

Acts 22:15

You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

As a law student, I did not study the law relating to evidence

- But I can recount a well-known case
- In the course of a prosecution a witness was testifying in a case
- involving one man biting off another man's ear in a fight
- after giving testimony, which was very bad for the defendant
- the witness was being cross-examined by a learned barrister
- You said that you saw the defendant and the plaintiff in a fight? 'Yes, I did.'
- You then said that you were concerned for your safety
- And because of this concern you sought shelter elsewhere? 'That's right.'
- And did you further state that during this time of seeking shelter
- You turned your back on the fight? 'Yes, I did.'
- And it was when your back was turned, the defendant bit off the plaintiff's ear? 'Yes.'
- So, said the barrister. You admit your back was turned – when this happened
- Did you see the defendant bite off the plaintiff's ear?
- No sir ...*Ah!* ... but I saw him spit it out

A witness is one who is called to give an account of what he or she has seen and heard

- When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask if he was the Messiah
- He told them to go back to John and report what they had seen and heard (Lk 7:22)
- Jesus himself said that his witness was testify to what he had seen and heard (Jn 3:32)
- In his first letter, John said he proclaimed what he had seen and heard (1 Jn 1:3)
- Peter and John were commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus
- But they replied, 'we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard' (4:20)
- Now Paul has received the same commission from Jesus himself
- To be a witness to all men of what he has seen and heard

Acts 22 begins with Paul's defence before the mob

- It is in effect a 'model testimony'
- Every Christian should have a testimony and it is not a bad thing to write it down
- However, a testimony is different for an autobiography or life story
- It is an account of what we have seen and heard – it is an account of Jesus

Paul began to speak to the crowd in Aramaic

- 'Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence' (Acts 22:1)
- The word translated defence is the Greek word *apologia* – in English 'apology'
- We tend to use apology and sorry in much the same way
- But really an apology gives a reason for what you have said and done
- 'I cannot come to the circuit meeting I have another appointment at Plymouth Argyle'

The fact that Paul spoke fluent Aramaic caused the people to become 'very quiet' (22:2)

- Unlike Greek or Latin, Aramaic was the common language of the people of Jerusalem
- Therefore, they realised that Paul was one of their own number
- If they had labelled him as someone with very little understanding of his Jewish roots
- And a Gentile collaborator - because he had been born elsewhere – they were wrong

Paul began his address respectfully, and gives a testimony in which he explains:

- I HIS PAST
- II HIS PATH
- III HIS PLACE

I HIS PAST (21:39-22:5)

A good Christian testimony will inevitably say something about our past

- Some people make the past so exciting and the present so boring
- That you wonder why they ever became Christians at all
- It reminds me of the young man who began his testimony:
- ‘Before I became a Christian, I lived a life of wine, women and song ...
- and we weren’t doing much singing!’
- As we are the leading authority on ourselves it is easy to slip into too much detail
- Paul focuses on the issue at hand –giving Christian testimony to religious people
- This particular type of religious people are interested in his birth, his upbringing
- His education and his knowledge of their laws and customs
- After all the charge against him is that he is teaching ‘against our people ...
- Against our law and this place (the temple)’ (Acts 21:28)

If that is the charge being brought against Paul; that is what he must answer

- The normal way of describing a man’s younger years was birth, upbringing, training
- Paul has good credentials in all three areas
- Paul explains his heritage as Jew – speaking to them in their language (Aramaic)
- Yes, it is true that he was not born in Judea (the Jewish territory)
- He was born at Tarsus in Cilicia – but he was brought up in Jerusalem
- And what is more his credentials in the customs and law of the Jews are impeccable
- For his tutor, Gamaliel, was the most revered teacher of the era
- Paul was thoroughly trained in the law and just as zealous for God as his critics

Paul explains how, in his zeal, he also opposed Christianity and persecuted Christians

- The ‘Way’ was the earliest name for the Christian believers at Jerusalem
- Paul arrested both men and women and had them thrown into prison
- And pursued them to Damascus
- So that he could bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished
- Paul recognises the zeal of his critics all too well – for he had once been like them

This is another mark of testimony – Paul is vividly describing his life without Jesus

- He shows how a life without Jesus is always filled with something else
- And yet in a real sense the ‘something else’ is never enough
- First Paul’s hatred was confined to Jerusalem but then that was not enough
- And he pursued the Christians to Damascus

The first part of a great Christian testimony understands the past – without Jesus

- It shows the things that can so easily fill an individual’s life
- Even showing the futility and emptiness of all that went before

Having described his life before his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, Paul moves on to:

II HIS PATH (22:6-21)

In recounting his encounter with Jesus

- Paul explains his conversion and his commissioning
- It is good to notice that the two go together
- There are some people who would like to do things in the church
- But they are not really converted – how then can they begin to serve God
- But, even more sadly, there are others who are converted
- And yet seem to have no idea of what God would have them do
- Paul shows that both his conversion and his commissioning come from Jesus

His dramatic conversion has sometimes been taken as a model of all Christian experience

- But this cannot be right – the dramatic nature of his conversion is extraordinary
- Paul himself realises that – but whether our conversion is quiet or dramatic
- We still need to be converted

Perhaps you can name some dramatic Christian conversions

- St Augustine, John Newton, Billy Bray, Nicky Cruz, and others
- But in detail I just mention one – Chuck Colson

From 1969 to 1973, Chuck Colson was special counsel to US President Nixon

- It was an administration known for its tough guys
- But in the White House, Colson was known as ‘the hatchet man’
- The media described him as ‘incapable of humanitarian thought’
- Then suddenly, Colson found himself caught up in the Watergate scandal
- He had helped organise the illegal wiretapping of the Democratic headquarters
- Realising he was in big trouble, Colson took a friend’s advice, and turned to God
- And his turning to Christ changed his life – though at first it was hard to credit
- The *Boston Globe* commented: ‘if Mr Colson can repent of his sins
- There just has to be hope for everybody’
- And that’s exactly it – conversion is not about how dramatic everything appears
- It is about the reality of repentance; the change of course

I put it this way – there are 360 degrees in a circle, 180 degrees in a semi-circle

- There are some people who, at conversion, appear to make a 180 degree turn
- That is they quite obviously turn around and go in completely the opposite direction
- There are others who might think themselves just 1 degree off beam
- But in eternity 1 degree off beam ends infinitely far away from where we should be

The conversion of many people appears to others to be far less dramatic

- The story might not make a best selling Christian paperback
- But the reality is repentance, change, conversion because of a meeting with Jesus
- This does not mean the visible face-to-face meeting that the Apostle Paul had
- But it does mean knowing personally that Jesus died and rose again
- And that he did so for me ... and for you

After his dramatic conversion, Paul was given an equally dramatic commission

- Physically blinded by the light that he had seen at his conversion
- Paul was taken to the godly Ananias, who told him

The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.

(Acts 22:14)

Paul's conversion came about when he believed that Jesus was God's Messiah

- It was the result of a heavenly confrontation
- It was not something that Paul made up or others imposed on him
- The risen heavenly Christ met him, challenged him, rebuked him, turned him around
- And commissioned him for a new life of service in the gospel
- While I have stated quite clearly that a dramatic conversion is unnecessary
- I must also state quite clearly that conversion is necessary – and in that conversion
- We must expect to be challenged, rebuked, turned around and commissioned
- Jesus is revealed to Paul as 'the Righteous One'
- There is no way that we can honour 'the Righteous One' by living unrighteously

In the New Testament, the act of repentance, believing and baptism were of one piece

- This is not the time to weigh infant and believer's baptism
- It was not the baptismal water that washed away Paul's sins – but it symbolised it
- It was an outward sign of an inner washing, that came by way of repentance and faith
- In the shed blood of Jesus upon the cross and his mighty resurrection

Paul is commissioned to bear witness to what he has seen and heard

- Not in Jerusalem, because the Lord had told him they would not accept his testimony
- But far away among the Gentiles

Paul gave account of

- I HIS PAST
- II HIS PATH (and how he got where he was)
- III HIS PLACE

During most of Paul's testimony (or defence), the crowd listened with a certain respect

- But Paul's testimony to Jesus produced a hostile response
- When Paul had spoken of being directed by God to go the Gentiles
- Effectively saying that he was going directly to Gentiles with the message of salvation
- Without first being related to Israel and its institutions – that was the last straw
- For it placed Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing before God
- This was a complete denial of their religion
- At this point Paul was shouted down by the crowd
- Which started calling for his death
- Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!
- The people of Jerusalem certainly did not want him there

Paul had a powerful testimony that he could use among the people of Jerusalem

- These were the very people who knew that he had once persecuted the Christians
- he honestly thought that his background would give him credibility
- he thought he would be a powerful witness to his people
- But this was not going to be so, and God knew it
- So God directed him to a different path
- It is a reminder that when we are converted it is God who does the commissioning

Having ambitions and plans in our Christian service is not wrong

- But even these must come under God's authority
- It is easy for world desires to cloud Godly ambition
- Especially if we mistake one for the other
- God sometimes graciously puts obstacles in our way to alert us to the dangers

Only the intervention of the garrison commander saved Paul from the mob again

- It is more than likely that the commander did not know what was going on
- Not being able to understand what Paul had been saying in Aramaic
- The commander therefore decided to find out the truth
- By interrogating Paul under torture – with the scourge

It was with the notorious scourge that Pilate, in a travesty of justice, had Jesus flogged

- After he had declared him innocent (John 18:38-19:1)
- The scourge was such a vicious lash that many died or were crippled because of it

However, Roman citizens were exempt from examination under torture

- So Paul said to the centurion in charge
- Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?
- We do not know how Paul received his Roman citizenship
- The most likely explanation is that one of his ancestors received it for valued service
- Succeeding citizens had a registration of birth, recording their Roman status
- Roman citizens were exempt from scourging as a method of inquiry before trial
- And quite naturally Paul claimed that right
- the commander's citizenship was purchased by a large sum of money, possibly a bribe
- but Paul was born a citizen

Once in Rome, Paul would be able to look back and see the plan of God unfolding

- A key ingredient of faithfulness is a willingness to persevere amidst discouragements
- Most people who have achieved great things for God
- Have done so by persevering when others gave up, as the Proverbs record (16:9)
- "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps."

In Acts 22, we have Paul's defence, which is in effect his testimony, he tells of:

His past, he explains his heritage as a Jew and his zeal as a Jew

His path, he explains his conversion and his commissioning

His place – he is where the people do not want him

But he is where the Lord does want him and from this moment he is on his way to Rome