

## **WITNESS**

Acts 22:6-21

When we see a term such as “witness” we might think of a court room and the proceedings that take place there such as a person making a statement. One of the most impressive things (to me) of what happens in a court room is that everything is orderly and the judge is in control. In such a setting a person can present information (usually being sworn to be truthful) and others can present other information which is also supposed to be truthful.

One of the things that seems to be happening today when opposing views are presented is that people don’t want to be constrained by such things as truth and sometimes, they won’t allow the other side to even present their views. Speakers are shouted down and fights break out and property may get destroyed in an effort to stop opposing views or testimonies from being presented.

The idea of making false accusations and stirring up a crowd into a mob to destroy the influence of someone with whom you disagree was not invented by modern day political extremists. This tactic has been around for thousands of years and is typically driven by unreasonable and unrequited hatred of another person or philosophy. When Paul was on the first and second missionary trips, radical Jews would stir up crowds in those areas and Paul was nearly killed on several occasions. Several years later when Paul was in Jerusalem in the temple, some of these same radical Jews from Asia saw him there and their hatred of him and what he had been doing erupted and again they instigated a riot. The accusations were that Paul was totally anti-Jewish and had defiled the temple by bringing in Gentiles. All their claims were totally false but that did not stop the crowd from going crazy and trying to kill Paul.

The trouble started in the temple and quickly moved to the area outside the temple since these “dedicated Jews” would not have wanted to defile the temple by committing murder there. It is ironic that they were so immoral that they did not have a problem with a mob murdering someone while (at the same time) they were so religious that they were concerned about defiling the temple. This inconsistency is somewhat of a commentary on their history of being very religious but not letting their religion impact their lives beyond rituals.

The rioting mob triggered corrective action from the nearly Roman garrison and Paul was rescued from the would-be murderers. The Romans had no concern about any of the reasons for the riots, but they were intent on keeping the peace. They suspected that Paul was an Egyptian who had been the source of civil unrest earlier in Jerusalem. As the soldier carried Paul away to where they were housed near the temple, Paul asked the captain if he might speak to him. The captain was surprised that Paul spoke Greek and he recognized that he was not dealing with the typical ruffians that they normally had to deal with. Paul asked for permission to address the mob which had quieted down somewhat since the arrival of the Roman soldiers.

Until the Roman soldiers arrived, there was no possibility of Paul being able to speak to the crowd. This points out how important it is to have an orderly and peaceful environment for meaningful communications. Paul had not intended to give his testimony to the Jews in Jerusalem when he went to the temple that day, but the lawless, radical Jews created a situation where his testimony was the appropriate response. We see that God used both the anarchy of the radical Jews and the orderliness of the Roman army for the purpose of giving the Jews in Jerusalem one more chance to hear the gospel message of God’s salvation available through the completed work of the promised Messiah.

Paul started his testimony by giving them information about his life prior to his salvation. The essence of the message was that he was very much like most of them – very Jewish in his beliefs and practices. He was also able to weave in some details that would let them know how zealous he was for all that was orthodox Judaism. These details were given in order to establish a thread of commonality with these people. He even had (at one time) the same and maybe even stronger opposition to Christianity than they currently had. In the past, he did more than just talk about his opposition, he did something that was even supported by the highest Jewish leaders in searching out and arresting Christians. In a somewhat subtle way and without being antagonistic about it, he was telling them that in a contest to determine who was the most devout Jew, he would win.

Paul's testimony was likely the final time many of them would hear such a clear presentation of the good news before the terrible judgment that happened in A.D. 70.

#### An Encounter – 22:6-9

<sup>6</sup> “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, <sup>7</sup> and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ <sup>8</sup> “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup> “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. Acts 22:6–9 (NASB95)

It was that unbridled devotion and enthusiasm for what he believed which led to events that would change his life forever. Of course, we know what happened on the road to Damascus and Paul related those events in such a way that listeners would have to admit that “something supernatural” had happened to Paul. Most of the Jews were open to God doing things out of the ordinary with regard to their ancestors. If they were at all familiar with the Old Testament scriptures, then they would have heard about God or the Angel of God speaking to people and impacting their lives.

The way this account happened was such that it could not be mistaken to be just some random physical happening that produced a bright light and produced a sound. All who were traveling with Paul saw the bright light but only Paul was blinded. All heard a voice but only Paul understood the message of the voice.

#### Sight Restored – 22:10-16

<sup>10</sup> “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.’ <sup>11</sup> “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. <sup>12</sup> “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, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. <sup>14</sup> “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. <sup>15</sup> ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’ Acts 22:12–16 (NASB95)

The immediate response that Paul made would have seemed reasonable to those who were hearing this account. They probably didn't need to think a lot about what anyone would do who had been blinded and had been having a conversation with someone they thought was dead and was being confronted in an authoritative way for what he had been doing. Paul's response was that of cooperation as evidenced by the question “What would you have me to do?” There was more evidence of cooperation in that Paul did exactly what he was told to do. What other choice did he really have since he was blind and did not know the full extent of what or why it was happening?

Think about how many people who have been confronted by the claims that Jesus Christ is God's only means of salvation and they have rejected that truth in an act of rebellion against God. Turning down God's offer of salvation makes as much sense as Paul telling Jesus, "I'll just learn to live with this blindness and be led around by people I don't really know and who really don't have my best interest in mind." The lost world is literally blind to the truth regarding salvation and they have to depend on imperfect guides for their direction in life.

Another point of identification with the Jewish listeners was emphasized in his description of Ananias. Ananias had excellent credentials regarding his devotion to Judaism and the Law. He had a good reputation and was a person that God used in the events that Paul had experienced in Damascus. First, God used Ananias to bring about a healing miracle. The Jews would not have any problem in accepting an account that such a miracle could happen. We see that God also used Ananias to speak a prophetic word to Paul regarding how God was going to use Paul.

God had appointed (literally, chosen beforehand) Paul for several things. The first was that Paul would know God's will. The overall purpose of God dealing with humankind was directed toward people knowing God's will. There had been a progressive revelation or unveiling of that will. The part that had not been revealed was referred to as a mystery. The ultimate revelation came in the person of Jesus, the Christ; however, not all who saw Him or heard about Him understood what they were seeing and hearing. The evidence was there for all to see, but the meaning and significance needed to be revealed so that it could be "known."

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus (Eph 3:3-6) that "by revelation He made known unto me the mystery" of what God was doing through Christ. In verse six of this reference, we see the details that "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ." A companion statement is found in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." This is the good news and it is the will of God.

According to Paul's account, the second thing Ananias told Paul was that he was appointed "to see the Righteous One." This was an obvious reference to the Messiah. The word for "see" that Paul used here is (in the Greek) used for "knowing" or "perceiving" as well as seeing with one's eyes. We can compare that with what Ananias stated in 9:17 that the Lord (Jesus) did appear to Saul on his journey. The word "appear" is from the same Greek word that gives us the English word "optical." This would strongly suggest that Saul saw the Lord with his physical eyes. What we are told was that he saw a bright light. That may have been the extent of what he physically saw but came to realize that it was the Lord that appeared to him in an overwhelming way to get his attention.

There is at least one other mention by Paul that he saw the Lord and heard from Him. Hearing directly from the Lord was the third evidence that Ananias told Saul that he was to experience "to hear an utterance from His mouth." Certainly, Paul had already heard from the Lord before he was led into Damascus and that would not be the last time he would have direct messages from God.

### The Task – 22:17-21

<sup>17</sup> "It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, <sup>18</sup> and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

<sup>19</sup> "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. <sup>20</sup> '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.' <sup>21</sup> "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' " Acts 22:17-21 (NASB95)

This part of Paul's testimony is not recorded anywhere else in the Biblical account of his life and experiences. Paul would not likely share this part of his testimony with Gentiles and those who were more aligned with western thought. However, this experience would be seen by the Jews as validation of what Paul was sharing with them since God's supernatural intervention in the history of their nation was well known by them.

The idea of being in a trance might cause us to think of being half-asleep or being in a hypnotic state. The literal translation would be "ecstasy." The common usage of that word today means overjoyed or extremely happy. The literal meaning is actually "out of the normal status of the mind." That condition could be good or bad. An Old Testament account of Elisha and his servant gives a good example of what we would normally "perceive" versus what we might "see" if we were able to go beyond the normal status as Gehazi was enabled to see the Army of God surrounding him and Elisha. Similarly, Paul was able to see the "unseen" and heard the words of the Lord Jesus while in the temple two decades before.

As we share with people and establish points of commonality, we must be prepared to move from there to what is distinctive in our relationship with the Lord. The message must be clear that when Jesus comes into our lives, we become different and that He has a purpose for our lives. Our Christian testimony from the point of conversion should be such that all can readily discern that our lives are different after we met Jesus than before.

Paul's testimony to these Jews showed that his preference for ministry after his radical experience of salvation was to share the message with his countrymen who were in the same situation he was in before he encountered the Lord. Paul was sure that the radical change he had undergone would convince his Jewish brethren of the truth and many would be saved. The Lord overruled him and sent him away from Jerusalem because He knew that the Jews would not accept the testimony about Jesus.

We must be bold in sharing the supernatural events of our relationship with the Lord. When we engage in a work which just doesn't make sense to the human mind, we should be able to point to the will of God as the reason for what we do. To the typical Jew, taking the good news of God's salvation to the Gentiles was irrational and not something they were prepared to accept.

The response of the Jews was a picture of frenzied hate! And why? It was because Gentiles were to be allowed to share in Israel's privileges of the favor and protection of the God of the whole world. They failed to see that a key part of the blessing for those who were the children of Abraham was that God blessed them so that they could be a blessing to others. He revealed Himself in and through them so that Israel would reveal Him to the world. The same thing applies to us today. We are the new Israel of God and we must not make the same mistakes they did.