

**Text: Ac 26.9-18**

We are in the capitol of the Roman province of Judaea, Caesarea Maritima. Porcius Festus, the governor, has assembled the elites of Caesarea to join with the visiting Herod Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice.

As we listen in, we hear the man, Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul, rehearsing his *apologia*, his defense, before this assembly.

As Paul speaks, we find him discussing significant issues that can make the difference for eternity if those who hear will receive his teaching.

Last week we talked about *The Transforming Issue*, the resurrection. Paul is astonished that his hearers will scoff at the idea of resurrection from the dead. He points out that if God is a god at all, then resurrection is what we should expect for those who follow him.

When Paul, raised in Judaism, followed faithfully all his teachers taught him. He believed in resurrection (he was a Pharisee) but he had trouble with a particular resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus.

The next part of Paul's testimony will explain why his viewpoint turned around 180°. That's where we are today.

Read Acts 26.9-18

In this testimony, Paul points to Jesus. We could say Jesus is the central character of Paul's story.

More than that, Jesus is the central person of all history.

As we get into Paul's testimony, I'd like you to think about this: What would life be like without Jesus? — I don't mean, "what if you weren't a Christian," rather I mean: what if there never was anyone called Jesus in all the long history of the world?

**Proposition:** Without Jesus, there is no Christianity. Without Jesus, you have no access to God.

**I. Jesus central to Paul's testimony**

A. Before conversion, Jesus was Paul's obsession (9-11)

1. Paul's "necessity" (9)

a. His previous world view: "I thought to myself"

- b. Compulsion, necessity: “I must” [thought himself in the will of God]
- c. Do hostile things (“contrary, in opposition”<sup>1</sup>)
- d. Against the name of Jesus

He was where his hearers are: as a Pharisee he believed in resurrection after dead, but refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

## 2. The scope of Paul’s activity in Jerusalem (10)

- a. Deputized by the chief priests
- b. Locked many believers in prison
- c. Offered his approval (cast his vote?) for the death penalty
  - 1) Casting the vote: word refers to “voting pebble” – famously white stones and black stones, cast into an urn
  - 2) A little uncertainty here, some think he was too young for the Sanhedrin at this time (could belong to a synagogue Sanhedrin, a lower level court)
  - 3) Also, death penalty reserved to Rome during this period, if the Jews were imposing this without Roman sanction they broke Roman law
  - 4) Minimum meaning: in full agreement when death penalty imposed (as seen in Stephen’s execution)

Ac 8.1 ¶ Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

<sup>1</sup> ἐναντίος in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

#### d. Saul “ravaged” the church

Ac 8.3 But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

“he went from house to house and dragged the followers of Jesus off to jail; he went from synagogue to synagogue and enforced judicial proceedings against them, and when they were put on trial, he cast his vote for their condemnation and demanded the death-sentence against them”<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Saul continued his pursuit beyond Jerusalem (11)

- a. Punished believers in the synagogues
- b. Tried to get them to blaspheme (commentators emphasize “tried”)
- c. Pursued them to foreign cities (officials in other cities would accept Sanhedrin authorization)

Behind all this was Saul’s rage: “being furiously enraged at them”

The word “describes an anger so violent it appears as insanity (BDAG 322b).”<sup>3</sup>

### B. At conversion, Jesus became all Paul could see (12-15)

1. Stopped on the way to Damascus by a light brighter than the sun (12-13)
  - a. The time was mid-day, the brightest time of the day
  - b. The light surrounded Saul and his companions
  - c. They all fell to the ground in fear (new detail)

---

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 464.

<sup>3</sup> Kellum, *Acts*, 289.

2. And a voice, speaking in Aramaic: “Saul, Saul...” (14)
  - a. The voice accused Saul of “persecuting me”
  - b. The voice challenged Saul’s conscience with a familiar proverb: “hard to kick against the goads”
    - 1) The proverb was well-known in the Greek world (at least as old as Euripides)
    - 2) The word “goad”
      - a) Originally referred to a bee’s stinger
      - b) Metaphorically transferred to the sharp stick or metal bar a farmer would use to prod his animal
      - c) The horse might kick against the goad, only making his case worse
    - 3) The audience would know the proverb, in Gk culture it gained a proverbial sense of “fighting against the gods”<sup>4</sup>
3. The moment of conversion (15)
  - a. Who are you?
  - b. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting

No doubt Paul was well familiar with what the apostles preached about Jesus.

Possibly Paul was of the same synagogue as Stephen and had engaged Stephen in furious debate over this very Jesus

Nothing could convert Saul, except Jesus

### C. After conversion, Jesus became Paul’s mission (16-18)

1. The following record comes from three sources in Acts
  - a. Found in the records of what Jesus said directly to him (Ac 9.5-6, 22.8, 10)
  - b. Found in what Ananias said to him (Ac 22.14-15)

<sup>4</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background: NT*, Ac 26.14.

- c. Found in what Jesus said to Paul in Jerusalem later (see Ac 22.18-21)

The focus here is not on Paul's experience but on the message.

2. The Lord told him to stand up ("stand up and stand"): he confronted Saul with a mission (16)

- a. To witness to what he had seen
- b. To witness to what he would see

3. The Lord promised to rescue him from Jews and Gentiles (17)

- a. He might be opposed, but he would preach
- b. The Lord would see to it that he finished his course, preaching until his mission was done

A source of his boldness?

4. The Lord commissioned him with a purpose (18)

- a. To open their eyes (turn from darkness to light)
- b. To offer them forgiveness of sins
- c. And to offer an inheritance among those set apart to Jesus

The thing I want you to see as we go through this testimony is how central Jesus is to everything Paul said:

- He started out hating Jesus
- He found himself face to face with Jesus
- He received a life mission from Jesus

Jesus became the centerpiece of Paul's life.

## II. Jesus the Christ the key to Paul's testimony

- A. Notice the contrast between the Paul of yesterday and the Paul of today
  1. Yesterday, "hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (9)
  2. Today, "the Christ was to suffer" (23)

On the one hand, Jesus the man, on the other, the Messiah (χριστός)

## B. The Damascus road experience turned Paul's mind around: Jesus was the culmination and end of all Jewish thought (22-23)

Ac 26.22-23 "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; <sup>23</sup> that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

1. Paul was faithful to the message received
2. Jewish opposition focused on his message

## III. Jesus the only Deliverer according to God's Word

### A. The Lord's mission offered mankind the only deliverance from sin available (17-18)

1. Jesus sent Paul to all men, but especially to Gentiles
  - a. To bring them from darkness to light
  - b. To bring them from the dominion of Satan to God
2. Only Jesus can rescue anyone from their lost condition

### B. The Scriptures agree

Jn 10.7 ¶ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

Jn 10.9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jn 11.25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,

Ep 2.18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Jn 6.35 ¶ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Jn 14.6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** Without Jesus, there is no Christianity. Without Jesus, you have no access to God.