

the acts of apostles

ACTS 22 · DAY 22

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and hear words from His mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.’” – Acts 22:12–16 NIV

Your Testimony.

This is the second of three accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts. It is important to understand that when Paul is declaring his testimony this time, he is speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem. They had known who he had been – a devout Pharisee and a persecutor of the early church. So his conversion was not only a profound story, but also a confronting and powerful example of God’s power.

Paul emphasizes the reason why he had changed so drastically to become a Christian with two main pieces of evidence: “you will be a witness to all you have seen and heard.” (v15).

In the Greek the word ‘witness’ directly means someone who testifies based on first-hand experience. Paul SAW Jesus in all His glory and he HEARD Jesus speak first-hand.

In our lives, people can argue about our own doctrine, our ideas and cultures, our thinking and our actions. But there

is one thing no one can attack: your first hand experience of God. Your testimony is a fortress for your faith. No one will be able to convince you otherwise once you have tangibly seen and heard the power of God at work in your life.

What have you seen of God? What have you heard from God? When last did you have a first-hand encounter with Him? Pray today for the Holy Spirit to remind you of the power of your testimony, and while you’re at it maybe ask Him for a fresh demonstration of His power in your life as well.

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The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” – Acts 23:11 NIV

Take Courage.

Paul’s testimony about Jesus has placed him in some hot water with the Jewish leaders. They are plotting to kill him because of the powerful conversion and conviction Paul represented. His testimony about Jesus had resulted in great opposition.

Throughout Acts, as well as in modern times, it is evident that the Good News about Jesus risen from the dead and its implications for us as Christians causes conflict. The Gospel does not make sense. But the power of it is very evident in people who have chosen to believe. And the world does not like what it cannot understand. It is OK to grapple with understanding elements of God and His will in your world. But never place your desire to understand higher than the divine persuasion (faith) that Jesus is alive and the Holy Spirit is present with you in this moment.

Whatever we are going through in this season – whatever controversy or conflict you find yourself in, I believe the words Jesus spoke hold power for you today:

1. Take Courage! The Greek word for this phrase literally

means ‘to be warmed from within’ – to be strengthened on the inside. No matter what wintry, cold and confronting things are happening to you, I believe the warmth of God will bolster you and keep you from shuddering. God has given you inner strength for today.

2. As you have testified... Your testimony will take you places. It is written in Revelation 12:10-11 that we overcome the accuser by the blood of Jesus and the WORD of our TESTIMONY. Don’t let anything silence the story of God unfolding in your life. Keep telling people about the relevance of God in your daily life and you will not only be protected from today’s troubles, but will be used by God in greater ways than you think possible.

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[Governor Felix] ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs. Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” – Acts 24:23–25 NIV

Keep Speaking.

Paul was in a lockdown situation very similar to our own. When we read this chapter it is important to remember that even though we can read it in a few minutes, this was a two-year-long portion of Paul’s life!

He was stuck in a place with limited ability to move around and he had no idea when he would be freed or allowed to go. In fact, he was strung along by the whims of the ruler he was subject to – tempted with moments of release but never being set free.

Paul had an urgency to build the church and testify about Jesus to the world. But he was stuck in an informal state of limbo. I love that even in this kind of uncertainty, Paul still testified boldly whenever he had the opportunity. As we read in verse 25, Paul spoke to his captor about righteousness. He broached the subject of self-control and even went as far as telling Felix about the judgement day when Jesus returns. And these

heavy topics convicted Felix to the point where he couldn’t handle it and had to send him away. But Felix continued to call for Paul to speak the gospel.

Even in this unsure time, are you willing to speak the full gospel whenever you have the opportunity to? What are some reasons why you hold back when it comes to your faith? Whether it is fear, inferiority, lack of understanding or shame, bring it to God today and ask Him to help you speak the Truth of God into the lives of those He has entrusted to you.

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28 A prophet named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) 29 So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. 30 This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

Global pandemics and Godly provision.

Nothing is a surprise to God. In Acts 11, God reveals to a prophet that a famine would come seeking to wipe out the known Roman world. The historian and writer, Luke reveals the famine distressed the whole inhabited world. Historians now tell us that it brought about economic crisis and an increased death toll globally. Sound familiar?

What did the church in Antioch do? They acted, rallied, gave, sent relief and did as much as they could to help those in need. In times of pandemics, famines, war and natural disasters God utilizes his Church and his people to leave a tangible imprint and impact on the world.

Recently, the World Health Organization stated the Coronavirus Pandemic is a 'once-in-a-century health crisis'. If that's the case then like the church in Antioch, we have a 'once-in-a-century opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus. To bring hope to those who need healing, to bring faith to those who are engulfed in fear

and to bring Gods Grace to those who may be Grieving. In times of crisis, God wants to give you greater purpose in this season of crisis to reach and impact the world. Ask him today to show you where you can be part of his solution.

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5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. 6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Earnestly pray until the chains break off.

At the beginning of Acts 12 we learn that King Herod has begun persecuting the followers of Jesus and has James put to death. Subsequently Peter is captured and put in prison. Having been shocked by the death of James the church is awakened to a desperate need to pray for his release.

The following verses tell of a miraculous encounter Peter has with an angel on the night before his imminent execution. Peter is bound by chains, guarded by sixteen soldiers and walks free from prison!

As a Christian, you and I must never underestimate the power of prayer. It allows you to encounter miracles! It has the power to break chains and bring personal freedom in your life today.

But don’t be surprised when God answers your prayers! The disciples almost left Peter out in the cold in disbelief that it could really be him!

As a church let us commit to earnestly praying for those who need to see breakthrough in their lives today. What are you praying for today? Don’t stop until the chains break off.

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1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Ready to respond.

Acts 13 takes us in to the next phase of Saul's ministry. So far the gospel has been preached to 'Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria' (Acts 1:8). Now the time has come to take it to 'the ends of the earth.'

What we observe in these verses is that Saul (who in this chapter becomes the Apostle Paul as we know him) and Barnabas respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit for their next step in this great commission.

Many times in our lives we seek the leading of the Holy Spirit for our next step. It could be a job opportunity, a relationship, a degree, financial wisdom.

Sometimes we can wait for the 'big booming voice from heaven' to direct us (which can happen) but more often the Holy Spirit will lead you while you are actively seeking Him.

If you are searching for direction from the Holy Spirit in your life why not commit to the example of these men:

- *Worship while you wait on Him*
- *Fast while you follow Him*
- *Pray while you pursue Him*

Church when the Holy Spirit responds we must be ready to go!

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8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Faith to obey.

Paul and Barnabas continue their journey preaching the gospel, first to the Jews then to the Gentiles until they come to the city of Lystra. As there is no Jewish synagogue they proceed to the centre of the city and begin to preach the gospel. Here they encounter a man who has been lame all his life. He hears of the miraculous and merciful grace of Jesus and is filled with faith to believe that what He has done for others He would certainly do for him. Recognising this Paul commands him to stand to his feet. The lame man has a choice to make; to stand or to stay put.

Have you ever felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to stand up, stand out, respond to him and yet have hesitated out of fear, doubt or worry?

This man had NEVER known what it was like to stand and yet he had the faith to obey. Had he not he may well have missed his miracle.

Maybe God has called you to make a bold stand today; have faith and obey.