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## Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

### **R2L: Maintaining a Positive Testimony in the Midst of Negativity**

(Acts 21:37-22:21-- Part 2 - The Apology)

37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek? 38 “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” 39 But Paul said, “I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.” 40 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, 22:1 “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.” 2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said, 3 “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. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 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. 6 But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ 8 “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ 9 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. 10 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.’ 11 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. 12 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, 13 came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. 14 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. 15 ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’ 17 It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, 18 and I 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 understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 20 ‘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.’ 21 “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

I would hope that by now a passage like 1 Peter 3:15 would be very familiar to you. In writing to some Christians who were beginning to experience increased hostility and persecution because of following Jesus, Peter wrote:

**...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;**

Why do you believe what you believe? And if you were called before others, whether a relative, a friend, a city council or a federal judge, would you be able to offer a “defense” – an apology, a comprehensible accounting of your faith and trust in the person and work of Jesus. Is Jesus so set apart in your life, that you are ready to make such a defense; to offer a reasoned explanation for all that you do, all that you say, and all that you believe when it comes to your Christian faith. Let me put it to you this way; if we say we believe something, we need to be ready to explain why! It is this principle of being ready to make a defense for what he believes and an accounting, a line by line reasoning for the hope that he has in Jesus that we find Paul doing in our text.

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Let me remind you that Paul had come to Jerusalem to report to the church there the mighty working of God among the Gentiles in bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ. It was also his desire to proclaim the gospel to his fellow Jews while celebrating Pentecost. Recall that he had gone to the Temple to worship and complete a ceremonial Old Testament purification rite. At the end of that ceremony, some Jews from Asia, perhaps from the city of Ephesus, entered the Temple and publically accused him of teaching against the people of Israel, against the Law of God, and against the Temple itself, and they accused him of breaking the Law by bringing a Gentile into the Temple.

All of this was just enough to incite a mob mentality among the people who rioted and sought to kill Paul. By divine providence, the Roman Commander along with a number of centurions, invaded the scene and rescued Paul, but not before he had been beaten. The commander tried to get to the bottom of what had happened, but the half the mob was yelling one thing while the other half screamed another. As the people yelled, they got themselves worked up into another frenzy and sought once again to pull Paul back into the crowd in order to kill him. The commander ordered Paul to be brought to the barracks for his own protection until the matter could be resolved.

Last week we began looking at this large account, that runs from Acts 21:26-22:20, as an account that teaches us in part how to maintain a positive testimony in the midst of negativity. Paul was being falsely accused; he was being physically assaulted; and the crowd wanted him to die. How would you respond to such negativity? The real question I need to ask you is this; how do you respond to most negativity? Most of us have never had the experience of Paul, but at the first mention of being accused of something, even if wrongly, how do you respond? When your spouse asks you about a purchase you made; when your parents ask you about a test score; when a friend confronts you what you have been looking at on the internet; how do you respond. And all of that is “good.” What about when the boss asks you for an explanation about something you had no part in? How do you respond when you post what you believe on Facebook or some other social media, and it is met with name calling and false misrepresentations of what you said or what you believe?

Beloved, we live in a world that thrives on, promotes and practices negativity. And, as a Christian who has been given the hope of eternal life; the hope of the Scriptures, the blessing of a living relationship with the living God, because of the Son of God through the Spirit of God; as one who is commanded to “rejoice in the Lord always!” and to “Let your gentle (calm) spirit be known to all men” (Philippians 4:4-5); how are you doing at maintaining a positive testimony in the midst of negativity? And, how can we maintain such a testimony?

Of course, Scripture contains the answers to such questions and we have some such answers here in our text in the life and example of Paul. How does Paul respond to such negativity? How does he remain positive? In Acts 21:37-22:21, we have Paul’s apology; the defense, the reason why he does what he does. In our text we see Paul speaking up; speaking the language; and speaking about Christ. Like Paul, we need to have our apology ready as one of the most significant ways of keeping positive in the midst of negativity is the sharing of your own testimony; of what God has done for you through His Son, Jesus Christ.

## **I. Speaking up! (21:37-39)**

Beginning in verse 37, we find one of the first things that is necessary in order to maintain a positive testimony; speaking up! Sometimes the hardest part in sharing your testimony is just getting the conversation going. Notice in verse 37, as they approached the barracks, the crowd pressing in behind, Paul spoke to this commander, asking him if he might say something to him. It is interesting to note that while the commander had asked the crowd to explain what was going on, to no avail; he had never asked Paul what was going on. Nowhere do we see Paul jumping in angrily, trying to yell over the top of the crowd. Trusting in God, Paul knew that he would have to take advantage of the right opportunity. Seeing that he would be removed from the very crowd he had longed to share the gospel with, Paul asked the commander a question. Our text says that the commander was surprised because Paul spoke to him in Greek. His assumption was that the only person that could have riled up the crowd like this was some

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infamous Egyptian who had recently led an ill-fated attack on Jerusalem with four thousand Assassins (v. 38). But such a man would not have known Greek and it was clear that Paul did. This, no doubt caused the commander even more confusion as to what was going on.

Then beginning in verse 39, Paul gives his credentials, as it were. He was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, just east of Asia where these other Jews had come from who were making the accusations. Cilicia was well-known and respected. This gave Paul some credence. Then Paul begs for an opportunity to speak to the people in order to give his apology, his defense, the reason why he was there and for having done what he had done. The commander, whose name was, Lysias, gave Paul permission to speak. Do not let his fact escape your notice; Paul spoke up. He had taken a risk simply in speaking to the commander, who might well have been angered by this action. Yet Paul knew he had to speak up. As a Christian, there was nothing more pressing to Paul then to make sure that the Gospel was heard by this people.

What might we be thinking if we were Paul? Am I going to jail? Might I be killed by the Jews? Might the Romans kill me? I wonder how I might get out of all this? Make no mistake; all such questions were at best secondary to Paul. It is clear from previous experience with Paul and from what he is about to say to the mob was that the most important thing on his mind was telling these people the Gospel of Jesus Christ; that the eternal Son of God came to earth as the Son of Man; that He lived and died to pay the debt for our sins, that rose from the dead and ascended back into Heaven, and all just as the Scripture said He would. Paul was not about to let this possibility of speaking up for Jesus pass Him by.

Do not miss the lesson here. If you are a Christian, if you truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, then your greatest concern ought to be taking any opportunity possible to tell others the Gospel. Everything else is to be secondary, even our own lives if God should will it so. Every day ought to begin with looking and praying for some opportunity to tell other people about Jesus. For Christians, it is not ever to be cliché or in word only that knowing Jesus and believing in Him are the most important thing that anyone can ever do. I get tired of people, myself included, saying that, but then doing little about it.

Someone here may say, “But Pastor, you have had schooling, you have been trained how to do these things.” Let me tell you what I believe is a misunderstanding about Bible colleges and seminaries. These places often do little to train you in sharing the gospel. Yes, you learn how to study the Bible, prepare sermons; understand Church history; but do you know the greatest training ground ever in sharing the gospel is in your own home, your own neighborhood, your own church, your own class or job. The best way to learn how to share Christ is to get around those who are sharing Christ. And when things are getting negative, one of the best things you can do is speak up and ready yourself to share Christ.

This brings us to our second point; that to maintain a positive testimony in the midst of negativity, we must be...

### **II. Speaking their Language (21:40-22:5)**

According to verse 40, Paul gets permission to speak to the crowd and waves his hand to get their attention, which, amazingly enough, worked. The mob hushed, a great hush, you could have heard a pin drop kind of hush. Then to the surprise of everyone, Paul switches his language from Greek to Hebrew. Here Paul was speaking the language of the people he was addressing, a Hebrew dialect, Jewish Aramaic.

Before moving on, let me state a lesson we need to take from this. Beloved, we must learn to proclaim the Gospel in a way that the people we are addressing can understand. The issue here is not just the kind of language, be it Hebrew or Greek, but even in the style or word choices we make. A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to help my son, Luke with his honor’s thesis. I told him I would be glad to proof-read it. He sent it to me and I did indeed proof-read it, noting sentence structures and word changes that were needed. But even having read that paper twice, he used language in his paper that just did not make sense to me. He spoke of things like “entity component system architecture;” “CADdisplay links;” and one of my favorites, “sprites” – like the soft drink; only it had a different meaning altogether. Of

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course, his intended audience, his computer science professors, would understand him; but even though he was using English, someone like me had a much harder time understanding.

Beloved, when we take an opportunity to share the gospel, we must also understand the ability and capacity of the people we are talking with and address them in a way that they can understand so that the gospel is clear.

In 22:1, Paul addresses the people in Hebrew and starts by calling them “brethren” – a term used to equate himself with them in the same faith, heritage, and fathers of those to whom Paul is seeking to reach. And notice what happens when he puts himself on their level; he captures their attention. Luke says in verse 2 that “they became even more quiet.” What is more quiet than a great hush? Before you might have heard a pin drop; now you might hear a strand of hair drop. The point is Paul sought and got their attention; something we must seek to do when sharing the gospel.

Then, in verse 3, Paul begins by explaining who he was. Why would he do this? Let us remember that Paul had been traveling throughout the known world for some thirty years now. He had been away from Jerusalem for a long time and it stands to reason that most of the people only knew stories and rumors about Paul. Few would have known him personally. Therefore, Paul begins his testimony with some personal facts saying,

**“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia...”** This was a well-known place to most of these people; not some backwoods town. Next he tells them, **“but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated under Gamaliel** (who was regarded as the greatest scholar of Judaism ever to live – highly respected). He next reminds them of how Gamaliel taught, **“strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you are today.”** Again, notice how he makes himself one with them. He goes on in verse 4, “I persecuted this Way (a reference to Jesus who called Himself, “the Way” – the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior; along with those who thus followed in the footsteps of Jesus) **to death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons...**” Anyone who had put their faith in Jesus was Paul’s prey.

Then, in verse 5, Paul does something interesting; he calls upon the testimony of those who can verify all of this pre-Christ life saying, **as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify.** In other words he calls them to verify this with the Jewish ruling counsel who knows this to be my background and history. Beloved, part of our testimony needs to explain what our life was like before Christ. Then Paul tells the crowd that it was this council that gave him letters to pass through Damascus and bring the followers of Jesus back to Jerusalem to be tried and put to death. What was Paul doing? He was being, as he had always been, transparent. His life was not a secret. Paul had been a public figure, highly educated and in the service of ruling body of the Jews. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership, was a witness to his zeal for the people of Israel, God’s Law, and the Temple. These were all things the people would understand.

So we see Paul speaking up and speaking their language; this brings us to a third consideration when sharing our testimony and it is this; we must be...

### III. Speaking about Jesus! (22:6-21)

Beginning in verse 6 and running through to verse 21, Paul spends the bulk of his time on the person and work of Jesus in his life. We read in verses 6-8...

**6 But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ 8 “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’**

Notice that Paul clearly identifies Jesus saying, **“Jesus the Nazarene...”** because the name “Jesus” was a common name. Paul was making sure the people understood that the Lord who spoke to him from heaven was the Jesus who claimed to be the Savior, the one whom they had crucified. In verse 9, Paul appeals to more witness of his life saying, **And those who were with me saw the light, to be**

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**sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.** Then Paul spoke with the Lord in verse 10 and was left blind in verse 11.

**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.**

Then we read in verses 12-16 the next events, **12 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, 13 came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. 14 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. 15 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'**

I love how Paul uses people in his life, believers and unbelievers, as witnesses of his life including the Jewish Council, the men who were with him on the road to Damascus, as well as the well-respected, zealous Jew, Ananias. Why does he do this? Beloved, Christianity is a historical faith; it is rooted in history as well as in our own personal histories. Let us never forget that Jesus did not come to seek and to save sinners in secret; Jesus came publically, lived publically, died publically, ascended into heaven publically. Because of this, we have an enormous amount of historical and archeological evidence to support everything that is written in the Bible. Not once has there ever been genuine evidence presented to disprove the history of the Bible. Our faith is rooted in history, not fantasy. It is about Jesus how came, lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven. Our faith is in Jesus.

Finally, walking through verses 17 through 21 we read; **17 It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, 18 and I 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 understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 20 '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.' 21 "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"**

This was Paul's testimony to the Jews. He addressed the charges made against him without ever referring to or demeaning the Jews from Asia. He showed that he was not against the people of Israel, but rather, because of love and respect for Israel, wanted them to know that God had chosen them to be the people through whom God would send the Savior of all those who would believe. Nor was Paul against the Law and the Temple. Remember how he explained he was strictly or rigorously trained by the greatest mind of Judaism. Indeed, he was zealous for the Law; so much so, that the Jewish council of Israel sanctioned him to hunt down the Christians. Paul was recognized by Law-abiding Jews throughout the known world for all this.

Nor could Paul be accused of being against God and His Word, Rather, Paul was fighting for it, preaching it, and explaining it. Using the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament, Paul was the foremost proponent of the Word, showing people how it all pointed to Jesus as the promised Savior. This is Paul's apology; his explanation; his reason for doing all that he had done for the previous thirty years; complete with respectable and believable witnesses to confirm his testimony. L

Let me close by asking...

#### IV. What will you say?

Do you have an apology, a defense for why and how you live your life? Why are you who you are? Why you read your Bible, go to church. Beloved, let us seek to follow the example of Paul; let us follow the exhortation of Peter and know what we believe and why we believe it. Why?

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For two reasons. First, keeping your focus on testifying about Jesus in the midst of difficulties gives credibility to the gospel. Second, we can only really tell others what we believe about Jesus by what we know about Jesus ourselves. We need to know and defend who Jesus is, what He has done, why He has done it, and what all of this means for us. Beloved, if we truly believe that the Gospel is the most important thing we can ever tell another person, we ought to know what it is and then make it known. How can we do this?

Okay, I know this sounds cliché; but we must be spending time in God's Word, in good, sound Christian books, and in discussions with other Christians so we might better understand God's Word together. Do you remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-12?

**11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;**

My job as a pastor is to exhort, encourage, enable and equip you in as many ways possible so that you can do the works of service; the ministry of the church. Beloved, if you are in Christ, you are never free once the Sunday service is completed. You are commanded by God to do the work of ministry and the greatest calling you have is to make disciples of Jesus; to share the gospel of Jesus with others. To do this, we must be speaking up; we must be speaking their language; explaining the truths of God's Word in ways they can understand.

I would ask you to consider if there is anything at current in your life that is not in accordance with what you say you believe. Beloved, people are watching us. Never forget that not only what you say, but even how you say it is important. We must be wary of actions that will betray our beliefs; that reveal us to something other than what we claim to be; devoted followers of Jesus. We must be practicing those things we profess to believe or no one will listen. I also contend that a professing Christian whose life is at odds with the Scripture will not maintain a positive testimony in the midst of negativity. At some point, you will cave in.

To be sure, the truth is that that we all sin; we all will go against what we believe and profess to others. So, knowing that people are watching, and that they will see us when we fail, when we sin, we need to remember that it is a better testimony to admit that we failed our God in some certain area rather than to try to cover it up. Why, because chances are it will be found and then we will have lost the opportunity to speak for Jesus concerning the gospel.

Paul never hesitated to remind his listeners that he was a murderer, sanctioned by the Jewish ruling council, and that he had acted according to his zeal for what he thought was God's will. He also confessed that he came to understand that all of this was sin and now he was proclaiming the truth concerning Jesus as Lord and Savior. He made himself ready. How about you? Are you ready to give your testimony even in the midst of hostility? Why would you do that? Anything less is a betrayal of who we are in Christ. Anything less will not bring us happiness but hopelessness; will not bring us peace but perplexity.

Let me remind you of an even better example of this than Paul. Turn with me to John 4. In speaking about sharing the gospel to others, notice what Jesus said in verses 34-38:

**34 ...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. 36 Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37 For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."**

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The simple truth Jesus taught here is this. God is calling His people to Himself through the preaching of the gospel and all those who have been chosen to salvation will respond in faith. How is the gospel message spread? God spreads this gospel by sending us, using us to His glory, commissioning us to go out and proclaim His Gospel so that those who are chosen by God will respond. That is why we must be ready with our apology, our defense, our reason for hoping in Jesus. And by being ready, we prepare ourselves to maintaining a positive, Christ-centered testimony regardless of the circumstances around us.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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