

# The Three “C’s” of the Gospel

Acts 22

## PRAYER

We’ve been looking at how setting a Christlike example to imitate can persuade other *believers* to follow Christ, even in the most difficult circumstances. We saw how Paul’s imitation of Christ set an example for the churches, reminding them of the cost of obediently following Christ. Obedience reveals that we are children of the Living God. We are holy and righteous because our heavenly Father is holy and righteous. But we also live in liberty, under Grace and not under the Law. Our obedience is willingly and freely offered up as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. That’s how Paul described it in his letter to the church at Rome (12:1-2).

**But why would we do that?** What motivates us to sacrifice ourselves and to be radically different than the world around us? What drives us to follow in Christ’s footsteps, as Paul followed him? *The answer is simple enough. It is the Gospel.* Today we’re looking at Paul’s testimony of his eternal “addiction” to the Gospel. He will describe how his own life was completely transformed by the Grace of God in Jesus Christ. **Paul’s life in Christ was cross-centered, cross-driven, and cross-celebrated.** Because of the cross, Paul lived a life of joy, not heartache – despite all the physical pain, suffering, and sacrifices he endured for Christ.

Paul was hated by the Jews because he preached salvation by grace through Jesus Christ alone, instead of salvation by obedience to the Sacrificial Law. The idol-makers in Ephesus thought Paul would put them out of business by preaching against idolatry. Well, the priests of Jerusalem were also threatened by the Gospel. If Jesus of Nazareth was the Promised One, the Messiah, and if he was the final atoning sacrifice, then *life as they knew it had come to an end.*

**Please turn to Acts 21.** We’ll begin at verse 35.

Last week, we saw that Paul’s mere presence in Jerusalem was enough to start a riot. He was arrested and brought to the Roman barracks which is housed in the Tower of Antonia. The mob which beat him is gathered in the streets below. As Paul is carried up the steps, he will ensure that ***Christ is the one high and lifted up, and not himself.*** That’s where we pick up the story. **Acts 22:35.**

<sup>35</sup> When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; <sup>36</sup> for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting,

“Away with him!”<sup>37</sup> [That was the cry of the mob in John 19:15 as Jesus appeared to them beaten and scourged, standing on Pontius Pilate’s judgment terrace. Paul’s clay has been shaped into the image of Christ by the Potter’s Hand, and he is now raised up for the world to see. It must have looked familiar to them.] As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he [the commander] said, “Do you know Greek?”<sup>38</sup> “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” [This accusation is ironic – the word for “assassin” here is *sicarii*. The *sicarii* are Jewish Zealots – terrorists trying to oust the Romans by cutting people’s throats in the street. These are the very ones who have been hounding Paul from city to city, trying to kill him.]<sup>39</sup> But Paul said, [probably with a wry smile – no...] “I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city;

[**Tarsus** is the capital of the province of Cilicia. It’s a great center of learning and trade. This Roman soldier has undoubtedly slept in one of the famous black tents made in Tarsus – Paul is a tentmaker, from a city of tentmakers. It’s important to know that Rome declared Tarsus a “free city”, meaning that Rome had given them its permission to govern themselves. The commander should have understood that Paul was saying, “I am a free citizen of Rome. *Hint, hint...*”, but he doesn’t. Paul says instead ...] I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.”<sup>40</sup> When [the soldier] had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

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<sup>NAU</sup> Acts 22:1 “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.”<sup>2</sup> And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,<sup>3</sup> “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [meaning Jerusalem], educated under Gamaliel [a respected Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin], strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.”<sup>4</sup> “I persecuted this “Way” to the death [referring to the *Way of Christ* – Christianity – Paul is letting them know that he understands their repulsion at the very thought that the Law could be replaced by God’s grace, by His unmerited, unwarranted, unsolicited favor freely bestowed on His elect, His chosen ones – without regard to birth or the Law. Paul tells them he had been], binding and putting both men and women into prisons,<sup>5</sup> as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren [referring affectionately to the Jewish

leaders in the synagogue at Damascus], and [I] started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there [i.e. the Christians] to Jerusalem, as **prisoners to be punished**. [That's what the crowd wants to do to PAUL – he's telling them that he understands their rage. He too was enraged by this Gospel message. *However, that was before he encountered the living Christ*]

<sup>6</sup> “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, <sup>7</sup> and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ <sup>8</sup> “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup> “And those who were with me **saw the light**, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. In Matthew we read, “the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Mat 4:16 <sup>NIV</sup>) Paul saw that light; those around him saw it. But Paul also **hears the call** which they do not, and he **responds** to it in submission and obedience:

<sup>10</sup> “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, **and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.**’ God, the Creator and Sustainer of his life, has called him from eternity to do the work of Christ in the world. God has ordained and decreed what Paul will do, and Paul is quick to respond with the most important question he has ever asked. “**WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD?**” What shall I do, MASTER. What are my orders? How may I serve You?” God **BLINDED** him until he could clearly see.

Paul's defense to the mob is that he has been called of God to do what he has been doing. *He has no choice in the matter*. It's not optional. It's his obedience to God that has been driving his words and his actions. Paul is giving the same defense that Peter gave to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29: “**We must obey God rather than men.**”

Like Gamaliel, his teacher, Paul is pleading with the crowd: “This is of God – not Paul. Don't fight against God, for you cannot win.” (Acts 5:38-39) ***Paul is Christ's bond-servant***. He is a man under orders – and as a result, he has become an outcast among his own people, his brothers, *just like Christ*.

<sup>11</sup> “But 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. <sup>12</sup> “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, *and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there* <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing near said to me,

**‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’** And at that very time I looked up at him. [Or “I received my sight” – the Greek verb is *ana-blepo*. Paul wants the crowd to know that Ananias was a good Jew, a devout Jew, one who upheld the Law – like Paul, like the crowd, and yet **he became a Christian**. Paul once was blind, but then he saw the light of truth in Jesus Christ. He took Christ’s hand – *Christ’s* hand – and was led like a child into the kingdom of God. There’s a picture for you!] In Matthew 20, we read,

<sup>30</sup> And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, **“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”** <sup>31</sup> The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” <sup>32</sup> And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

<sup>33</sup> They said to Him, “Lord, *we want* our eyes to be opened.” <sup>34</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they **regained their sight** [*ana-blepo*] and **followed** Him. (Mat 20:30-34 <sup>NAU</sup>) Upon receiving their sight – they **followed** Jesus Christ. Luke used that same verb here in Acts; it means “to look up”, but it also means to receive sight.

And now HERE comes Paul’s Gospel presentation – the very one he heard and responded to those many years ago. It is both a **call** and a **commissioning**. It is the Gospel proclaimed to every Christian for 2000 years in one form or another:

<sup>14</sup> “And [*Ananias*] said [*to Paul*], ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. <sup>15</sup> ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’

That bears repeating, because it reminds us of our *own* commission. If you are hearing this for the first time, and you have never responded to it with Paul’s question, “**What shall I do, Lord?**”, then *please* see me or one of the other elders right after the message; we have some good news for you. ***Listen carefully:***

‘The God of our fathers has **appointed** you (1) to know His will, and (2) to see the Righteous One, and (3) to hear an utterance from His mouth. [To what end? For what purpose?] <sup>15</sup> ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what **you** have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now why do you delay? **Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.**’

Paul continues with his testimony, and the defense of his actions and his teaching.

<sup>17</sup> “It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, <sup>18</sup> and I saw [*Jesus*] saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because **they will not accept your testimony about Me.**’ <sup>19</sup> “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. <sup>20</sup> ‘And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.’ [Paul is saying, “They will LISTEN to me – I am ONE of THEM.” Yet Jesus himself had no honor in his home town. Jesus said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luk 16:31 <sup>NAU</sup>)] Here comes Paul’s bombshell. He’s not saying it in anger, or to condemn, or to tear down his brother Jews. He’s saying it lovingly, sorrowfully. You should hear his voice cracking with the emotion of it. This is not his delight. He takes no pleasure in it. But it IS his burden and his commission. Verse 21:

“And He said to me, **‘Go! For I will send you far away, to the GENTILES.’**”

“They will not accept your testimony about Me; [and so] I will send you... to the Gentiles.” **That’s all it took to set the mob off again.** They had listened patiently to this man’s testimony about his personal experience. But once he included them in the picture, and says they have been rejected in favor of the Gentiles, they were enraged again. *They’re enraged because they hear the words of Hosea coming out of Paul’s mouth, just as they came out of Jesus’ mouth:*

(Hos 1:10 <sup>NAU</sup>) **Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered;** [Hosea is referring to God’s Covenant promise to Abraham] **And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are NOT My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God."** [The Promise is being removed from Israel, which refuses to have God as their King, and it will be given to the Gentiles – Paul’s words imply that these are the days in which the words of Hosea are being fulfilled.] **It’s interesting that Jesus quoted Hosea in the Parable of the Winepress.** A landowner rented out his vineyard to tenants who refused to give him the fruit of the land. And so he sent servants to collect the rent. The tenants beat, killed, and stoned the servants. The owner then sent his son, but they killed him too. And so,

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'the stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone; this came about from the lord,

and it is marvelous in our eyes '?"<sup>43</sup> "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. (Mat 21:42-43 NAU)

Paul quoted this same passage in a letter he wrote to the Romans, a letter that may well be in the hands of his enemies in the crowd below. In that letter, Paul said,

<sup>30</sup> What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;<sup>31</sup> but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.<sup>32</sup> Why not? Because they pursued it **not** by *faith* but as if it were by **works**.

They stumbled over the "stumbling stone."<sup>33</sup> As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

(Rom 9:30-33 NIV)

Through the lips of Paul, in these few words telling them that he was sent to the Gentiles, the mob is hearing Jesus' pronouncement that, "**the kingdom of God will be taken away from you.**" They are **convicted**, but they are NOT cut to the quick. Few of them are asking, as Paul did, "**What shall I do, Lord?**" The Gospel is nonetheless doing what it is intended to do. When we present the Gospel, it is for three purposes: to **CONVICT**, to **CALL**, and to **COMFORT**.

1. The Gospel **convicts** us of our sin and our need for Christ; it's so that we have no excuse, but also so that we might be healed. Through the Gospel, Paul is convicting the unbelievers in the crowd of their sin of rebellion. Their continuing bondage is breaking his heart. He's weeping over them as Christ wept over Jerusalem.
2. The Gospel also **calls** the elect to *repentance* and to *faith* in Christ. Paul is calling his fellow Jews to believe in Jesus Christ, because he knows the healing touch of Christ and the power of God that raised him from the dead.
3. And the Gospel **comforts** those who belong to Christ, reminding them of the grace of God that sustains them in their afflictions, as Paul has been sustained for many years. With the Gospel, and by his example, Paul is comforting the church in Jerusalem, and also the men he brought with him from the churches of Asia and Greece.

<sup>22</sup> They listened to [*Paul*] **up to this statement** [about the Gentiles], and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for **he should not be allowed to live!**” <sup>23</sup> And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the commander ordered [*Paul*] to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be **examined by scourging** so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. [They were going to extract a confession from Paul by force, even though he’s more than willing to tell them.] <sup>25</sup> But when they stretched him out with thongs [*leather straps*], Paul said to the centurion who was standing nearby, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman [*citizen*] and uncondemned?”

<sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard *this*, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a **Roman.**” <sup>27</sup> The commander came and said to [*Paul*], “Tell me, **are you a Roman?**” And [*Paul*] said, “Yes.” <sup>28</sup> The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” [He’s impressed that this seeming nobody, this lowlife Jew, has the privilege of Roman citizenship] And Paul said, “**But I was actually born a citizen.**” [As I said earlier, Paul is from Tarsus, a free city. Roman citizenship was his right by birth and not by bribe. **That’s how it is with his citizenship in heaven** – and with ours. It was bestowed on him by God, not by anything he had done to purchase or merit it. This text is rich with similes and allusions, isn’t it?]

<sup>29</sup> Therefore those who were about to examine [*Paul*] immediately let go of him; and the commander also was **afraid** when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. [If Paul pressed charges, this man could be stripped of his rank.] <sup>30</sup> But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released [*Paul*] and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

**Jason will pick it up here next week.**

Like Paul, we should all ask God, “**What shall I do LORD?**” We don’t ask *ourselves* that question; we ask it of GOD: “**What shall I do LORD?**” How may I serve You, subjecting everything I own and do to Your will for me? **You led me by the hand into Your kingdom so that I might glorify Your Name in the world.** How may I do that TODAY – NOW, in this moment, and in every moment of my life? **How may I take someone else by the hand, and lead them to Christ, as Paul was led, and as I was led?** Have you asked that question? You need to ask it.

Paul was a missionary. All that means is that he was a man on a mission – a mission he was commissioned for, and equipped to fulfill. We're all on that same mission. It's a mission that we too were commissioned for, and that we are being equipped to fulfill. Do you see yourself as a missionary? Listen up. There is no *gift* of "missionary." It isn't given to some and not others. It is our duty as the body of Christ to fulfill the mission, *together*. As Scott pointed out weeks ago, Paul didn't act alone. He acted in concert with others. Each one did their part so that the mission, the *Great Commission*, would be fulfilled.

**If the Worship team would please come forward.**

You might expect me to call you to duty at this point. Well, you're not wrong. But I want to do it by sharing a few memories from my childhood. Maybe you'll see the connection. Maybe you'll hear the call, and respond appropriately.

When I was 5 years old, my mom dropped me off on a street corner to head off to Summer camp. I had no idea what was going on, or where I was going, or why I was left alone. I climbed into the car with some other kids and began to cry. Mary Ellen, a woman of the world at age 6, took my hand, asked my name, and began to comfort me with tales of all the fun we going to have together swimming and playing games. She kept on holding my hand, and comforting me with things she knew about, things I knew *nothing* about – until I finally stopped crying.

When I was 6 years old, my dad dropped me off for my first day of school. He told me to have a nice day and drove off. I had no idea where I was supposed to go, or what I was supposed to do. I looked at all the doors, not knowing which one I should open. The other kids all disappeared into the classrooms. I began to cry. Another woman of the world, a second-grader, took my hand, asked my name, and promised that she would get one of the teachers to help me. I stopped crying and waited patiently. She did just what she promised. I had a GREAT day.

When I was 32 years old, God dropped me off on the front steps of a church. I had no idea what I was doing there, or what lay ahead for me. I only knew I had heard his voice, and I was responding as best I could. I sat there in the pew and I cried. Folks nearby thought I had the worst cold they'd ever heard. But later that day they took me by the hand, and they prayed for me, and held me in their arms until I stopped crying. I was *convicted*, I was *called*, and I was *comforted* by the Gospel, a Gospel that had been poured into empty vessels, and then poured into me.

They were missionaries, ordinary believers, doing what they'd been commissioned to do, acting out of love and compassion for the lost. That's all God is asking you to do: take someone by the hand, tell them about the things you know, things which they know nothing about. Keep holding their hand until they stop crying. A lot of people have held my hand over the years. And now I have the privilege of doing that for others. I'm passing on what's been shown to me, with kindness and care. Can you do that? I believe that you can – and I've seen that you're doing just that. You're *missionaries*, like Paul. You're on a missionary journey, doing the work you've been called to do. Keep doing it: more and more, more and more. **Let's pray.**