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Acts 21:27-22:22

Outward Church: Three-Part Testimony

Pastor Jonathan Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

This morning, I got up thinking about the first time I ever shared my testimony, my story of coming to faith in Christ. In college, I took a spring-break missions trip down to Chinle, Arizona, to the Indian reservation to run a program for kids. I think we must have talked about sharing our testimonies because, on the drive down, I spent time writing my testimony. I wanted to share it, but I didn't volunteer myself. But a few days later, one of my fellow college students nominated me to share my testimony, and I was ready.

I was nervous-excited to share, and it went really well. Afterward, my college pastor said I should go to seminary, which is perhaps the first time someone said that to me. So, in one sense, sharing my testimony helped put me here. God is good! Sharing your testimony can lead to surprising places. Or, the reverse is true. God can lead us to surprising places to share our testimony. That's true of Paul's story.

God led Paul into the heart of a riot to share his testimony, into the center of Jerusalem. Some people wrongly accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple, a capital offense, and an angry mob dragged him out of the temple, ready to kill him. The Holy Spirit might lead you to share your testimony with a friend over breakfast, in a packed board room, at your family's 2021 reunion. Will you be ready? Chances are, you won't get stoned. What can you do to not offend?

Paul took a Nazarite vow. He shaved his head. He sponsored four other Jewish men in their Nazarite vows. He went above and beyond to not offend culturally so that maybe, just maybe, they would hear the gospel and believe. But it didn't matter because those who hated him were there.

Acts 21:27b-28 (ESV)

... the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

The Jews from Asia know how well Paul preached Christ there, and they want to put a stop to him in Jerusalem (Acts 19:26). They sparked the riot. They want Paul dead.

Acts 21:30 (ESV)

Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.

That's the last time Paul will ever see the temple. He almost dies, but a Roman tribune, an elected official, took soldiers and rescued him, literally carrying Paul out of there, like a very dangerous mosh-pit. This mob provides Paul with a unique opportunity, an opportunity to share Jesus with an angry mob. He'd wanted to do that back at Ephesus in Acts 19, but here he finally gets his opportunity with his own countrymen, people he might have known and recognized.

As we look at Paul's testimony, it serves as a model for us as we share our testimonies. We may never face an angry mob, but we still might have the opportunity to share Christ with a coworker, neighbor, friend, or family member. That's why it helps to break down Paul's testimony into a **three-part testimony**:

I. Who I was (Acts 22:3-5)

Paul gives his background to establish some credibility. He's a Jew, educated by a notable teacher, Gamaliel, who we met back in Acts 5:34-39. He was so zealous for the law he persecuted the earliest followers of Jesus, simply called "the Way." He even had letters from the high priest and council of elders to punish the Christians, not something most people had. Some of those people who wrote him his letter might be listening to Paul now. They knew him. They knew his story.

Why does Paul tell us this? Because God is about to change him. When Jesus saw Paul, he didn't just see opposition, someone who was fighting him, but an opportunity. God saw a man who could become a mighty missionary to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, someone who was incredibly zealous for the Jewish people.

When we look at our own lives and our friends, family, and other people that need Jesus, do we see opposition to Christ? Or opportunities for Christ? We can't save them, but God can, no matter how far gone they seem.

I recently watched an interview with "Pastor X," an underground pastor in the Middle East. He told the story of his wife coming to faith. She was a radical Muslim. She wore a Burka at the age of 3. She started reading the Quran at the age of 5. At the age of 9 memorized the Quran. At the age of 13, she was so in love with the god of Islam that they took her out of school and put her in the Islamic Fundamentalist School. At the age of 17, she became an evangelist for Islam, like the religious police for it. At the age of 23, she and her mom were listening to a Christian broadcast, and her mom called the pastor and became a Christian. Then she talked to the pastor for two hours, and he challenged her to give Jesus a try for one week. She said the sinner's prayer and was convinced nothing would happen, and that night her mom wakes up screaming and walking perfectly. She had MS. They take her to the doctor, and her MS is completely gone. Jesus had healed her. People at the hospital asked her who she had prayed to, and she said Jesus, then five people come to Christ.

God can take anyone, no matter who they are, and change them. Have you thought about the ways Jesus has changed you? I know some have grown up in a Christian household and identified as a Christian since a very young age. You might not have a "before and after" story, but we can all track the places Jesus is changing us, softening our hearts to him, and helping us love others even when it's not easy. First, just talk about who I was or who I've been, but then it gets really good.

II. How Jesus is transforming me (Acts 22:6-16)

That's what Paul does. He tells how he was on the road to Damascus to persecute the Christians and throw them in jail, but a bright light shone around him, and he fell to the ground, and a loud voice said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And Jesus said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." Then he repented. He asked Jesus what he should do. And Jesus told him to go to Damascus, and there Ananias came to him and healed him of his blindness.

Acts 22:14-16 (ESV)

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. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Here's the message that changes Paul and can change you too. "God has appointed you to know the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, and you'll be his witness. Now rise, be baptized, wash away the sin and the old life, and call on the name of Jesus." Jesus wants to change us, to transform our lives.

Maybe the story of “Pastor X” seems a little removed from your life. This week I sent Mark a text asking him if he’d be willing to share his testimony today, and he said he just this week thought of how he’s never shared his testimony at Cornerstone. It seems like the Holy Spirit is moving, so I’m excited to hear his testimony of who he was and how Jesus is transforming him. [Listen to Mark’s testimony]

Thanks for sharing, Mark. I appreciate your willingness to tell your story. You could share your testimony, too, of who you were and how Jesus is transforming you. He’s transforming all of us. Come talk to me if you’d like to share your story. Let’s get back to Paul’s story and what he does. He transitions from himself to God’s mission.

III. God’s love for all people (Acts 22:17-22)

This is the part that gets the crowd so upset.

Acts 22:17-22 (ESV)

¹⁷ “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.’”

²² 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.”

Jesus says that the Jews aren’t going to accept Paul’s testimony about him, but he doesn’t get it. He was a zealous Jew who was willing to kill Stephen. What could possibly transform someone like Paul unless he encountered the living breathing God And here’s why they reject Paul because he says Christ has sent him to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. That’s when the crowd erupts, and they shout for Paul’s life!

I recently watched a season of the CBS Television show Survivor. You guys may not know, but I like watching this show. It’s the ultimate game. In this season, there are two teams that have been remixed together. And the host of the show, Jeff Probst, gives anyone on either of the teams the opportunity to defect to the other team. But they have ten seconds to decide. One girl, Candace, does change sides, followed by another man named Jonathan. But because Candace was the first one to defect, she can’t escape her team’s wrath for the rest of the season. Her old team hates her. Every time they win a challenge, and she loses, they send her to exile island to pay for what she did, a harsh, cold, unforgiving place. And that’s just a game!

Now put on top of Paul and his Jewish brethren 1,500 years of religion, an exile for Jewish unfaithfulness to God, and enemy occupiers, the Romans. Put on Paul and the Jews a nationalism stronger than almost anything we have in our country, bound with a sense of identity and faith, and then for Paul to step off the Jewish team, and go to the Gentiles, was like a stab in the back. They didn’t just want to send him to exile island; they wanted to exile him permanently; they wanted his life.

The gospel is for us, but it’s not just for us. It’s for the whole world. The Jews in Jerusalem at this time were so zealous they forgot about God’s plan for Abraham’s descendants to bless the whole world (Gen 12:1-3). As Christians, it can be easy for us to get caught up thinking the gospel is just for us, but God has a mission for us to go beyond ourselves to the people he loves.

Application 1: God is more loving and gracious than we can ever imagine.

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God doesn't want anyone to perish. He's incredibly patient. He wants us to come to repentance. As we think about others, let's capture a little bit of God's heart here for the outsider. Let's look beyond ourselves to those we don't understand and know. God loves them and wants them to come to repentance.

Application 2: Be prepared to share your story.

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Part of the way we can see people come to faith is by sharing our stories. Paul's testimony is an apologetic. He tells his story to help them come to faith. Vaishali has written her faith story for her baptism. I'm looking forward to her sharing it. If I asked you to share your testimony, "to give the reason for the hope you have," right now, would you be able to get up and do it? I actually texted Mark yesterday, and here he is. It's good to write it down and prepare, but we really just want the Holy Spirit to speak.

Application 3: Trust the Holy Spirit to give you the right words.

Luke 12:11-12 (ESV) 11 And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

I'm kind of contradicting myself, aren't I? Be prepared, but trust the Holy Spirit. Know your story, but when the time comes, don't try to download your testimony from Google Drive. Simply share. The Holy Spirit will bring to mind the parts he wants you to remember.

I really enjoyed the interview with "Pastor X," but I was also really convicted by it. He shared how he married his wife, and she came to live with him at his nice house with his nice cars and lots of money, and two months later, she was depressed. He says, "How are you depressed? You came from a third-world country, and we're in a first-world country." She says, "Because the church here is under a satanic lullaby, and I'm falling asleep, and every time I try to wake up, the lullaby goes faster. Let's go back to my country." He was so shocked that they left everything and moved back to her country to tell others about Jesus.

They wanted to follow the Holy Spirit, wherever the Holy Spirit would lead them. They felt like they were asleep, too comfortable. God picked them up and put them back in the Middle East to share Christ. Maybe the Lord hasn't called you to the Middle East, but he's going to call you to your neighbors or family or even to move. I want us to end with the second half of Mark's story because it shows God does call people from one place to another. When we follow the Spirit, anything is possible. [Mark, come on up, and then we'll have the worship team sing one more song.]

Romans 15:13 (ESV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen on [Apple Podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. Have you shared your faith story, your testimony?
2. Who were you before you met Jesus? Or what sin patterns have you seen God change?

3. How is Jesus changing and transforming you? Need help? Ask a friend what they see God doing.
4. How does God's love for others motivate us to share the love of Christ?
5. How prepared are you to tell your story? Could you share it right now? Do you need to take time to write it out?
6. Spend time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to give you the right words and present you with opportunities to share.

Sources

The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching (p. 471). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. My big idea is adapted from this book.

I edited some mental health issues out of the Pastor X interview.