forgiveness of sins and eternal life are free. It is all of grace. No one can earn God's favor. We can only receive the gift of life that Christ obtained for His people when He died on the cross, when He suffered for our sins in our place.

So if you're here without Christ, I invite you. Look to Christ, believe in Christ, receive that salvation and that life through faith alone in Christ alone. Believe. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 34: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." You taste, you believe, you will see that He is good and faithful. May God help you to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. And we thank you for the witness of Paul, the great testimony of his conversion. A picture and example of your sovereign grace that plucked him as a brand from the fire in the midst of his hostility, of his enmity toward you, of his opposition. You stopped him and changed him, made him a new creature.

And you've done that to every one of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. We thank you and praise for that. And pray that we would take our witness out of this place and into the city and be faithful in declaring the gospel to others. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.