“The Power of a Personal Testimony”

8/13/2017

John 5:17-27

Please take your Bible with me and open to Acts 22.

Whenever you read a good book, you quickly discover the main character of the story. Can you tell us who the main character is? Think about Pip in Great Expectations. Or, Leopold Bloom in Ulysses. Or, Nikolay Bolkonsky in War and Peace. Or, Huckleberry Finn in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Or, Captain Ahab in Moby Dick. Main characters are not only important. They are critical to the message of the book.

Now that you’ve been reading through the Book of Acts, can you name the main character? There are really two main characters in the Book of Acts. In the first half of the book, in the first twelve chapters we read about the Apostle Peter. But from Acts 13 to the end of the book, the story revolves around the man who gave you half of your New Testament, the Apostle Paul.

And in reading Acts you find Paul to be a very powerful figure in the first century Roman world. But as well, you find him to be a significant problem to, not only the Jews, but the Romans.

We’ve come to the place in Acts where Paul’s ministry in Jerusalem is one primary thing; He’s Paul, the defender of the faith. And, in order to defend the faith, you find him doing one specific thing over and over. He tells his personal story of how he came to know Jesus Christ. We call that a testimony.

Here’s what I mean. From Acts 22 through to the end of the book Paul is telling those who are listening just who he is and what he teaches. But even more importantly, he’s telling them Who Jesus Christ is and what He has done.

Acts 22-26 contains five speeches Paul gave. Now, see if he wasn’t a bit of a problem to both the Jews and to Rome.

Acts 22 – a crowd in Jerusalem; while order is being kept by Roman Chief Captain, Lysias.

Acts 23 – before the Seventy Jewish Elders; a.k.a. “the Sanhedrim.”

Acts 24 – before Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea.

Acts 25 – before Festus, the Governor of Judea after Felix died.

Acts 26 – before Herod Agrippa II, King over Judea.

And what does Paul do? He gives his testimony before them all. So, I’ve titled today’s message “The Power of a Personal Testimony.” Shall we pray?

Let me begin with this. Are you a Christian? Have you repented? Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross? Being saved, as you know, is the only way to enter into a right relationship with God. And, if you are a Christian, you have a testimony. You have a powerful personal testimony.

I realize there are those who have a quote unquote glamorous and moving testimony. Some people were blatant atheists and are now saved by the blood of Christ. Some though grew up in the Church, grew up in a Christian home, were saved at VBS. Your testimony is yours. And it’s not only personal; it’s powerful. Please don’t ever say these words. “My testimony isn’t much. I grew up in the Church hearing the Gospel every Sunday. I never killed anyone or spent any time behind bars. So, I don’t have much of a testimony.”

That is showing great disrespect to the LORD. Your testimony might not be as quote glamorous as that of the Apostle Paul. But, so what. It’s still glorious. God moved you from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of His Dear Son. What you should say is Hallelujah!

Let’s consider Acts 22 and see Paul’s personal testimony.

First, Paul was in the tent-making business. Just like you, he had a day job. Yet, his ministry was his life. Wherever Paul traveled across Asia Minor and across Europe, he worked his tent-making business. Yet, he did the one thing we are all called to do, as Believers. He spread the Good News that Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah. He told friend and foe alike that Jesus was crucified for our sins and that He had risen from the dead. Now, He was offering His salvation to anyone who would believe on His Name.

Your life is not just a “tent-maker” life. Yes, you need to earn an income. Yes, you need to feed your family. But, isn’t life a whole lot larger than what you eat and what you drink? Here’s what it really looks like. Romans 14:17 *“For the kingdom of God is not meat [food] and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*

Your life, Christian, is a statement announcing to the world around you that Someone Else lives within you. You reveal by your speech, your attitudes, and your actions that the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the peace of Jesus Christ, and the joy of Jesus Christ reign over you. Jesus is the LORD. Jesus is your LORD.

So, yes, you need to be a tent-maker. But the LORD is using your tent-making abilities to reach people with the Gospel. How else will they hear the Good News if you don’t tell them. There are people at work or at school or at your gym that will listen if you’ll just speak up.

Paul, then, like you and me, was in business. But his life was much more than his business.

First, Paul was in the tent-making business.

Second, Paul gave his testimony. Please follow with me at Acts 22:1.

Please follow with me at 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,)*

*(3) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city 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. (4) 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 there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. (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 unto 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, whom thou persecutest.*

*(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. (10) And I said, What shall I do, Lord? 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.”*

Today we’ll be witnessing a baptism. But, what’s really happening here? You are about to hear and see a personal testimony. In baptism you let people know that you are saved. Everyone who is saved in the NT is baptized. Christians, Believers; they are the ones who are baptized in the Bible. And why be baptized? Because we are good and because we are the best Christians we can be? No, we are baptized because of a command. The LORD commands you to be baptized.

Matthew 28:19 *“Therefore, go [in your going], teach [disciple] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

You see, baptism, in the Bible, always comes after personal salvation. So, once you are saved, then you have a testimony. And with a testimony comes a public announce-ment that you are saved. Baptism is your announcement.

Now, Acts 22 is one of the three times you’ll read in Acts the words of Paul regarding his salvation. Three times you’ll read his testimony. So, with Paul’s testimony in this passage, let me show you what a testimony consists of. I’ve divided it into four questions.

First, who? Who were you with when you were saved? Notice verse two. Who was with Paul when he was saved? Here’s verse four. Acts 22:4 *“And I persecuted this way [the way of Christ] unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”*

Who was Paul with on the day he was saved? He was with a group of persecutors. He was the head of “Team Persecution.” How do we know that? Turn back to Acts chapter nine; Acts nine, verse one. Acts 9:1 *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, (2) And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

*(3) And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: (4) And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? (5) And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

*(6) And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. (7)* ***And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless****, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.”*

Who was Paul with on the day he was saved? He was with his team of persecutors. Who was I with on the day I was saved? I was with people I’d never met before. One was a young lady who also wanted to be saved. The other was the man with the open Bible.

The first part of a personal testimony is who.

Second, what? What was going on on the day you were saved? Here’s what was going on the day Paul was saved. Look again with me at Acts 22 and now verse five. Acts 22:5*“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 there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.”*

What was Paul doing on the day he was saved? He was completing a task assigned to him by the Jewish authorities who operated out of Jerusalem. That task was to search for, to arrest, and to handcuff Christians so they could be brought to Jerusalem for punishment.

What were you doing on the day you were saved? Some of you would say you were listening to a sermon. Some of you would say you were watching, as I was to a movie and then listening to a man show you the way of salvation from his Bible.

Paul’s testimony is that he was carrying out a given task; a task assigned to him by the Jewish Elders, the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem.

First, who? Who were you with when you were saved?

Second, what were you doing on the day you were saved?

Third, where? Where were you on that glorious day on which you were saved? Where was Paul when he met Jesus Christ?

He was on the Damascus Road. This is the Damascus Gate, still in existence today; one of the many gates in the wall around the Old City of Jerusalem. It opens onto a road that leads away Jerusalem, Israel and towards Damascus, Syria. The distance between the two cities is 130 miles. Acts 22:6 *“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.”*

Where was I on the day I was saved? I was in the Strand Theater on Chenango Street in Binghamton, New York.

Now, some of us can’t quite remember where we were. But you know that *at that time and place you were saved*. Some of you were at home at your bedside where you knelt and prayed the Sinner’s Prayer. Or, maybe you were at work or at school. Some of you were at a Church. I was in a movie theater in Binghamton, NY.

Where were you on the day you were saved?

First, who? Who were you with when you were saved?

Second, what were you doing on the day you were saved?

Third, where? Where were you on that glorious day?

Fourth, and finally, when? When did you come to know the LORD? I was saved on December 7, 1967. Now, you may not know the exact day on which you were saved. But you know approximately when you were saved?

You see, it’s a good thing to verbalize your testimony. It’s a good think to give your own personal testimony. Your testimony is a re-construction of what took place on the day you were saved.

Today, if you can answer these four basic questions, do so. And then, write it out completely.

In a few moments in the baptistery you will hear some testimonies. They are salvation testimonies. Yes, there’s a lot that’s happened since that glorious day. But your testimony is your testimony of what occurred at that one point in history when you came to the LORD. And once you’ve heard the testimony, then you will see them baptized.

Now, just one final word about baptism itself.

What baptism is not? Baptism is not a saving work. It is not salvation. No one can be saved by anything other than the finished work of Christ. It’s His work that saves. There is nothing you can do to save your soul. But, the moment you trust Jesus Christ and His saving work on the Cross; at that moment you are saved. And saved for eternity.

Paul said this to the Corinthians. I Corinthians 1:17 *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”*

And the Gospel? I Corinthians 15:1 *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; (2) By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

*(3) For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; (4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”*

And here’s Paul’s clarification. Romans 4:2 *“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. (3)**For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

*(4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. (5) But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”*

There is no baptism anywhere that will save you from the judgment of Hell. There is no baptism that can remove your sin debt. Only the living Christ can save you. So, when Paul preached, he brought a message to people; the message that Jesus Christ shed His blood at the Cross and became a Sacrifice; the Sacrifice for sins. And, at the moment you believe on Christ, you are saved. So, baptism cannot and never will save.

Do you remember the thief who was saved on the Cross? Was he baptized? Not at all. Yet, what did the LORD say to him? “This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

Baptism, then, what is it? Baptism is a testimony. Baptism is simply an outward testimony that you are saved and that you are already a child of God; nothing more and nothing less. Baptism, is a symbol. It symbolizes your new connection to the LORD. When you go down into the water, you symbolize Christ’s death. And that His death was your death. When you come up out of the water, you symbolize Christ’s resurrection. And that resurrection was your resurrection.

Are you saved? Then you have a testimony. Do you have a testimony? Then, be baptized. Announce to those who know you that you are saved.

And, last, if you’ve never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, today is the day you need that. Today you need to Repent and to Believe.

* To Repent = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe = I simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins.

Salvation Prayer*. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve judgment for my sins. I believe Jesus died in my place on the Cross to remove that judgment. Please save me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray?

Hymn # \_\_\_\_ “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”