

Paul In Chains
Acts 21:17-22:30
Pastor John Miller

Paul has come to the end of his third missionary journey. Now, some of you that are maybe visiting with us tonight, we're going through the book of Acts. We call it: The Gospel Of The Spirit. Paul had basically three missionary journeys; and we covered the first, the second, and the third. In Acts 21:17, we have the end of the third missionary journey. It says, "And when we," Luke is with them in the party, "were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." They've come back to Israel. They came back through Caesarea and then made the land journey up to Jerusalem. Beginning in Acts 21:17, Paul has arrived. Remember that everywhere Paul went, the Spirit was warning Paul that bonds and afflictions awaited him. Paul said, "I am willing to not only suffer for the Lord, I am willing to die for the Lord." They wept and cried. They said, "Paul, please don't go," but Paul said, "No. I'm going to go."

We talked about the will of God and discerning the will of God, and Bible students differ over whether Paul was in God's will or out of God's will. We'll have to wait to get to heaven before we're really going to know the answer. I tend to believe that Paul was in the will of God. They stopped trying to influence Paul. They said, "The will of the Lord be done," and I believe that God's will was done. God, in a very wonderful providential and sovereign way was going to rule in the affairs of Paul—he was going to be arrested and then transported first in Jerusalem, then to Caesarea, and on to Rome—and the rest of the book of Acts Paul is in chains, so I've titled this study tonight: Paul in Chains. I believe that God can use even our chains. God opens doors, God shuts doors, and if God has put you in chains, God can have a purpose for those chains. God can use you even in your time of affliction, adversity, and confinement.

"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." This "James" mentioned in verse 18, (we cannot be absolutely sure, but there's a pretty good guess) most Bible scholars agree that it's James the Just or James the Lord's brother or the James that wrote the epistle of James—the one that talks so much about true faith manifests itself in works. Now, it's interesting that none of the apostles were there at the church and leading the church in Jerusalem; but James, the brother of our Lord, at this time was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. They were present with all of the elders—Paul's long ambition to come to Jerusalem—and he's coming for a couple of reasons. He's coming because he has been collecting an offering among the Gentile churches, and he's bringing it to give to the Jewish churches that were in a time of suffering. He wanted to bring the churches together and unify the Gentiles and the Jewish believers, so he came to bring an offering. Paul also had a great love for his Jewish brethren and wanted to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, he's coming back to Jerusalem and will be arrested as the Spirit had warned him, but he meets first of all with James the leader of the church and all of the elders who are present.

In verse 19, "And when he had saluted them, he declared," that word "declare" in the Greek

literally means he thoroughly explained. He told them all that God had done with him among the Gentiles, “particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: 21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs,” that is, the Jewish customs, rites, and rituals. “What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.”

Basically, Paul arrives in Jerusalem. He meets with James and the elders. They are pretty excited, and Paul tells them all that God has been doing on his missionary journeys. God called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles; so he declares unto them, I've always liked this verse (verse 19), all that “God had wrought among the Gentiles.” Whenever God uses you—and God wants to use you—God is the One who is doing the work and to God be the glory. Amen? He didn't say, “Man, you should've seen the way we led those Gentiles to Christ,” and “You should see the amazing ministry we have,” and “what we're doing, and how powerful it is.” No. He said, “I want you to know all that God is doing among the Gentiles.” He turned the attention away from himself and his traveling companions and he pointed to the Lord, so they glorified (verse 20) the Lord—God was working, and God was getting the glory. Remember that. Whenever God uses you, you never touch the glory. You always direct the glory to the Lord. You're just His instrument. You don't praise the instrument, you praise the Lord for the work that He is doing.

So, they glorified God and were excited but said, “There is a problem.” There are thousands of Jews in Jerusalem that believe. In Jerusalem, which is the mother church, the majority of the believers were Jewish. They were getting saved and believing in Jesus, but many of them were still really devoted to Judaism. They were still really devoted to their rites, rituals, and to the Jewish laws. There was a rumor (it wasn't true) in verse 21, that you have told the Jews among the Gentiles “to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.” That is not true. Now, Paul did teach the Jews and the Gentiles that we're saved by grace. Amen? We're not saved by the law. By the way, Paul wrote the book of Galatians for this very reason and God had the book of Hebrews written to the Jews. The great Donald Grey Barnhouse used to say that Hebrews was written to Hebrews to tell them not to be Hebrews, and I like that. Be Christians. There's a real kind of tension today and somehow Jewish believers (which I thank God for) sometimes call themselves completed Jews, but they (and sometimes Gentiles follow suit) feel that you're a little more spiritual—you're a little more holy—if you observe certain days or use certain rituals, rites, or customs. They still have the legalistic concept of how we should worship.

Over the years that I've been a pastor and have been a Christian, I have been a little concerned that from time to time I see Gentiles wanting to become Jewish in order to become more spiritual. When Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia, he said, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you...before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” He says, “You were saved by grace, and you're not going to be made perfect now by the

law. Why would you go back under bondage? Don't go back under that yoke of bondage." So, as Christians, we're not saved by the Mosaic law. We're not saved by keeping rites or rituals. We're saved by the grace of God. Jesus is our sacrificial Lamb. All the lambs of the Old Testament were only typical of that Lamb, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to wash away our sins. So, having been justified by grace through faith in Christ alone, we are then sanctified by a life in the Spirit. Now, that's not to say that we don't live righteously, that we don't have laws or rules to obey, but God writes His laws on the fleshly tablets of our hearts. We don't do it for salvation. We don't do it for sanctification. So, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

It's interesting, back in verse 18, that they met with James. Remember, James wrote the epistle of James in which he so emphasized that justification is seen or manifested by our works. Paul wrote about our justification being by faith. They didn't contradict each other, they're just dealing with two different issues. James is saying, "Genuine faith will produce good works," and Paul is saying, "We're saved by faith not by our works," and "if a faith is truly real or genuine, it will manifest itself in good works." What Paul basically taught was that he wasn't teaching that you shouldn't circumcise your children if you're Jewish. He had Timothy circumcised, and he wasn't even fully Jewish. He was Jew-Gentile, and because he was going to minister in the area where Jews were, he had him circumcised so they wouldn't be offending or causing anyone to stumble.

They basically said, "There's a problem here," because a lot of these Jews in Jerusalem still had kind of their legalistic perspective. Now, in Acts 15, they determined what the Gentiles relationship should be to the law but never really resolved what the Jews relationship should be to the law, so they proposed a plan to Paul (verse 23). They said, "Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them," and it doesn't say what kind of vow, but it is generally believed, and rightfully so I think, that it's a Nazarite vow—that would be a 30-day vow of no wine, you were to stay away from things that are strangled or from carcasses, you shave your head, and you take this Nazarite vow. So, "We have four men which have a vow on them," and we ask you to "Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. 25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication," which is porneia, sexual immorality. We saw that dealt with in Acts 15.

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them." Here's their proposal. "Look, we've got all these Jews and they're kind of legalistic, Paul, so they've heard that you're anti-Jewish, anti-law, anti-Moses, and all these things," which was a rumor. By the way, rumors spread quite quickly. Be careful that when you're telling somebody something, you make sure you know you're telling the truth. A rumor only has one leg, but it moves really fast. Once it starts, it's hard to retract. So, "This is what

we want you to do," a proposal, "we want you to take a vow with these guys. We want you to also sponsor them." They were basically asking Paul, I believe, to compromise. "Come on. You brought us this offering, and we accepted it from the Gentiles; but now we want you to become a little more Jewish so that you won't rock the boat, you won't upset the Jewish brethren, and we want you to sponsor them." There was expense involved in the Nazarite vow because you had a 30-day period where you couldn't work or do anything else. Then, you had to offer these sacrifices for the purification at the end of that period, and they were expensive. They're basically asking Paul to sponsor these guys. "You pay for their sacrifices, you participate, and everything will be great. The Jews will think you're wonderful, and everything will be wonderful, and there won't be any problems."

The question here, and we'll try to develop a little more in a minute, is: Did Paul do the right thing in shaving his head (he'd done it before), going into the temple, taking with them this Nazarite vow, and trying to become more Jewish to kind of appease the Jews? I find it interesting that good Bible scholars are divided on this issue. Again, I don't think it's going to be resolved until we went to heaven. Now, some of you say, "Pastor John, I didn't even know there was an issue." The issue again is: Was Paul out of the will of God? Was Paul making a mistake? Was Paul compromising and falling back into legalism? Was Paul doing what he thought of in 1 Corinthians 9 when he actually said that he wanted to be all things to all men that he might win the more. Paul said, "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew...to them that are under the law, as under the law...To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ.)" Paul was possibly just trying to appease and win them.

Paul knew that we were saved by grace. Paul knew that we weren't saved by ceremonial things, keeping the law, or keeping these things. Paul might have just been trying to say, "Look, I'm just trying to become all things to all men," but he also loved the Jews and wanted to do everything he could to win them. Some questioned Paul's motives, whether or not Paul had the right motives or whether or not Paul really was doing the right thing. Again, we don't really know. What we do know ultimately, I believe, that God sovereignly was taking care of Paul, and God would use it for Paul's arrest which, I believe, was in the will of God and his transportation to Rome where there he would be in chains, but he would be preaching the gospel.

In verse 26, "Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple," so he purified himself with them. He went into the temple, and "to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. 27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia," this is modern Turkey where Ephesus is; which, by the way, is the capital where Paul spent so much time, "when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city," a man by the name of "Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out

of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. 31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.”

Go back with me to verse 27. It says, “And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him.” Paul’s in the temple. He’s doing his Nazarite vow. He’s sponsoring these other fellas. He’s trying to appease the Jews, and I basically think of, you know, you’ve got to be careful sometimes when you let other people tell you what to do. When other people tell you, “This is what you need to do,” you really need to make sure that God is leading and directing you. I don’t think this was Paul’s idea, and I think that it kind of turns into a crazy thing. Paul’s in the temple, and some of the Jews which were antagonistic who came from Asia...Paul spent so much time in Asia, in Ephesus for three years reaching the Gentiles. They knew his message. They knew that he preached to Gentiles, that they didn’t have to be Jewish to be saved. When they saw Paul in the temple, they started a riot. They got all upset. They cried, “Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place,” so they had three accusations—against the people, against the law, and against this place. They said, “and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.” Again, this is not true. It’s not true. There is no indication that when Paul went into the temple to take this vow that he took Gentiles with him.

Why is this significant? You might already know this, but the temple that was in Jerusalem had different courtyards. The outer courtyard, Gentiles could come into, but between the temple proper and the outer courtyards there was a wall. On that wall there was a sign fixed that said: No Gentiles can go past this point. If you do, you have yourself to blame for your own death. Now, how would you like to show up at church and find a sign saying that if you’re of a certain race, you come past this wall, you’re dead right now! Welcome to our church. There was an inner court for the women, an inner court for the men, there was the inner holy place, and the inner holy of holies. You had all these divisions in the sanctuary, but the Gentiles could only come so close because there was this wall.

Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians about Jesus breaking down the wall of partition between us. Read it in Ephesians 2. No doubt, Paul had this wall in mind that when Christ died, He dissolved that wall. He not only brought us into the holy place, but He brought us in together; so now there is one body, one family. No where in the New Testament does it have any indication that there should be a Jewish church and a Gentile church. In Christ we’re all one—Jew, Gentile, bond or free, male or female, right? That includes all races, all ethnic backgrounds, all different kinds of people—only one family of God—and I love that fact! We’re all one family, and God is our Father in heaven; but the Jews had this barrier. They had this wall fixed, and so they start freaking out. “He’s brought Gentiles in here!” Verse 29, “(For they had seen before with him in the city,” with Trophimus, and they knew he was an Ephesian, but they assumed that he had brought him into the temple when, in reality, he had not brought him into the temple.

They grabbed Paul and started to beat him (verse 30). They drew him out of the temple and began to beat him and the doors were shut. "And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band," the Romans allowed the Jews to govern the temple mount, but they also stood guard. They had their garrisons there. They had their centurion and their men. They would be up on the top colonnades, and if the Jews were causing a riot or something was going on, the Romans would come and intervene. So, they see the Jews going into a big tizzy. They're beating on Paul, and they come running in. The soldiers and the centurions (verse 32) ran in and captured Paul and "they left beating of Paul."

Verse 33, "Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle." The crowd is crying out, "Well, he did this," and another in the crowd, "He did that." You had this kind of mob violence. Their emotions are raging, but their minds are not working. It's kind of a crowd frenzy mentality. They grab Paul and are crying different things, but the Roman centurion and the commander didn't know why Paul had been apprehended by them. The "castle" mentioned in verse 34 is what's known as Antonia Fortress. It's in the northwest corner of the temple mount, and we visited it when we were there in February. It was there that they had the seat of the Roman government there in Jerusalem.

Verse 35, "And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers," they're carrying Paul, and the mob's still trying to get him, "for the violence of the people. 36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying," now, catch what they're saying, "Away with him." Have a familiar ring? Remember when they grabbed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and He was to be crucified? They said, "Away with Him." The same statement is made here now of Paul. Thirty years earlier it was said of Jesus, and it's interesting that Paul said in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him...and the fellowship of his sufferings," certainly, that's what Paul was experiencing here.

Verse 37, "And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. 40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying," so the Romans rescue Paul, and the mob is trying to get him. Paul says to the Roman centurion, "Can I speak to you?" This guy was kind of blown away. He said, "You can speak Greek?" That phrase actually means, "You can actually eloquently, clearly speak the Greek language." Paul was raised in Tarsus, and he had that Greek culture. He had the name Paul which was a Greek name as well as Saul but he had that background, both Jewish and Greek. The Roman centurion was rather surprised. He thought that he was an Egyptian (verse 38) "which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were

murderers? 39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city," a city that is prominent and well-known, "and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people."

I want you to get the picture here. This would be awesome in a movie! The mob grabs Paul. Wherever Paul went, there was always a riot or a revival, right? So, now we have a riot, and they're beating on him. They're hitting him. They're yelling they want to kill him. They want to tear him limb from limb, and the Romans rescue him. They're going up the stairs and you'd be thinking, Get me outta here! Get me outta here! Paul says, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute." He says to the Roman, "Can I talk to them?" You're thinking, Are you outta your mind? I heard of one liberal scholar that believed that this wasn't really a true story because he just figured, "How could anyone in their right mind want to speak to a mob that was trying to kill you?" I'm thinking, You just don't know Paul the Apostle, amen? Paul's passion to share the gospel of Christ. These people actually wanted to kill Paul, and Paul says, "I want to talk to them." I've spoken to some antagonistic crowds. I've got some really mean looks, but I've never spoken to a crowd that is trying to beat me up and wanted to go back to them and share the gospel with them.

Paul is in the set position where he's always wanted to be where God has opened the doors for him to be able to speak to his Jewish brethren. Now, these are non-Christian Jews, and Paul says, "My heart's desire for Israel is that they might be saved. I'm even willing to wish myself were accursed for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He has this opportunity on the steps of the Antonia Fortress, and Paul wanted to speak to this angry mob. Paul's great desire...God was in control orchestrating what is happening, and it begins in Acts 22:1. "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. 2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith," now, it's believed that this reference to the Hebrew tongue is a reference actually to Aramaic that the Jews at that time spoke. The word that's translated "Hebrew" tongue there could be a reference to Aramaic that was spoken at that time, but when they heard their own tongue being spoken, they silenced.

In verse 1, Paul addresses them as "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear...my defence." The word "defence" there is the Greek word apologia. We get our word apologetics from it. In the church, we use that term "apologetics" for the defense of the faith, the formal arguments to defend the truth of Christianity. We have certain people that are called to ministry of apologetics—defending the Word of God and the resurrection of Christ and the doctrines of the Christian faith. Paul is saying, "Let me make my apologia, my defense before you," and they gave listen.

I want you to notice the outline of Paul's testimony here. In verses 3-5, Paul dealt first of all with his past. I want you to know that every single one of you as a believer—all of us—have a testimony. One of the most powerful ways for you to share Jesus with other people is to simply tell them what God has done for you. You don't have to be a theologian. You don't have to be an apologist. You don't have to know Greek or Hebrew. All you have to know is, "Once I was blind, and now I see. Once I was in darkness, now I'm in the light. Once I was on my way to

hell, now I'm on my way to heaven; and Jesus Christ has changed my life." Amen? That's all you need to do. I like the story of the blind man. He basically said, "All I know is I was blind, Jesus touched my eyes, opened my eyes, and now I see," and even that they denied. They said, "No, no, no, no. You weren't really blind. Let's call his mom and make sure." That might happen to you. When you share your testimony, people may not believe or receive it, but still it's a powerful thing to use.

When you do share your testimony, it should fall into three categories—before Christ, encountering Christ, and after Christ. Too many times when people share their testimony, all they want to talk about is how big of a sinner they were. "Let me tell you how hard core I was. I used to shoot heroin into my eyeballs," and stuff like that. "I used to kill people like you." They want to talk all about their past. Now, it's okay to tell people about your sinful past, but let's not glory in that, that horrible pit that Jesus pulled us out of. Paul's was religious but he was every bit as lost as anyone. I want you to notice, so Paul would talk about before Christ, his encounter with Christ, and then after Christ. If you break your testimony in those three categories, you can package it to share with people real easily.

Paul said (verse 3), "I am verily a man which am a Jew," again, remember he's in Jerusalem talking to angry Jews, and he's going to share his testimony. He's going to do it as Jewishly as he can, if you can use that expression. "...born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, yet brought up in this city," that's Jerusalem, "at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." Paul says, "Look, I'm a Jew like you. I was born in Tarsus, but I was brought up in Jerusalem." Everyone knew the great teacher, Gamaliel. He was one of the most honored and recognized teachers of the law, and Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel, "and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers," and he said, "In my past life, I was zealous toward God, as you are all this day."

There's kind of a parallel to this in Philippians 3 where Paul tells his testimony from a theological perspective. Now, he's telling his testimony from an historical perspective. By the way, Paul's testimony appears three times in the book of Acts, and here's the second time we find it in the book of Acts. He said, "And I persecuted this way," a reference to Christians. In the early church the Christians were not so much called Christians as they were called those of the way, and it's possible it's because Jesus actually said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," so, Christians were known as those of the way. "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were," of that way, "there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished." There you have Paul's sinful past, and by the way, note we recognize this in Paul. Paul was zealous, but he was deceived. Sometimes people think that all you have to be is religious and zealous or religious and sincere. You can be religious and devoted and deceived or wrong. Paul was wrong. He was persecuting the church of Christ.

In verses 6 down to verse 16 we have Paul's powerful conversion. By the way, as I said, it

happens three times in Acts—Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. Notice he recounts what happened in Acts 9 (verse 6). “And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7 And I fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth,” and I’m sure that when that happened in Acts 9, Paul said, “And I am dead.” He hated Jesus. He was persecuting the church. This light from heaven, the voice from heaven, the Lord of heaven, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus.” “Ohhhh no!” Paul’s recounting his testimony, so we actually have a light from heaven, we have the Lord from heaven, and we have a voice that comes from heaven.

It says in verse 9, “And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” Now, if you’re a really astute student of your Bible, you might’ve noticed that in Acts 9:7, when Paul is converted, it says, “...hearing a voice,” now in Acts 22:9 it says, “...they heard not the voice,” and that’s because in Acts 9:7 the word is phone. They heard a sound. They didn’t hear the articulation. They didn’t hear the word. They heard a noise. They heard a sound, but they didn’t actually hear the articulation. They didn’t hear the words. They saw the light and heard this sound, but they didn’t know what was being said. Certainly, Saul did as he dialoged with Jesus and met Him on that road to Damascus. He not only was converted but was called and would be commissioned to be an apostle to the Gentiles. So, there’s the Lord of heaven, there’s the light from heaven, and there’s a voice from heaven. This is his encounter with Christ, and everyone of us as Christians have had a Damascus-road experience. We’ve encountered the Lord. Maybe not quite as dramatic, but we have encountered the Lord.

Verse 10, “And I said, What shall I do, Lord?” I think that’s an important prayer that each one of us should ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” “And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.” So, “Go into Damascus, I’m going to tell you what I want you to do.” “And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.” This proud Pharisee, this Hebrew of Hebrews, on his way to Damascus to bind Christians, bring them back, throw them in prison, and have them put to death sees this great light at noontime about the brightness of the sun. He’s struck to the earth, and he hears the Lord’s voice. He says, “Who are you, Lord?” And the voice came back, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” Now, remember Paul is persecuting Christians; but Christians are the body of Christ and Christ is the living head, and we’re united to Him. When anyone attacks the Church, the believers, they are in reality attacking Jesus Christ who is the living head and we are His body.

Paul says, “What do You want me to do, Lord?” as he goes into Damascus blind and humbled. God says to him, “I will show you what I’ve appointed for thee to do.” I believe with all my heart that God has an appointed task and a calling and a plan for each one of our lives. Now, I realize that sometimes you get frustrated wanting to know what it is. “If He would just speak to me through the heater duct or speak to me through the...right now I want it to come through the

air-conditioning duct. If He would just speak to me and make it clear to me.” I believe that God has a plan and a purpose and a design for you.

As I look back over my life and I don't know how much time is in front of me. I do know that there's less ministry in front of me than there is behind me. I haven't got another 45 years, I don't think, but I look back and I think how God has guided me, directed me, and led me; and His hand has been upon me. Basically, that's just been my prayer is, “Lord, I want Your will. I want Your guidance. I want to be in Your will. I want to do Your work. I want to be Your instrument. Lord, wherever You want me to go, whatever You want me to do. No stipulations, no terms. If it's Barstow, I'll go. Lord, I don't wanna go, but I'll go anyway. Tahiti or Bora Bora would be very nice, but whatever Thy will, Lord.” I think that everyone of us should ask that question, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” We've had an encounter with Christ. We want to know the will of Christ. We want to do the work of Christ. God had a purpose and a plan and a calling for Paul as He does for every one of our lives.

Paul goes into Damascus, humbled and blinded (verse 12), and we know the story, “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,” in light of verse 12, remember he's talking to angry Jews that thought he wasn't Jewish enough. He's telling them his testimony, and he wants to make sure that when Ananias came and laid his hands on him, he was a Jew, too, and a good Jew, one that was well-respected and had a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there.

It says in verse 13, “Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul,” a little footnote here for you Bible students. We don't have the recorded words of Ananias to Paul in Acts 9. All we have is Ananias saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto you in the way wants me to pray for you that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” So, we have information here given to us about what Ananias said to Paul or Saul at this time, that we get nowhere else. He said (verse 13), “Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14 And he said, The God of our fathers,” note the Jewishness of what he's saying here, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. 15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men,” which in a subtle way is including Gentiles, “of what thou has seen and heard. 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” I love this!

Saul is humbled. He has an encounter with the living, risen Christ. By the way, Paul's testimony is one of the most powerful evidences in all of the Bible and history that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead. How do you get this Pharisee to go from Saul the persecutor to Paul the preacher? Only one way, right? Jesus Christ is living right now! Amen? He died, He was buried, and He rose from the dead. How do you get someone whose life is transformed? If we be in Christ, we're new creations—old things pass away, all things become new. How do you get someone taken out of the darkness and brought in the light? Jesus does it. He's risen from the dead, so the fact that Paul or Saul has been transformed so radically, it's a great indication that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead.

Notice in verses 14-15 these five things that God communicated to Saul or Paul through Ananias. First, God has chosen you. That's true of us. Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Now, I know that you can't understand this, but God actually chose you. I wouldn't have chosen you, but God chose you. Remember in school when they would pick teams and you were always the last one to be picked? So embarrassing, and they didn't even pick you they just said, "Okay, we'll take 'em. You play second base. Not the position, the base. Just lie on the ground and be the base." We'd always put them back in right field in the far corner and said, "If the ball comes, don't do anything. Let someone else get it." To think that the God of all eternity actually chose you to be His child! When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, it says we're chosen in Him before the foundations of the world. What a glorious thing that God chose me before I was even born, that God had a purpose and a plan; so you're His chosen people.

Secondly, he says, "...that thou shouldest know his will," again, he said, "What do You want me to do, Lord?" So, God has chosen you that you might know His will, and He's given us His will in His Word. He's given us His Spirit to lead us. We know God's will. Thirdly, to "...see that Just One," that we have a relationship with Jesus. That word "Just One" is a reference to Jesus who is the Messiah, the Savior, the Just One. It's a Messianic title. Fourthly, I want you to notice (verse 14) that you "...shouldest hear the voice of his mouth." What a great description that is of conversion—God chooses us, we now know His will, we've seen Him, we hear His voice as He speaks through His Word by His Spirit.

Fifthly, notice verse 15, "For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou has seen and heard," so, God wants you to be His witness. We get our word "martyrs" from that. It means you lay your life down for Jesus Christ. Every one of us is to be a witness and to witness for Christ, to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to tell others what Jesus has done for us. It's so simple but so powerful. Don't be afraid to tell your testimony, to tell people just in a quick moment, "I used to live like this. I met Jesus, and now this is how I'm living. I've been saved." It's that simple, and there's nothing they can say. You had a front-row seat. You were right there. You saw it happen. God's changing your life, and so we're going to be His witnesses.

Verse 16, "And now why tarriest thou?" Ananias said to Paul, "arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Now, don't misinterpret this verse. A lot of people get in big trouble here when they interpret what is being said here as that it's teaching or inferring what's called baptismal regeneration. What do we mean by that? That's the teaching (which is not biblical) that you have to be dunked in water to be saved. The Bible doesn't teach that. We have to be washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and there's the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, but baptism is an outward rite or ritual of evidence of what God has done in your life. You can be dunked in the water and still not be born again and on your way to heaven. I've asked people, "Are you a Christian?" "Well, I've been baptized." "I didn't ask you if you've been baptized." You can get baptized 20 times, and you're just a wet person. You're not really saved. You're certainly not a soggy saint, that's for sure. You're not a saint. You're either a saint or you ain't; and you ain't, unless you've been washed in regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you can consult the Greek if you want. You can do your own homework, if you want; but a scholar as great as A.T. Robertson points out that this in the Greek is actually having called on the name of the Lord, so it says, "...arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins," having called, "on the name of the Lord." So, you have called on God's name. Your sins have been washed away. You have been forgiven, and now you ought to be baptized. The sequence is: You believe in Jesus. You're born again. Your sins are forgiven, then you're baptized—an outward showing of an inward reality—but baptism does not save anyone. It's not necessary for salvation, although I believe that we should be baptized in obedience to Christ.

In verse 17 we have now Paul's special calling. This is the third phase of his testimony. It says, "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem," this is right after his conversion on the Damascus road, "even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance," again, we only get this information at this point in the Bible. When he came back, he went into the temple and was praying; and he got a vision. "And saw him," that is, the Lord, "saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me."

A lot of times you get saved and you go back to your family and they don't believe your testimony. They watched you grow up, and now you're telling them that you're new in Christ. They don't believe it, so you have to live it in front of them. He says, "The Lord spoke to me and said get out of Jerusalem at this time, for they will not receive your testimony concerning me." "And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: 20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence," now this is a pivot point in his testimony. You'll want to note it in your Bible, "unto the Gentiles." Paul used the word "Gentiles." So, "I was this very strict religious Jew, killing and persecuting Christians. I met Jesus on the Damascus road, and now He's called me to preach the gospel," and when he said the word "Gentiles," notice the response of the crowd.

Verse 22, "And they gave him audience unto this word," what word? The word "Gentile," "and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. 23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air," now, can you imagine? You're a preacher. You're talking to a great crowd of people, and they're really rapt with him. "This is awesome. So far, you're a Jew. You're a Pharisee, you kept the law. You were killing Christians, I like this guy. He's awesome! Let's have him preach next Sabbath day," and then he has this encounter on the Damascus road and they kind of wonder, Where's this going to go? Then, he says, "The Lord called me to preach to..." and he says the word! A bad word—Gentiles. The Jews just freaked out! They started ripping their clothes off and throwing dirt in the air. Can you imagine? You're preaching to a church and they start ripping their clothes off, throwing dirt in the air? "Ahhhhrrrggghhh!" Let's close in prayer right now and get outta here! I mean, this is crazy! They just freak out on Paul. When they heard that word "Gentile" their response was they went into a fit of rage (verse 22), "...for it is not fit that he should live."

Verse 23, "And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air," but the response, "The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman." By the way, because Paul was speaking Hebrew (or some say Aramaic), the Roman soldiers didn't know what he was saying, and he gave Paul license thinking, Well, maybe he can work out the problem here, and everything's going to be happy. They'll all hug, and it'll all be over. He's kind of like, "This is pretty good," when all of the sudden BOOM! they just freak out. He goes, "What did he say?! Did he chop their mom's or something?" What did he say that freaked 'em out so bad? And so, he grabs Paul and has him bound and wants to do his own investigation.

Verse 27, "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea," because they were going to start beating Paul to find out what he said and what the problem was. Paul says, "Is it legal to bind a Roman? To beat him uncondemned without a trial? "And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom," my Roman citizenship. "And Paul said, But I was free born." I wondered how they proved they were Roman citizens. Did they have a little Roman citizen card with their picture on it or something like that? "Born a Roman citizen." I don't know, but Paul with a bit of pride on his part said, "Well, you purchased it. You had to buy it, but I was born a Roman citizen."

Verse 29, "Then straightway," immediately, "they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." It was highly illegal to bind a Roman citizen without a legal trial, especially to have him beaten. Verse 30, "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

Don't freak out, we're going to stop right here. We did cover the text I wanted to cover tonight, and if we don't move a little faster in some sections, we'll never get through this study in the book of Acts. As it goes into Acts 23, Paul again has the opportunity to preach to the Jewish Sanhedrin. He starts to share again with them, but let me wrap it up by saying this. Paul is now in chains and will be for about four or five years. The great Paul the Apostle...I love Paul. I just love this man, Paul. I can't wait to meet him in heaven. Paul had devoted his life now for well over 20 years to relentlessly, tirelessly preaching the gospel. He was a man devoted to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, and now he's in chains.

We would look at that from the human perspective of being a bummer! Like, "Why would God let this happen? Why would God let Paul get arrested? "Paul, you shouldn't have gone to Jerusalem." "Paul, you shouldn't have taken that vow." "Paul, you're blowing it!" I don't know. Maybe there are elements there that Paul had motives that were pure to reach the Jews, but he

wasn't thinking and acting according to God's will. I don't know. Nevertheless, I believe with all my heart that what Paul wanted was to be dead center in the will of God, and I believe that if we have that same passion, that same commitment, that no matter what comes into our lives, God will be glorified even in our chains. You may not be in an actual prison. You may not be in actual chains, but maybe you're in a cubicle at work and it's a prison for you. Maybe you're locked at a sink at home. Maybe you're changing diapers over a baby's crib and you feel like you're chained there. Maybe you feel like you're restricted, and God hasn't opened the door of opportunity; and you're waiting on God to give you an opportunity to serve Him, so you feel like you're bound by chains.

I believe with all my heart that God can use even our chains! I love to parallel this with Philippians 1 where Paul says, "I want you to know the things that have happened to me," and he's referring to his arrest and his imprisonment. "I want you to know," because he's going to end up from here on out through the book of Acts in prison in Rome, and that's where we're going to leave him. He says, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened," listen to me very carefully, "...unto the furtherance of the gospel." "What happened to me in Jerusalem—getting beaten, arrested, and thrown in prison," and he would actually be in prison in Caesarea for a year or two before he would be shipped off to Rome. There is where he would write Ephesians, Galatians, and Philippians. He would write his prison epistles, Colossians. He said, "I want you to know the things that have happened to me happened for the furtherance of the gospel." That word "furtherance" means pioneer advance. God will never be restricted or hindered by anything. You can be in a hospital bed, lying flat on your back, and God can use you there. You can be in jail or in prison, and God can use you there. Maybe God wants you to have prison ministry. I don't know. Certainly, God called Paul to a prison ministry, and when he wrote to the Philippians, he said it happened for the furtherance, that means pioneer advance.

Two things happened with Paul's chains. It gave him contact with sinners. He said, "Everyone in Caesar's household has heard the gospel." All the Roman guards, all the Roman soldiers, every few hours were chained to Paul. He says, "I got to tell them about Jesus Christ." Can you imagine being a Roman soldier chained to the hand of Paul the Apostle? "Hi! Let me tell you about Jesus!" "Oh great," chained to this fanatic Christian for several hours, so it gave him contact with sinners. Secondly, it gave courage to the saints. He said, "Many of the brethren, now that I'm arrested, I'm thrown in prison, are waxing much more bold in their faith and they're much more bold to preach the gospel." When they found out that Paul was in prison, they said, "We gotta get out there and preach!" They got emboldened and all amped up and went out and started preaching. Paul said, "God used my chains to further the gospel." Don't ever be discouraged about your reversals or your chains or your limitations or the doors that God seems to shut. God will use it for your good and for His glory. Amen?