**ACTS & US***“Become what I am”*

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**Previously on Acts and Us…**

Paul has been in custody for about 2 years in Caesarea. He was brought there by the Romans to protect him from the mob in Jerusalem that wanted to kill him, and to await trial for whatever he was being accused of.

In first century Judea there were three strata of ruling hierarchy;

1. Rome – the most pervasive and empirical dictatorship ever known in that part of the world. They were brutal and unmerciful, yet prided themselves as being civilized. The put in place Governors or procurators to govern over certain regions. For instance in Judea there was, Pilate, Felix, and now Festus.
2. The Herods – This was a dynastic line of “Jewish kings” who were placed in charge of the Jewish people, by Rome to keep order and keep the tax extortion continuing in Jewish lands. These kings were also brutal, and paranoid, yet they prided themselves on being Jewish. Herod the Great was the first, followed by; Antipas, Archelaus, Agrippa 1 (acts 12 – James), and this one Agrippa 2. They are known to put people to death if they suspect that they are a threat to their throne (Bethlehem) or the peace of the region (James – Acts 12).
3. The Chief Priests and Elders – These are the ones responsible for having authority regarding the word of God (Torah and Nevi’im) and overseeing Judaism and the temple. They were extortionists as well and would regularly accuse people of heresy or blasphemy for disagreeing with them, crimes punishable by death.

*In Acts 24 when the Romans took Paul into custody, they first heard from the Chief Priest about what crime he had committed. In this chapter they will hear from Herod Agrippa 2.*

**Acts 24:1** *“Ananias* (the Chief Priest) went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.”

**Paul was not fearful of his life. He knew that the Lord was allowing all this to take place. The Lord appeared to him at night and told him he will go to Rome and testify. He being a Roman citizen was allowed to appeal to Caesar and demand to be extradited to Rome.**

Before Paul could leave for Rome, King Herod Agrippa II came to visit the new governor, Festus. The new governor wasn’t as knowledgeable about the Jewish religion as the previous governor Felix, whose wife was Jewish, had been. But, in his attempt to repair Rome’s relationship with the Jews, Porcius Festus still wants to understand why the Jews are trying to kill Paul. He also knows it’s absurd to send a man to trial in Rome with no official charges, so he asks Agrippa for advice.

**Acts 26:1 “**Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.”

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: **2**“King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, **3**and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Paul was happy to explain his position to Agrippa, who was at least someone who was Jewish, and not a Chief Priest or a Roman.

**4**“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. **5**They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. **6**And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. **7**This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. **8**Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

He is basically saying that he had spent his entire life studying and teaching his people about the Messiah. What he would be, what it would look like when he appeared and how He would be raised from the dead.

**9**“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10**And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. **11**Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

He was letting Agrippa know that he too, once did not believe and in fact persecuted those who did.

Then he gives his testimony.  It’s about the same experience that is mentioned in Acts 9:1-19, and that he spoke about to the angry crowds when he was in Jerusalem. 22:6-21**.** This is the third time this is written about in Acts and he talks about the amazing event where he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and his life was changed forever.

**12**“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. **13**About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. **14**We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

**15**“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. **16**‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. **17**I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them **18**to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

This is the most exciting thing that ever happened to Paul. He speaks about it repeatedly. It’s the reason he believes. It’s the reason he gave up his illustrious life as a Pharisee and poured himself out as a servant, apostle and preacher of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

**19**“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. **20**First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. **21**That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. **22**But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— **23**that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

He very articulately explains that he knows the scriptures better than almost anyone in Jerusalem. Everything he teaches and believes is completely in line with the Hebrew scriptures. He is very aware of what is written concerning the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, but is now being persecuted and marked for death for believing in the Messiah now that he has finally appeared.

**24**At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

**25**“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. **26**The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. **27**King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

**28**Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

**29**Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may *become what I am*, except for these chains.”

**30**The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. **31**After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”

**32**Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

In other words, they were convinced that he was innocent, but because he appealed to Caesar, they were now obligated to send him to Rome instead of releasing him on the spot (which was in fulfilment of the Lord’s command for him to testify in Rome).

Paul was bold and courageous and spoke confidently about what he was most passionate about, faith in Jesus the Messiah. He was face-to-face with the two most powerful and influential people in Judea, even more powerful than the Chief Priests, yet he did not back down from his message…and he almost convinced King Agrippa to become a Christian.

**Acts *26:28***Then Agrippa said to Paul, “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.*”

*Note: Christian is the Greek for of the word Messianic, meaning “of the Messiah”. It doesn’t really mean “little Christ” or “little Messiah” as some tend to believe. The idea was popularized by CS Lewis in the 1950's in his book Mere Christianity where he said that Christians should be little Christs.*

*He never said that that is what the word meant.*

*It’s along the same lines as Philippian (of Philippi), or Corinthian (of Corinth). It basically means “of the Messiah”.*

**Acts 26:29**Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may *become what I am*, except for these chains.”

Paul desperately wanted all who were listening to him, “*become what I am”* to experience the same thing he experienced. That was his desire. To know Jesus and make him known. He was not interested in self-preservation, vindication, retaliation, or revenge. He wanted all those around to become what he is; a follower of Jesus the Messiah, and he was willing to risk everything and do whatever he could to make that happened.

 He did it through telling his testimony, just like he did in Acts 22. It was his favorite thing to talk about, and in his mind the most compelling way to convey the truth about Jesus the Messiah.

ACTS and US

Do you know *your* testimony?

*How were you saved? What happened to make you follow Jesus?*

Have you told it, written it down, or committed it to memory?

Your testimony may be the most effective and important message you can offer.

Your testimony is not predicated on your ability to memorize scripture, your theological training, or a comprehensive understanding of the law and doctrine.

It’s based on your experience with Jesus, and what you believe to be true.

It’s the story of what Jesus has done in your life. You are the authority on that subject, No one is an expert on your experience but you, no one can take that away from you.

Whether it’s sounds impressive and extraordinary, OR may feel seemingly mundane.

It’s YOUR testimony! - ***Speak it. Post it. Tell it. Preach it***

It’s more powerful than you may even realize.

Paul was standing before two of the most powerful and intimidating men in the entire region.

He could have told them anything to save himself.

He could have dazzled them with Pharisaical knowledge.

He could have used his persuasive speech to rile them against his enemies, or convince them of the injustice being done.

Instead he used this unique opportunity to stand before these powerful leaders, and give them his testimony in hopes that they would turn to Jesus. He was more interested in saving them, than saving himself.

**Proverb 18:16** “A man’s gift makes room for him, And brings him before great men.”

What does this mean?

The gift the Lord has given you will often give you the opportunity to speak to the powerful and influential leaders of the world.

Think of Joseph before Pharoah, Esther before Xerxes, and Daniel before the Kings of Babylon. They and many others were able to influence the influencers of the world by being willing to boldly speak the truth, regardless of whom they stood before.

But it’s difficult isn’t it? Sometimes when we meet famous, powerful or influential people, we become more self-conscious, nervous and timid than we normally are. It’s tough enough to speak about the things that would normally be expected, but to share the gospel, or tell them how you got saved, takes real boldness.

Have you ever tried sharing the gospel with your boss?

To some, that may be your normal routine, but to many people that seems like an impassible task.

Me at Capitol Records in Nashville.

Tried to share the gospel with my co-workers from time to time.

Found it very difficult to speak about the Lord with my boss, or the V.P. and President of the label, because in that kind of competitive corporate setting it’s not appropriate to relax and be yourselves around the top executives. You must try to stay very professional in everything you say and do.

One Friday afternoon, I had finished my work for the week, the company wasn’t very busy, so I decided to just relax in my office for the rest of the day with my feet up on the desk playing my guitar until it was time to go home.

Suddenly, in walks the Vice President of the label, and with him the Chairman of our parent company EMI from England, my boss’s, boss’s, boss’s boss.

His name was Sir Colin Southgate (yes he was an actual knighted “sir” in Great Britain.

I jumped up, put my guitar away and tried to explain myself, because thought I was going to get fired on the spot, but instead he reacted very unexpectedly and said, “as you were!”, “keep playing!...that’s just what this company needs, people who really love music!”I wish I could tell you that I gave him my testimony and he turned to Jesus right them and there, but I didn’t.

Years later however, I had moved to NJ, but was visiting and staying with a friend in Nashville and I ran into the President of the label at the local Starbucks. I made sure this time to talk to him, and tell him my testimony of what God has done in my life.

I’m not sure how much impact it had on him, but I was glad I got a chance to talk about Jesus to him.

Recently I had the opportunity to speak to a group of local pastors here in Monmouth County, they wanted to hear my Testimony. For them it was the most significant thing I could share, (One of the Pastors missed it and asked me to share it at a diner this past week). You may think your story is boring and ordinary, but to some it’s just what they need to be convinced of God’s power and love.

James 2 tells us to show no partiality toward the rich or the poor. We should not be bold with one and timid with the other. I believe each of us will be given opportunities to speak to many people of all levels of influence both great and small, about what God has done in our lives. We don’t have to go looking for the opportunities, God will provide them, it’s our job to just be obedient, available and bold.

Paul, by simply giving his testimony to the powerful King Agrippa got the response “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”*

Think about the people in our lives who *would* “*become what we are”* [Christians] if you and I are willing to share our testimony about the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

Pray for an opportunity to do that.