

Can We Talk

Telling Your Story with Power and Purpose

Acts 21:37–22:29

Focus: In the face of public hostility, Paul shares his personal testimony with clarity and conviction. This study emphasizes the power of telling your story—how God uses our past, our transformation, and our boldness to reach hearts in unexpected places.

I. Why This Study?

A. Objective:

1. To explore how Paul uses his personal story to connect with a hostile audience.
2. To understand the theological and evangelistic power of testimony.
3. To learn how to share our own stories in ways that reveal God’s grace, truth, and calling.

B. Relevance:

1. In a world saturated with arguments, personal stories still speak deeply to human hearts.
2. Many believers underestimate how God can use their past—even the painful parts—for witness.
3. This passage shows how testimony can build bridges, confront assumptions, and proclaim the gospel in culturally complex settings.

II. Context of Acts 21:37–22:29

A. The Background of Paul’s Testimony to the Crowd:

1. After being falsely accused and violently attacked, Paul is _____ by Roman soldiers near the temple (21:33–36).
2. As he is being taken into the barracks, he asks the Roman commander for _____ to speak to the crowd (21:37–40).
3. Paul delivers his speech in _____, immediately gaining the attention of the Jewish audience (22:1–2).
4. He recounts his background as a Jew trained under Gamaliel, zealous for the law, and a _____ of Christians (22:3–5).
5. He describes his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and his _____ to _____ (22:6–16).
6. Paul shares how, after returning to Jerusalem, he was warned by God in a vision to leave because his _____ would be rejected (22:17–21).

7. When he mentions his mission to the _____, the crowd erupts again in rage (22:22).
8. The Romans prepare to flog him, but Paul reveals his Roman _____, halting the beating and shocking the commander (22:25–29).

B. Historical Insight:

1. Paul’s ability to speak Greek and Aramaic helped him navigate _____ audiences.
2. His connection to Gamaliel gave him _____ credibility among Jews.
3. Roman citizenship was a high-status legal protection—few Jews had it, and it _____ Paul from unlawful punishment.
4. This episode reveals the tension between _____ nationalism, _____ law, and emerging _____.

C. Key Takeaway:

1. Your personal _____ is a powerful tool for witness—especially when shared with _____, _____, and _____ about who changed you.

III. What Happens When You Tell Your Story with Power and Purpose?

A. Personal Stories Can Disarm Hostility (Acts 21:37–22:2)

1. Key Verses:

“When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.” (22:2)
2. Key Lessons:
 - a) *Paul requests permission to speak with respect and _____ timing.*
 - b) *His use of their heart language (Aramaic) shows cultural _____ and earns a hearing.*
 - c) *Sometimes the way we begin the conversation—tone, posture, language—opens the door to be heard.*
 - d) *Rev. Dr. Eric D. Barreto writes: “Contextual fluency—knowing how to speak gospel truth in ways that resonate—is not manipulation, it is incarnation.” (Ethnic Negotiations)*

B. Your Past Doesn’t Disqualify You—It Prepares You (vv. 3–5)

1. Key Verses:

“I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death... as the high priest and all the Council can testify.” (v. 4–5)

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Paul does not hide his past—he _____ it as part of his story.*
- b) *Transparency about who we were _____ what God has done.*
- c) *Dr. Soong-Chan Rah writes: “God’s grace is not only redemptive; it is narrative—rewriting our past in light of God’s future.” (Prophetic Lament)*

C. Transformation Is the Turning Point of the Testimony (vv. 6–16)

1. Key Verses:

“‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.” (v. 8)

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *The Damascus Road encounter is central—Paul shifts from _____ to _____.*
- b) *Testimony centers on _____ encounter, not _____.*
- c) *Dr. Brian Blount explains: “Conversion in Acts is not just individual—it is vocational. God interrupts to reassign your purpose.” (Can I Get a Witness?)*

D. Testimony May Be Met with Resistance (vv. 17–22)

1. Key Verses:

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” (v. 21)

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *The crowd listens until Paul mentions his _____ mission—then they erupt.*
- b) *Testimony can challenge _____, _____, or _____ assumptions.*
- c) *Dr. Mitzi J. Smith writes: “Liberating testimony disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed.” (I Found God in Me)*

E. God Can Use Your Identity for Protection and Purpose (vv. 23–29)

1. Key Verses:

“But I was born a citizen.” (v. 28)

2. Key Lessons:

a) *Paul’s Roman citizenship is not just a privilege—it’s a _____ for the mission.*

b) *Believers can leverage their identity—race, nationality, class, education—for gospel _____ and _____.*

c) *Rev. Dr. Willie Jennings writes: “Christian witness must learn to navigate systems with wisdom—resisting when needed, and using structure when helpful.” (The Christian Imagination)*

IV. Scholars’ and Theological Insights on the Power of Testimony

A. St. John Chrysostom: “Nothing is so powerful as a soul who speaks of what it has seen.”

B. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah: “Lament and testimony go hand in hand—truth-telling about suffering and transformation creates space for liberation.”

C. Dr. Brian Blount: “In Acts, testimony is never merely recollection—it is proclamation, confrontation, and invitation.”

D. Rev. Dr. Eric Barreto: “Every believer’s story is a parable of grace—contextual, embodied, and necessary.”

E. Dr. Mitzi J. Smith: “Your story is a site of divine revelation, where others meet God in the truth of your becoming.”

V. Prayer Focus

1. Pray for the courage to share your story—without shame and with clarity.
2. Ask God to show you who needs to hear how your life was changed.
3. Pray for discernment about when, how, and with whom to share your testimony.
4. Intercede for those who are currently in a “before” season—waiting for their Damascus Road.

VI. Key Takeaway

Your story is sacred. When offered with humility and boldness, it becomes a testimony of God's grace and a tool for transformation in the lives of others.

VII. Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. What parts of your personal story do you most hesitate to share? Why?
2. How does Paul's testimony encourage you to reframe your past as part of God's redemptive plan?
3. In what settings or relationships might your story be especially impactful?
4. What can we learn from Paul's tone, language, and structure in sharing his testimony?
5. How can the church better equip believers to tell their stories with theological depth and cultural relevance?