



OPENING PRAYER

Father, as we gather around Your Word today, we ask that You grant us open hearts and holy courage. Teach us to hold our stories with humility and to speak them with boldness, trusting that Your grace is always the hero of our testimony. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING QUESTION_(OPTIONAL)

If you had 60 seconds to summarize the story of your life using only three key moments, which three moments would you pick and why?



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1 “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,[a] 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[b] 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[c] 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 witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ 21 And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” 22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.” 23 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips,[d] Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?” 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.” 27 So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.” 28 The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I am a citizen by birth.” 29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

MAIN REFLECTION POINTS

In Acts 22, Paul finds himself in a high-stakes, life-threatening situation. Arrested in Jerusalem after a riot breaks out in the temple, he gains permission from the Roman commander to address the furious mob. Instead of delivering a theological treatise, arguing legal precedent, or pleading for his life, Paul chooses a different path: he tells his personal story.

Paul’s defense is structured into three clear movements:

- 1. Who he was (v. 1–5):** He establishes common ground with his hearers. He highlights his Jewish heritage, his strict training under Gamaliel, and his former zeal—a zeal that once led him to persecute believers to the death.
- 2. How Jesus met him (v. 6–16):** He describes his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Blinded by light, Paul moved from enemy to surrender, receiving his healing and baptism through the ministry of Ananias.
- 3. What Jesus called him to do (v. 17–21):** He recounts his vision in the temple, where Jesus explicitly commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

The crowd listens patiently until Paul utters the word “Gentiles”. That single word breaks their cultural exclusivity and triggers another uproar. As the Roman commander prepares to examine Paul under the whip, Paul calmly reveals his Roman citizenship. This legal status stops the flogging instantly, demonstrating how God leverages Paul’s identity and background to protect him for further mission.

- **Common ground opens closed doors.** Paul began by emphasizing shared identity and respect. Effective witness begins with empathy and connection, not condemnation.
- **Your past is not wasted.** Paul didn't hide his history as a persecutor; he allowed it to magnify the radical depth of God's mercy.
- **Testimony centers on Jesus, not self.** Paul's story is fundamentally about who Jesus is, what Jesus said, and what Jesus commanded him to do.
- **Obedience involves clear boundaries and risk.** The mob accepted Paul's story until his calling challenged their cultural biases. Faithful testimony often exposes where culture resists grace.
- **God uses every part of your background.** Paul's Roman citizenship was a practical tool God used to protect him and advance the gospel to the highest levels of Roman authority.

Gospel Invitation:

Paul's story reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. He went from being an active enemy of God to a devoted ambassador of Christ. If you feel like your past is too messy, your mistakes too heavy, or your life too far gone, Jesus offers complete forgiveness and a brand-new identity today. You can call on His name right now.

Missional Activation:

Write your 3-minute story: Take 15 minutes this week to write down your testimony using Paul's framework: My life before Christ, How I encountered Christ, and How Christ is changing my life now.

Share it with one person: Pray for an opportunity this week to share your story or a piece of God's grace with someone in your workplace, family, or neighborhood.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In verses 1–3, Paul begins by establishing common ground with a crowd that wants to kill him. Why is starting with shared experience and respect so essential when sharing faith with people who disagree with us?
2. Paul speaks openly about his past mistakes and zeal in persecuting the church. Why are we often tempted to hide our past failures, and how can sharing them actually magnify God's grace to others?
3. Ananias told Paul, "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (v. 16). What role have key mentors or believers played in helping you process and act on your own conversion or calling?
4. The crowd erupted only when Paul mentioned being sent to the Gentiles (v. 21–22). What are the cultural or social boundaries in our context that make people uncomfortable when the gospel crosses them?
5. Paul utilized his Roman citizenship to navigate a broken legal system and preserve his life for mission (vv. 25–29). What unique background, skills, or statuses has God given you that can be used strategically for His kingdom?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, thank You for saving us and giving us a story to tell. Give us the courage of Paul to speak of Your goodness without fear or shame. Use our pasts, our gifts, and our everyday lives to make Your salvation known to those around us. May our lives always point back to Jesus, the Lord who calls us out of darkness and into His light. In Jesus' name, Amen.