



38 | ACTS 21:37-22:29

WITNESSING FOR JESUS

Instead of magnifying our fear or our circumstances, we need to magnify our great and glorious, infinite, and loving God.

Outline

1. GOD'S PROTECTION (21:37-22:1)
 - Protected by an Unlikely Ally
 - Protected with a Unique Heritage
 - Protected with an Uncanny Permission
 - Protected with an Unbelievable Opportunity
2. GOD'S POWER (22:2-21)
 - God's Power to a Lost Sinner
 - God's Power through a Loving Savior
 - God's Power for a Life-Changing Salvation
 - God's Power for a Lifelong Calling
3. GOD'S PLAN (22:22-29)
 - God's Plan in a Dangerous Situation
 - God's Plan Brings a Sudden Deliverance
 - God's Plan Has a Sovereign Purpose

Call to Worship

The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! ²The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. ³Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! —Psalm 99:1-3

Songs

Only a Holy God

And Can it Be

Here is Love

There is a Redeemer

Turn Your Eyes

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

You never know when you are going to have the opportunity to preach the gospel. My youth pastor used to tell me, “**Always be ready to preach, pray, or die.**” That’s a good rule for any Christian. We are each called to “go into all the world and preach the gospel” to all people. And you never know who you’re talking to when you evangelize. Every Christian needs to feel the weight of souls that Jesus felt. He died for his church. We need to go and rescue the lost!

Years ago, as a child, **I lived in the deep woods in the bayou of Louisiana.** Many youth groups, burdened for souls, came to my door when I lived in the swamp country, near the Natalbany River. Various youth groups from different churches would journey a mile into the bayou to visit to our home and evangelize us. They didn’t know that one day I would follow Christ. **They faithfully gave the word, not knowing that one day I would plant churches in Spain** and lead a church in northwest Chicago. From the least to the greatest, we just don’t know who we are witnessing to.

I think of Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was converted as a youth in a snowstorm. Because of a snowstorm, the 15-year-old’s path to church was diverted down a side street. For shelter, he ducked into the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Artillery Street in London. The blizzard was so bad, the pastor couldn’t even attend, so a deacon preached a simple message. He stepped into the pulpit and read his text—Isaiah 45:22 (KJV)—“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.” Spurgeon’s Autobiography records his reaction:

He had not much to say, thank God, for that compelled him to keep on repeating his text, and there was nothing needed—by me, at any rate except his text. Then, stopping, he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, “That young man there looks very miserable,” and he shouted, as I think only a Primitive Methodist can, “Look! Look! Look, young man! Look now!” Then I had this vision—not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was. Now I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I did believe in one moment.¹

Who knew that this young man would be the “prince of preachers” in how he pointed people to Christ! Similarly, **Dwight Lyman Moody** was just an ordinary shoe salesman in Boston when he was reached for Christ. Moody tells the story of his conversion this way:

When I was in Boston as a young man, I used to attend a Sunday school class, and one day I recollect my teacher came around behind the counter of the shop I was at work in, and put his hand upon my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt that I had a soul till then. I said to myself, “This is a very strange thing. Here is a man who never saw me till lately, and he is weeping over my sins, and I never shed a tear about them.” But I understand it now and know what it is to have a passion for men’s souls and weep over their sins. I don’t remember what he said, but I can still feel the power of that man’s hand on my shoulder tonight.²

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: 1834-1854* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), 106.

² Frank Grenville Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), 257.

The concern and tears of a godly Bible teacher resulted in the conversion of a man who **saw a million souls saved** in his evangelistic campaigns.

How **we need to have a deep concern for souls**. Our testimony is a vital way to introduce the gospel to people. Here with Paul under **arrest in Jerusalem** at the Feast of **Pentecost**, he's unexpectedly able to give his testimony to the crowds **who have come from all around the nations to celebrate Pentecost**.

After the accusation that Paul had **violated the temple code** by bringing a **Gentile into the inner court of Israel** in the temple, the crowd seized Paul and would have killed him had the Roman guards not intervened in the nick of time.

At **least 1,000 soldiers were stationed in the Antonia Fortress** at the northwest corner of the temple area. The temple crowd was in an uproar, beating him, ready to put Paul to death.³ God protects Paul and allows him to give his testimony to this vast crowd of 30 to 60 thousand people.

Key thought: We need to go into the whole world and preach the gospel and leave the results to God.

1. GOD'S PROTECTION (21:37-22:1)

Paul had spent his entire Christian life witnessing for Jesus. He believed the command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel." It wasn't an option. He was **often in and out of trouble** with the authorities in various towns. Sometimes he went to jail. Once he was even given the **death penalty by stoning**. This time in Jerusalem looked like one of those more dangerous times. Paul knew the words of the Psalmist.

Psalm 118:6 | The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Paul **wasn't reckless**, but he trusted in the Lord, and in the midst of a riot, God protected him and **Paul had been pulled into the barracks**, into the citadel (Antonia Fortress) there, where our Lord had also stood before Pontius Pilate.

PROTECTED BY AN UNLIKELY ALLY

Paul had a question and began to speak to the tribune, who we later come to know as "Claudius Lysias" (cf 23:26). He was kind of a **one-star general of sorts**. Paul speaks in **Greek**, which gets Lysias' attention. Before him stood Paul, his **hair matted** from the blood and **gashes** on his face, **bruised** and **beaten**.⁴

Acts 21:37 | As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he [the tribune] said, "Do you know Greek?"

By this time the **tribune at first was convinced that Paul was a dangerous troublemaker**, and already he had an opinion as to who Paul was. When Paul spoke to him politely, however, in cultured Greek, the tribune's **opinion changed**. **Paul's language was in polite, polished Greek**, and the tribune was amazed that he would

³ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 491.

⁴ Sproul, *Acts*, 361.

speak Greek in the first place.⁵ Here was no wild-eyed radical, **no fanatical religious firebrand**; here was an educated individual speaking the language of the **cultured** and educated world with obvious fluency. **He expressed his astonishment.** “**Do you know Greek?**” The implication was that he was no back woods Judean, but a cultured and educated Greek speaker.

This seemingly insignificant incident, but it is not. **Due to Paul’s good education** and cultured manner, we have **one of the turning points of history**. From this moment on, the tribune took more than a passing interest in Paul and protected him from his enemies.⁶ **Paul could have been put to death that day**, but God did not allow it. Instead, Paul would be under the protective custody of Rome, and able to complete his mission, which with **seven more books of the Bible to write**.

PROTECTED WITH A UNIQUE HERITAGE

Paul was from the province of Cilicia, but **he was mistaken for an Egyptian who had started a riot in Jerusalem**. Thousands of rioters were executed, many by crucifixion in Rome, but the Egyptian had escaped. Lysias the tribune thought Paul was the Egyptian revolutionary.⁷ But he was a **educated, thoughtful person** from the **highly cultured Tarsus**.

Acts 21:38-39 | “Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” ³⁹ Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.”

Paul immediately relates to the crowd. He’s in chains due to a Roman, but he’s addressing the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul was a Jew, and that was something he never forgot (*cf* 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4–5). He was a man of **Tarsus, which hosted one of the greatest universities of the ancient world**. What is more, Paul was a Rabbi, trained at the feet of Gamaliel, who had been ‘the glory of the law’ and who had died only about five years before.⁸

PROTECTED BY AN UNCANNY PERMISSION

Shockingly, the Roman tribune is the one to give Paul permission to preach the gospel one last time to the crowd at Jerusalem, here at the Feast of Pentecost in 57 A.D.

Acts 21:40a | And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people.

Paul turned and **raised one bruised, chained hand**. Lysias, the tribune, was yet more astonished: **Paul’s gesture quieted the crowd**. The yells died to murmurs.⁹ And he gets permission from this Roman officer, like a one star general. He hears Paul speak in beautiful, eloquent Greek. I find that **God opens doors in the most unusual and unexpected ways**.

⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 455.

⁶ J. Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, Ac 21:37.

⁷ Flavius Josephus, *War of the Jews*, 2:261–263.

⁸ Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 188.

⁹ Pollock, *The Apostle*, 243.

PROTECTED WITH AN UNBELIEVABLE OPPORTUNITY

Paul is about to address the crowd in the **language of the Hebrews, in Aramaic**, and the people were eager to listen. It's the Day of Pentecost. He had been **carried from the temple courts by the soldiers who had bound him in chains**. They brought him to the steps of the Antonia Fortress where Jesus had once been mocked with purple robe and crown of thorns. He was able to address the crowd. Understand that Paul has been beaten. Imagine what he must have looked like. **Blood running down his face**. His **hands bound** with Roman chains. Roman soldiers and centurions surrounding him. There he is at the top of the steps of the **Antonia Fortress where our Lord had been**. He's about to address the crowd, and they are so curious what he's going to say, there is a great hush.

Acts 21:40b-22:1 | And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: ^{22:1} "Brothers and fathers, hear the **defense** that I now make before you."

Paul was able to look down on the crowd from the top of the steps of the Fortress, motion for silence, and then address them in their own vernacular. **Hebrew was often used to speak of the language of the Hebrews which was 'Aramaic' at the time.** ¹⁰ Speaking in the language of God's people seems to have a desired effect. They keep listening!

Paul is about to **give a glorious defense**, not of himself primarily, but of the gospel. The word for "defense" is "apologia" like Peter used when defending the gospel.

1 Peter 3:15 | Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

He knew this was not about anything earthly. The charges that he had brought a Gentile into the temple courts were false. **This was his opportunity to give the gospel!** The crowd wants to hear this former student of Gamaliel gone rogue. They didn't have Netflix or social media to hear and see him. Now he was in front of them. This was something riveting to them.

Saints, we are God's children, and where he directs us, **we are to open our mouths** for the gospel, **trusting in his love and protection** and guidance.

2. GOD'S POWER (22:2-21)

Now Paul is about to **proclaim God's power to save a poor, lost, religious sinner**, like himself. This crowd knew Paul. This was the great teacher, Saul of Tarsus, but now he's a follower of Jesus, the Messiah.

Paul is surrounded by Roman soldiers. The distinguished Roman tribune in charge of overseeing the Festival of the Jews at Pentecost, is **shockingly giving Paul the opportunity to address the crowd**, probably to get more information out of Paul and to understand his situation. Of course, since Paul is addressing the crowd in the language of the **Hebrews, Aramaic, the tribune won't get much out of it**. He's going to tell

¹⁰ Marshall, *Acts*, 372.

this Jerusalem crowd the good news, just as Peter had done almost thirty years earlier on the feast of Pentecost.

GOD'S POWER TO A LOST SINNER

The first thing he tells the crowd, is that **despite having the best religious education with the best person (Gamaliel)**, and with a sincere zeal for God, **Paul himself had actually been a lost sinner**. He had been lost and in need of the Savior.

Acts 22:2-5 | And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: ³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

Lost in religion. Paul was **ultra-religious but completely lost**. He was an expert in the Scriptures, but **when he was a lost Pharisee, he didn't know the God of the word**. What an amazing pedigree Paul had—born in **Tarsus**, the great university city in the beautiful Taurus mountain range. Paul was indeed **committed to Judaism more** than anyone in his audience. He was **taught by the great Rabbi Gamaliel**. He had been carefully and thoroughly instructed in the Old Testament law and the rabbinic traditions, and he was once a Pharisee who was blameless under the law (cf Phil 3:5–6). Considering that, **the charge that he opposed the law (21:28) was ridiculous**. His personal conviction was that the law was “holy ... and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12).¹¹

Lost in zeal. Paul had been zealous, persecuting Christians. Though it had been almost 30 years, **Paul knew many of the seventy elders on the Sanhedrin**, the council that ruled Israel, with the high priest as well. And of course, they knew him. The charge against Paul that he didn't respect Judaism is false on its face. Paul loved the law of the Lord.

The problem with Paul is that he was **religious but lost**. All people, whether born in a pagan home or Christian home, are born lost. Our religion does not save us. The children that are in the church, for the most part, are from loving Christian homes. But **no one is saved just because their parents are committed Christians**. Each child has to come to Christ on their own accord. Each of us has to come to Jesus for our own sins, seeing him as Savior and Redeemer.

GOD'S POWER THROUGH A LOVING SAVIOR

Even though Paul had known God's word so well, as an expert, he did not know the Savior. He was **actually persecuting the Savior and his people** (21:8). In fact, he was on his way to Damascus to continue his unrelenting persecution and punishment of God's people. But something or *Someone* interrupted him.

¹¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 2, 265.

A Revelation

Acts 22:6 | As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

After Paul showed his commitment to the law of God, explaining how zealous he was, he then demonstrated how the **God of Israel himself had sought Paul out personally**. The first thing that made Paul aware of God's presence was the "great light from heaven" shining all around him. This would be immediately recognizable as the glory cloud from the Old Testament that led the children of Israel. The Lord Jesus had sought Paul out, by revealing his glory from heaven. Instantly Paul knew he had been wrong. He'd been saying that Jesus had been a liar and a charlatan—a false Messiah. Now he knew that Jesus truly is the God of glory, the Lord of heaven and earth. **In a moment, Paul knew Jesus was Yahweh in human flesh.** And it was Yahweh that Paul was persecuting.

A Repentance

Acts 22:7-10a | And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'

As the Lord Jesus called Paul to salvation, Paul asked the Lord to identify himself. He said he was "Jesus the Nazarene who you have been persecuting." This was said to bring Paul to repentance. When we repent, we bring our sin into the light and see it in all its ugliness. Paul's next response is "What shall I do, Lord?" There is a surrender, a turning to Christ—a complete submission to him.

Paul's Response

Acts 22:10-11 | And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' ¹¹And 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.

Paul responded by asking what to do! He's to go to Damascus and meet a man named Ananias. **Paul obeyed. Theologians call this "irresistible grace."** Paul, who was once unwilling and opposed to Christ became "**willing in the day of God's power**" (Psa 110:3). Not all of us get a Damascus Road experience, but we all are drawn to the Father and given eyes to see. Though Paul was blinded by the light, he had surrendered by faith to Jesus. After all Paul's persecution of Christians, **Jesus pursued Paul and softened his heart.**

GOD'S POWER FOR A LIFE-CHANGING SALVATION

Ananias, a faithful brother in Damascus, met Paul and restored his sight. At that moment Paul was given a commission to evangelize and a command to be baptized.

A New Friend

Acts 22:12 | And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there.

Ananias was a devout disciple of Christ from Damascus, but he was known by the Jews as someone who was **faithful to the law**. Even the Jews in Jerusalem seem to know that Ananias is a good and blameless man. When God saves us, he puts us in his “forever family” in the Body of Christ. This **life-changing salvation** is guided by God’s people that surround us **like parents surround and hold on to their baby**.

A New Sight

Acts 22:13-15 | And one Ananias ... came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

It is touching that this godly man Ananias had a gift of healing of sorts. He says, “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” He was able to restore Saul of Tarsus’ sight back to him. This is a true, **physical healing**, but it is also representative of what was happening in Paul’s life. **He is given spiritual sight**. With John Newton, Paul could say, “**I once was lost but not I’m found, was blind but now I see**.” This a beautiful picture of repentant faith, which is a brand-new worldview. Paul is seeing through new eyes. It’s also an appropriate picture of regeneration, for Paul could see because he had a new heart and a **new nature by the Holy Spirit**, now indwelling him.

A New Assimilation

Acts 22:16 | And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

Paul had been circumcised on the eighth day to be assimilated into the people of Israel, but now he was told to seek a new induction and **assimilate into the church of the living God through baptism**. Baptism is a picture of our conversion, where God washes us clean of all our idols (Eze 36:25ff). Baptism is a way to testify to the world and God and to angels that you are not ashamed of the gospel. It is an outward sign of the inward reality that God has “washed away all your sins.” Paul was indeed baptized, calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. Let’s give glory to God for giving us a true salvation. Listen to Jesus’ call to each of us:

John 3:3 | Ye must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let us be patient and look for our children, our friends, and neighbors to truly come to Christ and see with new eyes and a new wonder. So many make false professions because they have not been born again.

GOD'S POWER FOR A LIFELONG CALLING

Paul now turns to the reality of what God has done. The majority of the Jews had rejected the gospel. Paul had fallen into a trance while he was in the temple. There God gave him a vision that the Jews had rejected the Messiah, and that Paul's ministry was to be far away from the Jews in the distant lands of the Gentiles.

Acts 22:17-21 | "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ¹⁹ And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' ²¹ And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

There is a certain sense of disappointed longing here. As with the Lord Jesus, **Paul's own people would not receive him** (Jn 1:11). He is literally saying: 'I had a priceless gift for you, but you would not take it; so it was offered to the Gentiles.'¹²

Paul is not going to be able to flee Jerusalem but will instead go "**far away to the Gentiles**" with an escort of Roman soldiers. He'll be witnessing to them all along the way. He will indeed make his way to Rome eventually, and then he will be free for a time and possibly even preach in Spain before he is imprisoned again, this time at the Mamertine prison in Rome, being cellmates with the apostle Peter. Church tradition states that they died on the same day around October 67 A.D.

Paul's calling was to expand the gospel outside of Israel, to the ends of the earth! We too cannot be content with just going to church and evangelizing our own families. That's vital, but we must have the calling and vision of Paul in our own lives.

We who can see and are born again are called to bring people to Christ, but **we often bypass our calling and become distracted by comfort**. It reminds me of a sad story I read recently in an Ethics book about a tragedy here in Chicago.

ILLUSTRATION: Christopher Sercye was playing basketball with his friends on May 16, 1998, when he was shot in the chest, and a stray bullet perforated his aorta. His friends helped him get to within **forty feet of the entrance to Ravenswood Hospital** and then went inside and asked for help. The hospital staff refused to help Christopher saying that it was **against the hospital's policies to administer aid** to those outside the hospital. Eventually a policeman was able to get a wheelchair and **wheeled Christopher into the hospital** where he was helped by the hospital staff. It was **too late, however, and Christopher died** about an hour later.¹³

Many times, it seems that churches are surrounded by people that desperately need to hear the gospel, yet Christians are content to share it **only with those that manage to**

¹² Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 190.

¹³ Robert T. Hall, *An Introduction to Healthcare Organizational Ethics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000, 151).

come inside their church. Let's never forget the gospel's power! Bring your loved ones to Christ!

Romans 1:16 | I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

I think of John Paton, who was willing to give his life to the gospel no matter what the cost. He was headed to the Hebrides Islands off the Northwest coast of Scotland where there had been those who had already lost their lives due to the people who were cannibals. When Paton said he was headed there, a Mr. Dickson exploded, "The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!" But to this Paton responded:

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.¹⁴

God protected John Paton, and he claimed the little island of Aniwa for Christ, and the entire island of several hundred formerly cannibal islanders came to Christ and stopped practicing cannibalism. Paton said:

I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Savior's feet.¹⁵

God rewards our courage to witness to our loved ones. Paul loved his own people and was willing to be accursed for them. What a joy for Paul to give his testimony to the great crowd on the day of Pentecost.

But God's plan was to remove Paul from Jerusalem and **set him on his way to Rome**. In order to get there, he's thrust into a dangerous situation when the crowd rejects his message.

3. GOD'S PLAN (22:22-29)

GOD'S PLAN IN A DANGEROUS SITUATION

A riot was brewing over Paul announcing to the crowd of Jews at Pentecost that they had rejected their Messiah, and now Paul was commanded by the Lord to go "far away to the Gentiles." This was an insult to the Jews, and Paul was saying that it came from the Lord himself.

Acts 22:22-24 | Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For **he should not be allowed to live.**"²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

¹⁴ Ralph Bell, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (Butler, IN: The Highley Press, 1957), 56.

¹⁵ Ibid., 312.

This was nothing like that first Pentecost of the church when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This time the people were under the control of the wicked one. They believed he was guilty of the death penalty. If a person brought a Gentile into the inner court of Israel at the temple, that was considered a capital crime. **They showed their disapproval** in the traditional way by shouting and **waving their garments and throwing up dust in the air.**¹⁶

The Jews may have removed their cloaks in preparation to stone Paul, torn them in an expression of horror at his “blasphemy,” or thrown them and the dust into the air as an expression of outrage.¹⁷ **Sometimes when we do what is right, bad things happen. But the Lord is with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.**

The Roman officer decided to interrogate Paul and ordered him into the barracks of the Antonia Fortress to be flogged with the dreaded **flagellum, a cat-o-nine tails, as our Lord was.** This was to extract information from him. I’ve been in the Antonia Fortress, in the torture chamber where they flogged people.

TORTURE COMING: The sunlight faded and the noise died as they marched Paul to the lower floor of the Antonia Fortress, into vaulted cellars lit by flickering torches, and into the torture chamber. **They removed his chains, stripped him, then bound his ankles to a bar and secured his wrists** above him. His arms were stretched high above his head and his whole body was hung taut and tight. **The position was painful in itself and every blow would fall on tightened nerves and muscles.** By now Paul knew what was intended. He was to be given the dreaded flagellum, a **murderous whip of heavy rawhide loaded with jagged bits of zinc, iron, and bone.**¹⁸ It could turn the body into hamburger meat, leaving muscles hanging and bones exposed. Paul may live through this, but he would be handicapped after this and may never preach again.

Paul knew he would live since he had been given a vision that he would make his way to Rome to preach the gospel. But he needed wisdom to know what to do. He could be **permanently injured** from such a flogging. Yet, Paul *trusted God’s plan.* Do you trust God’s plan in fearful situations? **God calls us to bring our anxieties to him** and to trust in his plan to use all things to conform us to Christ’s image.

Romans 8:28-29 | We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹... predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Trust the plan of God for your life, even if pain and danger are looming! He’s conforming you to Christ through your hard circumstances.

GOD’S PLAN BRINGS A SUDDEN DELIVERANCE

Paul was stretched out to be tortured. The centurion attending Paul had made sure this would be the most painful experience for the apostle. Before the beating began **Paul had a question for the centurion. God gave Paul great wisdom in his moment of trial.**

Acts 22:25-26 | But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who

¹⁶ Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 191.

¹⁷ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 2, 271.

¹⁸ Pollock, *The Apostle*, 247.

is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" ²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."

The centurion, discovering that Paul is a Roman citizen goes directly to his general, the Roman tribune and lets him know of Paul's Roman citizenship. This changed everything. They could not lawfully torture a Roman citizen.

It was not that Paul feared the pain. He had suffered without protest at Philippi (16:22). The kind of scourging he was facing was probably with an instrument that could cripple a person for life.

GOD'S PLAN HAS A SOVEREIGN PURPOSE

The Roman tribune, who was a very high commander interviews Paul.

Acts 22:27-29 | So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." ²⁸ The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." ²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

The tribune, one of the **highest Roman officers**, was afraid. Alarmed at how close he had come to scourging a Roman citizen, **Lysias the tribune immediately ordered his subordinates to release Paul**. He was also afraid because he was guilty of putting a Roman citizen in chains without a preliminary hearing which was illegal.¹⁹ Commander Lysias did not want to be reprimanded or even **be demoted from his high post** for something like this.

Paul's Roman citizenship forces Lysias to take an entirely different approach, so he **decides to have Paul appear before the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin** (22:30), in hopes of getting at the root of the matter.²⁰

Paul was not just trying to save his own life. He knew he would be **on his way to Rome to preach the gospel**. God's sovereign purpose is often far beyond what the present circumstances seem to indicate. Though it looked like Paul's life and well-being were in danger, God had greater purposes. He had just been **able to witness to a great crowd at the Feast of Pentecost**. Now he was on his way to appear before the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin.

Conclusion

We are called to be "fishers of men." I'm not much of a fisherman, but at different times of the year, if you go to **the Wabash River** in **Indiana**, there are these **massive flying silver carp that will literally jump out of the water and into your boat**. Hundreds of carp can be seen jumping five feet out of the water and often landing in someone's boat.

But that's not how evangelism works most of the time. The fish don't come to you normally. You have to go to them. "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14).

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 2, 272.

²⁰ Baker, "Acts," in *Evangelical Commentary*, 916-917.

Our country desperately needs us to go to them with the gospel and rescue them! Like Paul standing in Jerusalem, we need to stand in our own community and point people to Christ.

Often life can look very frightening as we see the culture slowly falling away from Christian foundations and moving closer to hell. This week was an historic week, with the **overturning of Roe v. Wade**. The fact that over **65 million babies were aborted** in my lifetime tells us treacherous state of the souls in our country. We are thankful for these wicked and unjust policies supporting murder being overturned. But as believers, we know there is an even greater job to be done.

Our country will demand the murder of babies to cease entirely when they turn to Christ. The **solution is not merely to stop murder**—we want to do that, but even more at the foundation is that **our country needs to turn back to Christ!**

Are you willing to suffer for evangelizing others for the gospel? How many around you are not yet ready for heaven? Point them to Christ. Dare to care enough to lead them to Jesus. Paul didn't worry about the consequences of sharing Jesus with others, and neither should we.