

Acts 22 - John Karmelich

1. One of the hard realities to accept in life is that some people simply won't accept the Gospel message, no matter how convincing the argument. This is the lesson of Acts 22.
 - a) Great speeches and great personal testimonies will not always make a difference. There are barriers to preaching the Gospel that can only be torn down through prayer.
 - b) The counter-point is that God *does* want us to tell people about Jesus. We have to remember that we don't get "points" for every person we convert. Conversion is God's job, not ours. God does not measure our success that way. God calls us to *be* his witness. Only God himself knows who does, and does not become a Christian. We are just to be witnesses, and the Holy Spirit has the job of conviction of people's hearts.
2. Given that, who do you think are the hardest people for you to convince Jesus is the Messiah?
 - a) Chapter 22 gives us a few clues to that question. I have found, both from this chapter and from practical experience, that the answer comes in two forms:
 - i) The people you know the best.
 - ii) Those who are deeply engrained in "religion".
 - b) First of all, anybody who's been a Christian for a while know that the toughest people to convince are those people you know best. This is especially true for those of us who were converted later in life. After your conversion, the hardest people to win over is often your immediate family, or say, your close associates from school.
 - i) The problem is they *know* you. They have seen you through many years of not living a Christian life. You can't expect them to see you change in one day and expect them to do likewise. Your life-to-them as a witness for Jesus takes time.
 - ii) Whenever I think about this, I am reminded something about Jesus: His own brothers didn't believe in him until after the resurrection. If you study the four gospels, Jesus had four half-brothers (see Matthew 13:55). Mary was a virgin, prior to Jesus' birth, but after this she went on to have other children. When you read the Gospel accounts, especially John's, there is no indication that his brothers believed in him. If Jesus' brothers didn't believe the gospels, how do we expect to convince our own siblings or parents about Jesus?
 - c) The Second biggest roadblock are those who are deeply engrained in their religious beliefs. The attitude is "I already know my stuff. What are *you* going to teach me? This is often true of church-going "Christians". I have met people who have gone to church weekly for years, but have never turned their live *over* to Jesus. They are trusting in their church membership and their faithful obedience to their attendance and service to that church.
 - i) As to other religions, when somebody has spent 5-10-15-30 years of their lives *engrained* in their religious beliefs, they are rarely going to change overnight. I have found that when people change religions after a long time, there is usually a period of anger that their old beliefs didn't provide the answers. There is a often a period of cynicism toward religion in general. (If my old religion is wrong, so are *all* religions). Finally, there is a search for the truth. It is very rare to find someone who has been engrained in deep religious beliefs to change to Christianity all at once. It usually requires a dramatic event (such as Paul's experience). Even when Paul was first converted, there appears to be evidence that he spent a lot of time in solitude to think about the experience. (See Galatians 1:17).

3. OK, so what does all of this have to do with Chapter 22? Everything! In this chapter Paul makes his defense to both of those groups.
- a) First, Paul speaks to those who he knows well – the religious Jews of Jerusalem. Paul *knows* these people. He grew up with them. He knows how they think. He knows how they rationalize. He truly understands them. Further, he has a love for them. Paul grew up the same way they did. I am convinced it was the deepest desire of Paul's heart to see his old friends and fellow Jews convert to Jesus.
 - i) The difference between Paul and the religious Jews is Paul has become born-again. He realizes the great mistake he made in not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and just wants to share that with the people he knows best. That is what drives Paul. That is what makes him put up with the pain, the hardship, the warnings about the troubles ahead.
 - a) It is common for Christians to have the same desire. Once we become born again, we have a great love for our family and friends. There is nothing we want more, for *their* sake, for them to see the light.
 - b) Chapter 22 is predominately one speech. It is Paul giving his defense for his beliefs in Jesus to a large, angry group of religious Jews.
 - i) Paul doesn't care about their anger. Paul cares about their salvation. He doesn't see them as people trying to kill him. He sees them as lost sheep who need to hear the message of salvation to *avoid* spending eternity in hell. It is not about saving Paul's life, it is about saving the lives Paul's listeners!
 - ii) The speech was a failure. It is brilliant in context. It is indefensible in its presentation. It didn't accomplish anything, other than for these Jews not to have any excuse when they stand before Jesus one day.
 - c) To those of us who found Jesus later in life, this story repeats itself in our lives. We discover the Bible *is* truth. We discover that Jesus *is* God. We turn our lives over to him. We get excited. We want to tell people. We want to share it with our own families. We *know* our families. We *know* how they think. All we have to do is tell them about Jesus, and they'll believe too!
 - i) Like Paul, the results is usually a disaster in the making. Why is that?
 - ii) Here's your answer: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)
 - iii) What God is saying in this verse, is that we need to turn to Him to lead others to Christ. It is not through our great speeches, it is not through our ability to "get to those people", or any other reason. Remember that God sent Paul to preach to the *Gentiles*, and not his fellow Jews . If Paul was very successful with the Jews, we could say "well, it was Paul's great Jewish background that led to their conversion". If that was the case, Paul would get the glory, and not God. (Read the Isaiah verse again now!)
 - iv) With his failure to reach a large Jewish audience, it is simply another example of our dependence upon God to reach *anybody* for the Gospel!
4. Paul's speech was a disaster. The only reason he didn't die there was due to the Romans saving his life and Paul stating his Roman citizenship.

- a) We haven't talked much about "Paul, the Roman Citizen", but this is as good a place as any to bring up the topic. ☺ The vast majority of people in this Roman-world were slaves. A Roman Citizen was entitled to special rights, including never being a slave. He also was never allowed to be crucified, nor severely beaten without a fair trial. A slave, on the other hand, had no civil rights. As of that time, Roman citizens were either born that way, or acquired citizenship via a large bribe. Acquiring citizenship was Roman fundraiser during this time period.
- i) OK, John, this is all interesting. What does it have to do with our life?
- ii) Paul used his Roman Citizenship to save his life. God often gives us special privileges or benefits based on our background, heritage, or occupation. (For example, many people can get special discounts on certain products in their own profession.) The point is simply Paul used what assets he had to further the Gospel, and save his own life. There is no point in being a martyr for Christ when you have the option not to be!
5. OK, I'm now on page three, time for me to get started. ☺ Verse 1: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."
- a) At the end of Chapter 21, Paul was praying in the Temple. Some Jews from Ephesus recognized him and told the local Jews that this is the guy who is converting Jews to Christianity. The *specific* accusation was that Paul was bringing Gentiles into the inner-area of the Temple, which was not permitted under the penalty of death.
- i) Some Roman soldiers saw the commotion, and dragged Paul away. A beaten Paul, asked to make a defense. The Roman guard, wanting to quiet the crowd, agreed with the request, and here we are at Chapter 22.
- ii) One of the underlying themes of the Book of Acts is "Spiritual Warfare". This is a Christian term describing the unseen world of demons and angels battling behind the scenes. There are very few blatant references to this warfare in Acts, but it is noticeable if you watch the text. Satan was doing everything in his power to stop the spread of the Gospels. If he couldn't kill Paul (although he was trying!), at least he could spread false rumors about him.
- b) As you read Paul's defense, keep in mind, the specific accusation of bringing Gentiles into the Temple area. To an Orthodox Jew, during this time era, the *only* way to approach God was through Judaism. Their view of Gentiles was that "they are used as fuel in hell". Given this built in prejudice, let's begin Paul's defense.
- c) Paul uses the term "Brothers and Fathers". Commentators are mixed as to why Paul uses this term, but it was probably out of respect of the members of the Sanhedrian Council, who were present in the audience.
- i) When Stephen gave his speech in Acts 7, he used the exact same reference.
6. Verse 2: When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.
- a) Aramic is a cousin-language of Hebrew. As I mentioned last week, scholars are divided whether Paul spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic. Either way can be considered an acceptable translation.
- b) The religious Jews of Jerusalem spoke both Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek. By Paul using the Hebrew language, he was establishing his "Jewishness".
- i) Also remember that the Roman soldier probably didn't understand anything Paul said from this point forward.

7. Verse 2, continued. Then Paul said: ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as also the high priest and all the Council can testify.
- a) As you read verse 2 through 5, you can almost sense Paul's blood pressure rise. Here was his big chance. He always wanted to preach to his peers. He has been talking for the last several chapters about wanting to witness to his fellow Jews. Reread the verses and you can sense the zeal coming from Paul, almost as if he is trying to relate to their anger about Christianity.
 - i) The lesson as a public speaker in this situation, is that it is often best to "acknowledge" their anger, as to calm them down, before giving the main point of your speech. By acknowledging their anger, Paul is saying in effect "I hear you, I used to be just like you and had the same anger. Then you can go on to the main point of your speech.
 - b) Paul speech focuses on his life story as it relates to his conversion. This is an excellent way to tell people about Jesus. People can argue with religion all day. The *hardest* thing for people to argue with is your personal testimony. When you tell people how your life has changed through Jesus working in your life, that fact can not be debated.
 - c) Some other tidbits before we move on:
 - i) Paul mentions that he was born in Tarsus, but raised in this city, which is Jerusalem. This way, Paul can relate to both the Hellenistic (Greek culture) Jews in the audience as well as the local Judea-based Jews.
 - ii) Paul speaks of being trained under Gamaliel. To this day, Gamaliel is considered one of the most prominent Rabbi's in the history of Judaism. Paul made this point to add to his credibility.
 - a) One of the interesting speculations is that the Jewish records never spoke of a "Saul" under Gamaliel. There is speculation that Saul (Paul) was ex-communicated when he became a prominent Christian. There is the belief that "any publicity is good publicity", and therefore, the Jews of that time may have blotted Saul out of any documentation. Again, this is all speculation, but it is interesting to think about!
 - iii) Paul refers to Christians as "The Way". This was probably the local nick-name for Christians before the term "Christians" became popular. The term "The Way" was probably an insult to the Jews, and Paul described it as such.
 - a) Paul describes how he was the ring-leader to persecute Christians prior to his conversion. In his defense, he states how the Council can verify how Paul, at one time did persecute the Jews.
8. Verse 5 (cont.) I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.
- a) Luke records Paul's conversion story in Acts Chapter 9. A lot of this chapter is a repeat of Chapter 9. Here, it is being retold by Paul, with more details being revealed.
 - b) Paul now focuses his speech on his experience on the road to Damascus. I'm fairly certain Damascus was not the first city outside of Jerusalem where Paul persecuted Christians, as there are many other towns/cities that are closer. Therefore, there is probably a time-gap in this section of the story. Paul moves from the "desire to persecute Christians" experience to the day he choose to move on to Damascus.

- i) It is about 20 years between the time of Chapter 9 and Chapter 22. Paul remembers the details so well, he can recall the details from memory. There is nothing unusual about that. Most people have a handful of life-changing moments in which they can recall all the details of that event.
 - a) For those of us who were saved in a dramatic fashion like Paul, details of those memories are burned in our lives forever!
 - b) In Acts 9, the author Luke records the story as a historical event. In this chapter, some details are added or omitted to focus on Paul's testimony.
- 9. Paul continues, Verse 6: About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' ⁸ "Who are you, Lord?" I asked. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.
 - a) Paul makes an interesting comment in 1st Corinthians: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 NIV)
 - i) Paul is aware that in Jewish culture, miraculous signs are taken seriously. Even in that culture, "private" signs are not always enough, but they do believe God works that way, only if you are a believing Jew.
 - ii) So Paul's strategy was 1) establish credibility 2) describe his "personal miracle".
 - b) There is something I pointed in Acts 9, that is worth mentioning again. Paul believed he was persecuting Christians. Jesus, speaking in this verse says, it is "I" you are persecuting! When we read of those who are persecuting Christians, Jesus himself is well aware of it and takes it personally! (I'd hate to be the persecutor on judgment day! ☺)
- 10. Verse 10: "What shall I do, Lord?" I asked. "Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do." ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.
 - a) Notice how God works in steps. God did not reveal every detail of His plans for Paul here on the spot, just the next step of "Go to Damascus". I find God works that way in our life too. God is trying to build our trust in Him. Therefore, he only gives us instructions for our lives one step at a time. He never gives us more than we can handle.
- 11. Verse 12: A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.
 - a) Ananias' story is told in more detail in Chapter 9. He was a Jewish Christian living in Damascus who knew about how Paul was persecuting Christians. God told Ananias in a vision that Paul was saved. Ananias was reassured by God that this was true. Imagine how scared he must have been to walk up to Paul, knowing his reputation. The fact that he said "Brother Saul" at their first encounter was a testimony to his faith.
 - b) What Paul is doing here is further establishing his credibility as a "good Jew". He described Ananias as a "devout observer of the law" and "highly respected". The fact that he tells the crowd Ananias used the term "Brother Saul" was another step to show his equality with Ananias and that Paul did not violate the law.

12. Verse 14, "Then he (Ananias) said: `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. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'
- a) "The Righteous One" in Verse 14 is a reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
 - b) In the Book of Isaiah, one of the best passages one can find about Jesus is Chapter 53. It was written hundreds of years before the Cross. One of many the references to "The Righteous One" comes from this chapter:
 - i) "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied ; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:11 NIV)
 - c) I love the part in Verse 16 where Ananias says "what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized." It's almost like "OK Paul, that is all the message God told me to tell you. Don't just stand there, let's get moving."
 - i) For those who write in your Bible, underline "what are you waiting for?"
 - a) That is a great verse to remember when God calls us to do something and we are procrastinating.
13. Verse 17: "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance
- a) We know from Galatians, Chapter 1, Verse 18, that it was 3 years between the time Paul was converted and the time he went back to Jerusalem.
14. Paul continues, Verse 18: and saw the Lord speaking. `Quick!' he said to me. `Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'
- a) One of the great, simple lessons to learn from this verse is "God knows best". When God tells you to do something, do it, don't hesitate. In verse 19, we will see Paul arguing with God. That is always a mistake.
15. Verse 19: "Lord,' I replied, `these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'
- a) Paul calls Jesus "Lord", yet he is arguing with him in these verses!:
 - i) To quote Jesus: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46 NIV)
 - b) Before we tisk-tisk Paul for his disobedience ☺, how many people *as Christians* have ever been disobedient to what the Bible calls us to do, or something God has personally called you to do?
 - i) The lesson to learn from these verses is that God knows best for our lives even when it does not seem logical. Paul was sure he could convert these Jews. Paul had the same background. Some of these people used to be his classmates. This is why Paul was arguing with God. He was sure he could convert them.
 - a) What we are seeing is Paul's pride come out. He thought he knew best.
 - b) Going back to my introductory notes, what we see here is not only God trying to warn Paul, but also that God's ways are not our ways. The *logical* thing would be for Paul to witness to them. That method would give Paul some of the credit. God's not into sharing credit!
 - c) Paul refereed to the martyrdom of Stephen. Although that event was 20 years ago, I'm sure Paul still felt guilty about it. (How would *you* feel if you persecuted Christians to death, and *then* realized you were wrong!) Plus, some older members in the audience probably were at the event.

16. Here is the climatic verse, Verse 21: "Then the Lord said to me, `Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"
- a) The crowd could handle all this talk about visions, and personal testimonies, even Jesus. All of these aspects are "Jewish". The buzz-word that ended it was "Gentiles".
 - i) Remember that Paul was on trial for bringing Gentiles in to the temple.
 - ii) You have to understand why the Jews were so angry. To hear somebody say "God is sending me to the Gentiles" is denouncing Judaism. Jews believe the only way to salvation is through Judaism.
 - a) This is simply an issue of "pride". Jews believe "we" are the chosen people. The truth is God choose the Jews to be *witnesses* to the world, as he calls Christians today to do the same. God does not expect the Jews to act/be superior just as he does not expect Christians to act/be superior just because "we are saved and you're not".
 - b) We are also dealing here with bigotry. Unfortunately, this has been a large problem with the Christian church through the centuries as well. For centuries, the Roman Catholic church believed the *only* way to salvation was through that church.
 - i) Thousands (millions?) of Christians were killed during "heresy" trials and persecutions. If you want to be humbled as a Christian, read the book "Fox's Book of Martyrs", which chronicles the testimonies of those who have died simply for their belief in Jesus and the Bible as the sole authority as the Word of God. It can be found at most Christian bookstores.
 - ii) Even our American history has a lot to be embarrassed about. Within our last generation, the Southern Baptist Church has gone to great lengths to apologize to their black congregations for *their* attitudes about segregation!
17. So the rioting has begun in the crowd:²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,
- a) Remember that all of these Jews were standing on the courtyard of the temple and Paul was standing on the stairs of the Roman fortress, which abuts the Temple.
 - b) I read an interesting commentary about this verse from David Stern, who is involved in the Jews for Jesus movement. To paraphrase "After living in Israel for 13 years (as a Jew for Jesus), I can speak assuredly that the Jews in this verse were throwing dust *at* Paul, and not just in the air!"
 - i) Modern Orthodox Judaism has a different view regarding Gentiles and their salvation. They don't have a problem with a gentile becoming a Christian. In their minds, a Gentile who leads a good life will have some reward in heaven, just less than a Jew. They have a **big** problem with a Jew becoming a Christian, and in their minds, that Jew is going to hell for the conversion.
18. Verse 24: the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.
- a) Back to the Roman commanders. The Romans didn't speak Hebrew. All they knew was Paul was talking, and then, all of a sudden, the crowd got violent and tried to kill him. Remember the Romans only concern was no rioting. They could care less about differences in religion. The Roman commander, not knowing what else to do, took the attitude of "lets whip a confession out of him".

- i) When I read about the Roman officials in this chapter, and the next few chapters, I always think of the people who are indifferent to religion. They have the attitude “We don’t care about any of that stuff. Why doesn’t everybody just keep quiet and mind their own business”. Unfortunately, that attitude won’t get you into heaven! God *desires* a relationship with him. You can not be neutral in your relationship with Jesus.
 - ii) The other thing you are going to see in the background is God uses the Roman army, in several situations to save Paul’s life. It is often interesting to see how God will use non-Christians for the sake of getting His will done!
- 19. Verse 25: As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"
 - a) It is illegal to flog (whip) a Roman Citizen. Paul was a Citizen. Notice how Paul used his civil rights to protect his life. He did not allow himself to be martyred when he had every legal right to avoid being flogged as a Roman Citizen.
 - i) The lesson is God does not want us to be a martyr needlessly. Paul did not say “OK, I’m ready to die for Christ, do your worst! He used what assets he had, i.e., a Roman Citizenship to protect his life.
- 20. Verse 26: When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. ²⁸ Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. Verse 29: Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.
 - a) It was a crime to flog a Roman citizen without a fair trial. The commander could get into trouble for this. This is why he questioned Paul. I’m not sure how Paul proved he was a Roman Citizen, but it was punishable by death to lie about it.
 - b) There is a game of “one-up-man-ship” in Verses 27-28. The commander said “I paid a big price for my citizenship”. Paul one-upped him by saying he was *born* a Citizen.
 - i) I’ve read a number of different commentaries about these verses, none of which give me any great insight to apply to our lives. I think Paul simply stated “I was born a citizen” in the fear of losing his life and was establishing his credibility as a Roman Citizen.
 - ii) The commander probably acquired his citizenship by a bribe, which historians concur was a common practice during that time. Commentators speculate that Paul’s parents were probably granted citizenship for support of Rome in making Tarsus part of the Roman Empire.
 - c) Part of this lead’s back to last week’s debate over whether or not Paul was in “God’s will” in preaching to the Jews. Just a few verses back God told Paul that the Jews would not accept his testimony, and here was Paul preaching to the same group! Some commentators argue that Paul was out of God’s will at this point. The counter-argument is that in Chapter 23, God speaks to Paul, to encourage him in his mission.
 - i) The “in-between” argument is that Paul may have been out of God’s will in preaching to the Jews, but God, who wanted Paul to be his witness, encouraged him on anyway, knowing that Paul’s arrest would lead to Paul speaking in front of major Roman officials.

21. Verse 30: The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.
- a) The protocol to arrest a Roman Citizen was to draw up formal charges. Therefore, since the Roman soldiers didn't speak Hebrew, they didn't know what the issue was all about. Therefore the Romans *ordered* the Jewish high-council (Sanhedrin) to meet just so the Romans knew what the fuss is all about!
 - i) The Sanhedrin was a body of 70 elders who ruled over the religious issues of Israel. The high priest was also a member.
 - b) The story continues in Chapter 23. It is a strange place for a chapter break, but hey, I'm not in charge.
 - c) Well, its only page 9. I could stop here and give everybody a break this week, or move right in to Chapter 23. Well, what they hey, writing about the Bible always puts me in a good mood. Let's call it a week. ☺
22. Let's Pray: Father, we thank you for pointing out these lessons on your will for our lives, issues of bigotry and pride and more importantly, the importance of having the courage to stand bold and be willing to give our personal testimony for Jesus. Let not these lessons be wasted upon us. Through your Holy Spirit, speak to our hearts about what is our individual calling, and more importantly, help us to be obedient to that calling. For we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.