

Sermon Transcript for Sunday, October 17, at Christ Community Church

Greetings to you all, Christ Community Church family! I am very honored that Pastor Jeff Kennedy asked me to preach God's Word to you this morning while he is away. My name is Todd Wood. I am involved in a small church ministry downtown where I co-pastor with Pastor Warren Cuppy among the Providence Downtown Church family. I am also a ministering pastor for the Idaho Falls Rescue Mission where the main offices are right next door to our church storefront on Park Avenue. We are so grateful for you who pray and support the gospel work in the heart of our city for the homeless. On Monday night, November 29, 7:00 pm, at the Civic Center Auditorium, the Bar J Wrangler musical group will be on their final farewell tour. Tickets are \$30 per person. This event is a fundraiser for the Idaho Falls Rescue Mission. The Bar J Wrangler team are a delightful cowboy group out of Jackson Hole, who love God and are full of humor.

Let me begin by telling you a brief football story. On Saturday night, October 9, 2021, there were 106,813 fans packed in the Kyle Stadium, the second largest crowd in its entire history, on the campus of Texas A&M. The Aggies were in a fierce, back-and-forth tussle with No. 1 seeded Alabama. With two seconds left in the game, the score being 38 to 38, Texas A&M had possession of the ball at the 28-yard line. Seth Small kicked a field goal to win the game for the Aggies over the Crimson Tide! The stadium, home of the 12th man, erupted in a deafening roar. You would not have been able to even hear yourself speak.

Sports outlets ran this news title, "The wife of Texas A&M kicker Seth Small won the college football weekend with this epic celebration." In the eruption of mass human celebration, videographer Cam Worthy zeroed on Seth's wife, Rachel. Rather than that football curving far out to the left, it veers right between the goal posts. Rachel leaps over the wall and out into the field toward her husband.

How do you capture this night in the life of #47, Texas A&M Kicker, Seth Small?

The media noted, "Following the game, Small said he'd rate the kick the third-best moment in his life, right behind accepting Jesus and marrying his wife." The college football world on a national level just witnessed the power of a Christian testimony. This morning, we are going to take note of Paul sharing his testimony before a narrow-minded, angry Jewish crowd.

Main Idea of Acts 22: Paul is going to teach us about the heart of Jesus and the power of sharing our testimony.

1. Paul shares the backdrop of his life (Acts 22:1-5).

"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: "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. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and

women, 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” (ESV).

From last week’s message with Pastor Jeff, we know that the commander of the regiment and Roman soldiers rescued Paul from a brutal beating by a murderous mob.

v. 1 –“Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.” The Greek word for “defense” is *apologias*. We use the word today, apologetics, when we are giving a defense of the Christian faith. Yet as Paul gives a defense, he is not trying to enter into a smack down with his opponents. His goal is not to wallop them in a theological debate. He is simply and graciously sharing his testimony. He is far removed from the Egyptian political revolutionary suggested by Claudius Lysias in Acts 21:38. He addresses the angry crowd as “brothers and fathers” and in their Aramaic dialect.

His background is as follows:

- A Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia
- Educated at the feet of Gamaliel
- Follows in an exact way of the ancestral law of the fathers
- Zealous for God in that he persecuted men and women

His religious zeal was so fervent, he acted on an epistle from the presbytery in Jerusalem to haul believers in bondage from Damascus on a 140-mile journey to Jerusalem. A comparable distance would be taking prisoners from Idaho Falls down south to Tremonton, Utah.

2. Paul relates how Jesus confronts him (Acts 22:6-16).

“As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 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.’ 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. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there. 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. 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; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name’” (ESV).

So, let's say this zealous religious leader, Saul of Tarsus, was making his way from Tremonton, Utah, up here to Idaho Falls to arrest and haul away Christians for judgment. He makes it close to IF. Somewhere in Shelley, Idaho, he is struck by a blinding light, a thousand times worse than any exploding cameras of crowding paparazzi. What in the world? On the ground, engulfed in the brilliant glory (doxa) of heaven, the words ring in his ears, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He cries out, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord identifies himself, "I am Jesus of Nazareth."

Look at what that zealous, religious man says next. It is an earthquake, a complete paradigm shift in his thinking.

v. 10 – "What shall I do, Lord?" – this is question, full of humility, repentance, knowing wrong, submission, and surrender to the Master.

Rather than going to Damascus to bind people's hands, Saul as a blind man is now being led by the hand into the city. And there he meets Ananias whom God uses to bring healing for his blindness and instruction for what he is to do.

v. 15 – "for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard." Being a witness for Christ is a responsibility for every believer in the city of Idaho Falls, not just for Pastor Jeff, Pastor Patrick, Pastor Ryan, and Pastor Daniel.

v. 16 – "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name"

Christian salvation comes by faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone. Some of most beautiful words are written by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Lately, I watched livestreams of the grandson of Billy Graham—William Franklin Graham IV—as he conducted gospel invitations first in Rapid City, South Dakota, and then immediately afterward on the next weekend in Des Moines, Iowa. He would urge people to rise out of their seats, walk down from balcony seats, come to the front of the arena by the stage, and call upon the name of the Lord. But it is very interesting that when men, women, and young people would come forward and gather at the front, he would look at all of them with a big smile, sometimes with tears trickling down his cheeks, and say, "Welcome home!" Salvation comes by looking in faith to Christ wherever you might be at the moment, in an auditorium seat, the back seat of a car, on a couch in your living room, or lying in a bed at night. Acting on that inward faith can be fleshed out in many ways like coming forward before others, confessing out loud your sin, and calling on the name of the Lord. Driving to a church service, walking an aisle, saying a prayer, giving money for an offering, or being water baptized are not what makes you a new creature in Christ. It is your faith and trust in Him to be your Savior. All those outward activities would be expressions of your inward faith.

It is interesting that Paul wrote over in I Corinthians 1:14-17: *"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, let the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."*

The apostle Paul was not involved with many water baptisms, and I tend to think that Evangelist Will Graham is not involved with many water baptisms either. But that outward water baptism commanded by Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel is a beautiful and powerful picture of the inward washing away of your sins. A local preacher in our town like Ananias will tell people with new faith in Christ, "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." If you are a Christian by your dependence on the work of Jesus alone for the forgiveness of your sins, there is the begging of this question to be asked, "Have you been water baptized as an outward declaration of your desire to be identified as a disciple of Jesus Christ?" If there is that desire in your heart, I would encourage you to talk to one of the elders or pastors in this church family.

3. Paul summarized his testimony with the calling of God upon his life (Acts 22:17-21).

"When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 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.' And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (ESV).

Notice the clear calling given to Paul.

v. 21 – "And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Applications – (1) A black Christian man in the south marrying a white woman. What does his family say? And then they both decide to move to Idaho to minister for Christ. (2) A native American Indian becoming a Christian within his tribe and then going to another tribe to preach the gospel. (3) A Jew in 2021 Israel converting to Christ and desiring to reach Palestinian Muslims.

Where do the Old Testament scriptures say that God's message is to go forth from the Jews to the Gentiles? Should this be a surprise or shock in the continuity of God's will made clear to the prophets of old?

God takes care of Paul when all evil breaks loose (Acts 22:22-29).

"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.' And as they were shouting and

throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 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. But when they had stretched him out for the whips, 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?' 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. So the tribune came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' And he said, 'Yes.' The tribune answered, 'I bought this citizenship for a large sum.' Paul said, 'But I am a citizen by birth.' 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" (ESV).

v. 23 – shouting . . . throwing . . . flinging . . .

Wow! They all went berserk when Paul said that his calling was to go to the Gentiles.

"The gospel Paul proclaims sometimes incites riots: it challenges the livelihood of some (Acts 19), it stirs up fears of antinomianism in others (Acts 21), and here the Jews of Jerusalem are offended that God is concerned with the Gentiles. As soon as Paul mentions God commissioning him to go to the Gentiles, they are infuriated and want to execute and want to execute him.

"This is the scandal of the gospel. The Jews treasured their status as God's people, and found it difficult to accept that God was 'grafting in' those from outside their race (see Rom. 11:17-24). God's grace extends to those we assume are beyond his reach, even to those we despise." – Justin S. Holcomb, Reformed Theological Seminary

v. 25 – Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?

v. 28 – The tribune: "I bought this citizenship for a large sum"; Paul: "but I am citizen by birth"

"It is a heinous sin to bind a Roman citizen; it is wickedness to beat him; it is next to parricide to kill him, and what shall I say to crucify him?" (An express declaration in Cicero against Verres).

Conclusion: Under the merciful and sovereign care of God, Paul is released from being whipped. And it is next day, where the Roman leadership brings him to the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30).

Application:

How can we share our Christian testimony this week?

"Lord, remind us to tell others how we were saved." – Dr. Stewart Custer in prayer

When someone asks you this week, "How are you?" What might you say?

- 1. What has Jesus done in the past for you? (Saved you from the penalty of sin)**
- 2. What is Jesus doing presently for you? (Saving you the power of sin)**

3. What will Jesus do for you in the future? (Save you from the entire presence of sin)

In lovingly sharing our testimony, are we able to trust the Holy Spirit for the outcome?

Lord Jesus, use us this week to be witnesses for you all over this city.

God bless you, Christ Community Church family.