



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 77 “An Appeal for Less Religious Zeal”
By Pastor Jody May 05/05/2024**

Acts 22:1-21 ESV

22 “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”

² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

³ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹ And 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.

¹² “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ 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.’

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



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witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’²¹And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

[READ THE TEXT]

Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”

People – “Thanks be to God.”

[PRAY]

[ILLUSTRATION]

You know growing up in South Florida (SFL) as a football fan I received a good introduction into how to speak one’s mind. There were two aspects to this. The first one was when I attended a pro game at Joe Robbie Stadium to watch the Dolphins play anyone in the AFC East conference. That environment was always hostile for Miami, never had a homefield advantage. It seemed that our stadium was always just as much filled with the opposing team’s fans as it was with Fin fans, because people from New York and New England retire and vacation in SFL meaning, we always had to put up with obnoxious northerners. We became pretty good as slinging insults and names because that’s what you did with Jet fans, they expected it, and you wanted to help make the day memorable for them.

On the other side of learning how to speak one’s mind my family had season tickets to the Miami Hurricane games. This was back in the heyday of Michael Irvin, Warren Sapp, Ray Lewis and so forth. College smack talking is a whole other level but in the late 80s and early 90s when FSU came to town things escalated rather quickly. Those were the games you left the women folk at home because the level of physical violence on the field matched what was going on outside in the old Orange Bowl. Yep, those were the good old days where I learned to sling insults, degrade with made up names, and defended the honor of my team. **That is what the world considers to be bold, make a b*%\$ of yourself in public, antagonizing those that disagree with you.**

I would like to offer you though a better definition of boldness. When you talk about bold though as when it pertains to food, culture, and art it simply



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means that it rises above the rest, **by being different**. You see boldness is the act of sticking out among the majority, the masses, and the mob based on being different and not being swayed by **group-thought/tribalism**. This past week a group of UNC students protected the American Flag after the administration had already once taken down a foreign country flag.¹ These brave young men held the flag, took the taunting, the name calling, the threats, the projectiles and held the flag up out of respect. That is what being bold is all about, it is exhibiting behavior that gets you noticed just because you decide to go against the grain, to do what is right, even among the threats of violence. We need more of this in our world.

[INTRO. & BACKGROUND]

Being bold in the proclamation of the gospel has nothing to do with being rude, condescending, or hateful towards those you share the gospel with. It just means that no matter what the situation is that you are not afraid to spread the Gospel contrary to what the ramifications might be.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 ESV

¹³ Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

Boldness is based in your faith in that what you are sharing is the absolute truth, and that the arguments that come against you, no matter how appealing/convincing/threatening they sound cannot replace that truth. Most modern arguments against God’s truth in the Gospel go like this:

- Is that you don’t need it, yet people still seek for ways to better themselves.
- There is no God, yet they still choose to worship things other than God.
- There is no such thing as sin, yet they still look for ways to make amends in their lives for the wrong they do.
- It is offensive, yet they have no problem offending others with their beliefs.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/unc-fraternity-brothers-defend-reinstated-american-flag-campus-mob-replaced-palestinian-flag>



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- Everyone should just follow what seems right to themselves, yet they actively seek to promote their ways of living for if they don't then it proves that they don't believe in their way of life that they have discovered.

All of that to say all the world is seeking to deal with their lostness, all the time, and they are merely exchanging the truth about God for a lie, they are choosing ignorance ([Romans 1:25](#)). It is the boldness of the Christian, proclaiming God's Word and what it had done to their life, that the HS uses to break through that ignorance.

1 Corinthians 1:21 ESV

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God **through the folly of what we preach to save** those who believe.

It is Paul's chance now to be bold, he has bought his time through first choosing to practice humility, if you remember. When it comes time for Paul to be bold and speak out it will **not be** with insults, taunts, or curses but it will simply be him telling the story of his life. This is where we would do good to practice what Paul is doing here, to learn how to tell our story showing others that life was not all about us but about God. Some of you are familiar with the phrases Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation when it comes to listening to others story or sharing of your own as it pertains to evangelism.² That is exactly what Paul is doing today, he is sharing his story because the Mob is incapable of talking, remember ethical thought has gone out the window they are only ready for violence.

Today Paul's life story has three main sections according to his address to these enraged Jews. First, we are going to hear about Paul's **COLLAPSE**, that point in time where everything was going well and then it all blew up, and how he was living actually led to his biggest downfall. Next, we will hear him speak on his **CONVERSION** where God showed Grace to Paul, saving Him by divine choice and interaction rescuing Paul from sin, for he was unable to save himself. Lastly, we will look at Paul's **COMMISSIONING** that along with someone's conversion people usually sense a direction in which God wants

² Jeff Vanderstelt, "Gospel Fluency" (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Publishing, 2017), 181.



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them to go, Paul had a very clear and distinct message from God in what he should do. This is how we should conduct ourselves, when we have a chance to be bold and speak out it should be about our experience with the risen Lord Jesus Christ and allow that to reflect on the hearer so that as 1 Cor says God may use the **folly of what we preach to save** those that God is calling unto Salvation.

1. COLLAPSE – Letting others know where it all went wrong.

22 “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”

²And when they heard that he was addressing them in the **Hebrew language,** they became even more quiet. And he said: ³“I am a **Jew,** born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but **brought up in this city,** educated at the feet of **Gamaliel** according to the **strict manner of the law** of our fathers, being **zealous** for God as all of you are this day.

Well unlike me and Jet fans, Paul takes a different tack, he associates with the hearers of his words. He calls these raging people family, *brothers and fathers,* he used their native tongue, showed them his creds for being a Jew (where he was born, where he went to school, who his teacher was) and he loved nothing else more than following the law, to be marked as one of them.

You know I am aware and in awe, just like you, of the new modern vernacular and how it has improved our quality of communication. With words like *riz, bussin, cap, boujee, mid, highkey,* and *simp* how did we ever live without such adjectives in our vernacular?! But there is this word that has taken place in the American home among loved ones that has risen like cream to the top: **BRUH!** Bruh can be heard among the young men of our land used to discuss similar likes and dislikes when engaging in conversation about things they like. This is why moms have now been related to *‘bruhs’*, not because of disrespect moms but because it is a sign of endearment/camaraderie in the home talking about things you both like, for example, “Bruh, when is dinner ready?” My point is, when we start to share your story with people you are to find a way to be familiar with them, not to point out your glaring differences about things you don’t like. As Paul said we are striving to be all things to all men to save some ([1 Cor 9:22](#)).



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JESUS CHOSE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH US SO THAT WE MAY LIVE WITH HIM FOREVER! Son of Man was his most used term to describe Himself so that we would know that He is all too familiar with our plights. It also means that the way He has found for living, is the way meant for all men. You see by associating with others we are building the bridges the Jesus Himself established, connecting with each others' humanity.

⁴I persecuted **this Way** to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

Paul is then now *look where my Zeal got me*. I spoke out against **“The Way”**, that was for those Ephesus Jews who cause the whole riot, so that they would know that he was just like them at one time, he hated Christians! He's like, I went after everyone, whole families, and now you can just ask those here, the elders and the high priest, these same people who are present, they are the ones that sent me out! Go on and check for yourself, they can tell you. I got a letter from them to travel between all the synagogues looking for these traitors, to bring them home to be punished.

Now what Paul is doing, and we know this because we can see his speech before his audience can, is that he is setting up the point of where it all collapsed. Where it all went wrong, so that those that are listening would be thinking they would do the same thing. That's when the Spirit confronts them in the story, it would lead to their conviction. You see when we begin to appeal to those with our stories, we cannot be afraid to let them know where we blew it, where we fell into temptation to be like everyone else, where we were looking to be liked by the world, where it felt good to live by the world's standard of living by Justification by our works.

LP:

Before we go about condemning for someone's behavior, we should first be willing to show we are just like them.



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Do you know that much about yourself, are you able to look in the mirror yet and point out to yourself where you blew it? Do you know how to talk about without shame or guilt the things you have done in your life to be accepted so that others can find themselves in your story? If you want to be an effective communicator of the Gospel you will, and you can't dodge that about yourself. God wants to use every bit of your life as a testimony to how He has saved you, how He loved you when you were far from Him, so people may see the hope of the Gospel in the story. When you do this, it will give power to this next section of witnessing to others.

2. CONVERSION – Letting others know when God showed Grace.

⁶“As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ ⁸And I answered, ‘Who are you, **Lord?**’ And he said to me, ‘I am **Jesus of Nazareth**, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰And I said, ‘What shall I do, **Lord?**’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹And 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.

Alright so none of us I know have a story like this where Jesus intruded on our life in person and literally kicked us off our high horse. Yet, all of us that have been saved have been awakened to who the Lord Jesus was, and how we should be towards Him, and that our collapse was an affront against Him. What Paul is experiencing here is a gift of faith. As we said a couple of weeks ago,

Ephesians 2:1-10 ESV

⁴**BUT GOD**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—**by grace you have been saved**—

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; **it is the gift of God**, ⁹**not a result of works**, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



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Paul shared all that theology in his story, I thought I was doing right but I was dead in my trespasses/sin. God Saved me by a gift of faith! How do we get that from this story? Paul called Jesus Lord before he knew it was the Lord, Paul accepted Jesus as Lord and as the one who spoke for God, Paul gave his loyalty to Jesus, and then he obeyed Him **EVEN though one minute before Jesus was the ENEMY!** Paul is telling about the first part that must happen in everyone’s story of conversion, **you must believe** that Jesus is the Son of God, He is the Savior, He saves when He wants, He is able to forgive sin if He so chooses, and you do not go against His wishes once you are aware of that fact! Conversion begins with faith, without it there is not real change for anyone!

That’s a great place for you and me to go and ask this morning, does Jesus command my life this way? Do I see Him, and do I obey Him, or do I not show I know Him not by what I do? Faith is displayed by obedience through listening.

¹²“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴And 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; ¹⁵for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

This next part of the story shows the other part to conversion and that is **repentance**, which can’t happen without a gift of faith. To repent is to show that way of life you were living where you turned from it, that which you said goodbye to. Perhaps like Paul you had an Ananias in your life that came to you and helped you understand what was going on. For Paul Ananias gave him back his sight symbolizing that Paul’s eyes had been open to the truth of who he was and what God did for him.

To the Jews the miracle would have been a big deal for there were also witnesses to his blindness as there were other temple officials traveling with him that could be asked. Then Ananias shows that the Way is actually **what all Jews should be practicing**. He told Paul that the God of their Fathers was the



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one that appointed him to give a witness to the Holy one, the one chosen by the Father to make him known to His people, that would be Jesus.

That is repentance. You realize all that you do and all that you are is to point to the one that has called you out of darkness into light. Perhaps your story hasn't had that much power to it because your life doesn't look any different since you have met Christ, where is the show of repentance? When God saves us, He doesn't just save us to live forever, He doesn't just free us from our addictions and desires, He saves us for the purpose **to witness about JESUS!** There is no other life choice for any Christian in this room. If you are not bringing awareness to others about Christ, you have missed your life calling. So, whatever that is, whatever you are doing, if it is not bringing glory to Christ, STOP, repent, and find your purpose in God for He loves you and wants you to experience the joy of living for His holy one!

LP:

If we are going to call others to repentance, we better be able to show them in our story where it happened for us.

When you show others that type of passion that is what comes across as bold, because that is not unlike anything else they have ever seen in their lives. Tik Tok is full of stories about people being themselves, trying to be happy, doing what they love to do, begging people for like to justify their attempts at self-saving work! Let me ask you HCC has the American Church become a whitewashed tomb because we can't find anyone inside them that wants not to live for themselves but wants to live for JESUS and not an audience of man!? Do you think we have it in us to get excited about the opportunity to live for Jesus like the first century church, to display our repentance, to show the joy of living for Christ? I pray we do, because without that you don't get to have this last part of the story which is essential for every Christian story to have.

3. COMMISSION – Letting others know what you are living for now.

¹⁷“When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned



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and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰And 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.’ ²¹And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

Paul was relating to them now his desire that even back then it was to save his brothers and fathers, but it was God’s will to send him away. What Paul saw as an opportunity to share the gospel with them then, God saw their hearts and knew it was not the right time. So, Paul practices something every convert should to this faith, they practice obedience and discipleship. If you remember in Acts 9 Paul leaves Jerusalem and goes into Arabia as he retells in Galatians 1.

Galatians 1:11-18 ESV

¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Paul worked out his calling among those around him that knew him, that could coach him, that could instruct him in the way, and it was then he went out on his own. The church helped establish Paul’s calling, the church helped equip Paul, so that everything Paul did was sanctioned by those that know him. But you see in today’s society we like to keep our dreams to ourselves; we either don’t share them because we think people will believe we are crazy OR we are scared of them so we never speak them into existence. Here’s the point we all have some type of calling on our life to live for God in the community of the



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local church, but it takes time, it takes relationship, and it takes communion with each other to develop what that is.

LP:

Calling - We have to be brave enough to share them, humble enough to receive input on them, and willing to have people hold us accountable for not following them.

One of the hardest things I have had to deal with as a pastor is to have people tell me what they think their calling is, while they not being an apostle, and as far as I know those were the only people that got their calling directly from God and have them not listen to input from the church. There is a lack of humility among the younger generation to wait and be still, practice Christian living, all to determine if they are equipped for ministry. Sometimes God equips people to be lay leaders be good teachers because He is preparing them for long years of local ministry, that is no way less fulfilling as being an elder in a body. The point is, it takes time to develop your own mission and you need the body, not isolation, to help you do that. Do you have the humility to do that?

Perhaps what is most important for us all to practice is the **telling of our story with boldness**. Let others here how you thought all was going well then there was a **COLLAPSE** in your life, that left you lost and looking for a solution. Let others know that you were **CONVERTED**, and it was by Grace alone you were saved, that the Lord showed you your sin, the Lord worked against your will to stop you from destroying yourself, that the lord was the one that healed you, and that you have turned and followed Him. Let others know you have a new purpose in life, that you were **COMMISSIONED** and that you are still trying to discover how you may bring Him glory. If we stick to that plan HCC, we will save some, we will make the wise seem foolish, and we will do our part in our community bringing others to Christ.

[PRAYER]

[CALL TO OBEY]

Elder – Read



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Remember the words of Paul from Acts chapter 21 when the Christians in Tyre were begging him not to go to Jerusalem? “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” And so the Christians said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” Brothers and sisters, we are called to the same kind of obedience each and every day. Let the will of the Lord be done, obey as you are called, and glorify God in whatever comes next.

[COMMUNION]

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

* The Congregation will stand
Elder – “Christians, what do you believe?”

LBCF 1689 Chapter 8 Section 4
Jesus as our Mediator and His Atoning Work

Congregation - Read

Jesus willingly accepted this office.
In order to fulfill it, he was born under the law.
He perfectly fulfilled the law and suffered the punishment we deserved, which we should have endured and suffered.
He was made sin and a curse for us.
He endured extremely serious sorrows in his soul and extremely painful sufferings in his body.
He was crucified and died, and remained in a state of death, but his body did not decay.
On the third day, he rose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered.
In this body, he also ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of his Father and intercedes.
He will return to judge humanity and angels at the end of the age.

[OFFERING+LAST SONG] –



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[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that directs all of life to bring us to our moments of faith and repentance because He will never lose one of His children.

Go in the name of the Son, that calls us out darkness into light by the light of His glorious grace, identifying with us by being lifted up as the Son of Man.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that has opened our eyes to the Truth of our depravity and has caused us to put faith in His name, now go and share your story with others.