

Acts 22

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Tape#8111
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Paul has come to Jerusalem, ostensibly to bring an offering from the Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem, which had been experiencing tremendous financial problems. So Paul to sort of break down the walls that existed between even the Gentile believers and the church in Jerusalem, gathered from the Gentile churches an offering. In order that he might demonstrate to the church in Jerusalem the love and the support of the Gentile believers. Now the church in Jerusalem was sort of a strange kind of a church in that there was a tremendous admixture of Judaism with Christianity. We are experiencing quite a bit the same today in some of the Messianic fellowships. There is a desire to return to Sabbath Day worship, to return to the Kosher laws as there are people who sort of pride themselves in this identity with Judaism. However in the Gentile churches it was decided that they didn't need to become Jews in order to be saved. That God by His grace will save those who believe on Him. And in talking about these rituals, and Kosher and all of this, Peter said why should we put on them a yoke of bondage that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. The book of Hebrews is devoted to warning the believers who had come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to warn that by going back to Judaism and the sacrifices, there was no salvation. There was almost a crucifying of the Son of God afresh because there was that attempt in the flesh to become righteous before God by adherence to the rules and regulations of the law. And if righteousness would come and could come by the law then Christ is dead in vain. So the whole book of Hebrews was a warning against going back to the tradition of Judaism. But traditions are very deep and they keep a person in a vice like grip. And so the church in Jerusalem was an admixture of Judaism and Christianity. They were still going to temple. They were still keeping the Kosher laws, the dietary laws of Kosher and all. And so they looked down on the Gentile believers as second rate or second class believers. Sort of a spiritual pride, well, we keep Sabbath and we don't eat pork. That kind of self righteousness that comes when you think that you are one step above another. So Paul is trying to break down these barriers, bringing the offering. But then Paul, also desired to be there for the Feast of Pentecost. Those feast times were great times in Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of people would gather. According to Josephus, as many as two million people would gather in Jerusalem for these feast days. Great holidays. Great times of celebration. Great times of worshipping God. Paul wanted to be there. Now those were the two ostensible reasons.

I believe there was a third reason that Paul wanted to be there and that is to share the gospel with the Jews. Paul always desired to bring the gospel message to the Jews. He felt that he understood them sufficiently so that he could convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. Now when Paul was going out among the Gentiles to preach the gospel, he would usually go first to the synagogue. For several Sabbath days he would be in the synagogue. He would be showing them out of their Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. And that was Paul's practice. When they rejected then Paul would turn to the Gentiles. And he would share with the Gentiles. And as he wrote to the Romans (Romans 1:16), I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles. So Paul's heart and as he expressed it in Romans, my heart and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved! And I could wish myself accursed from God for my brethren's sake according to the flesh. He had such a deep intense desire to reach the Jews that if it were possible to reach them he would accept being cursed from God Himself. That's how intense and deep Paul's desire was to share with the Jews the truth that Jesus is the Messiah.

Paul has come to Jerusalem. He has met with the church leaders. They have suggested that Paul go through purification rites and that he also sponsor some young men who were also going through the purification rites. So that when the Jews in the church in Jerusalem heard that Paul was there it wouldn't create a problem and a division within the church because they had heard of the message of grace that Paul was teaching to the Gentiles. So they said now Paul, we don't want any trouble, no division. So go ahead and sponsor these boys that need to be purified and you yourself, you know, go ahead and go through the purification rites and then when people come and they say what is Paul here for? We can then say, you know, he is a good Jewish boy, keeping Kosher and going through the rites and so forth. So it was while Paul was in the temple that he was spotted by some of the Jews from Asia, where he had preached in their synagogue. And they began to cry out, men and brethren, help! This is the man who has been going around the world telling the Jews that they don't have to keep the law of Moses. And so they began to beat Paul. Their intention was to beat him to death. During these days there were always extra Roman guards on duty. And they saw the tumult and they came rushing down. And they rescued Paul from the mob. They took him into protective custody. And as Paul was taken up to the Antonio Fortress there on the porch that overlooked the temple mount area where the Jews were gathered, Paul turned to the captain of the guard and in the Greek language said, may I speak to these people? He said do you speak Greek? Paul said, yes. He said I thought you were that Egyptian. That fellow that came from Egypt who led some people in insurrection a while back. Paul said no, I'm a citizen of Tarsus, no mean city. So the captain of the guard gave Paul permission to speak and Paul began to address the people in the Hebrew tongue. And so when they heard Paul speaking Hebrew they listened more intently. That brings us now into chapter twenty-two.

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." This is Paul's big moment! This is the day he's dreamed of. This is Paul's hour. He has been desiring since his conversion twenty years earlier. He's been desiring this opportunity to share with the Jews, his kinsmen according to the flesh, that light and understanding that he had of Jesus Christ as Messiah. He had been able to convince thousands of Gentiles, but his heart and desire was for his own people that they might discover the glorious truth that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. It is so clear in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is so obvious, that Paul was certain that if he could just show them in their scriptures, he could prove to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

It's an interesting thing that when the Lord opens up our eyes to a particular truth. The truth of salvation through Jesus Christ. It becomes so plain and so logical and so beautiful that we think, everybody should be able to see this! Anybody would be thrilled to accept this. Surely no one can fail to see that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that the Bible is indeed God's Word, inspired by God, leading men into a relationship with God! And it is so clear and obvious that we think that surely everybody can see it. It's surprising how blind people can be. You can so through and simply explain the gospel and they just sort of, daaa, no comprehension! It just, well, they just don't seem to get it. They just don't see! The Bible says (1 Corinthians 2:14) the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. You could say with equal logic, the deaf man cannot enjoy the symphony and the blind man cannot enjoy the sunset because they lack that faculty by which these things are appreciated and enjoyed. So the natural man lacks the faculty of the Spirit by which these things are understood. Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things. The Holy Spirit opens up your understanding. If the truth of God bears witness in your heart and as you read it, you think, wow that's exciting! That's beautiful! That's wonderful! That's because the Spirit is opening your heart to it. Someone else can read the same passages and say well, I don't know what it means. What are you so excited about? I mean, nothing is there that I can see. Because they lack the faculties, the Spirit by which these things are understood, appreciated and enjoyed. So Paul having been converted and having the Spirit of God open up the truth to his heart, he

was certain he could surely convince the Jews, especially, that Jesus is the Messiah. So listen to the defense that I make now to you.

²*And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.* This crowd that a moment ago was screaming out, kill him and all, now is silent as Paul is there on the porch addressing them in their Hebrew language.

Then he said: ³*"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.* I know where you are at! I'm one of you. I've been exactly where you are! I am a Jew, though I was born in Tarsus, I grew up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel. I've been taught in the law of the fathers by the chief rabbi, Gamaliel, perfect manner of the law. And I was zealous toward God even as you are, acknowledging their zeal. Now he in another place (Romans 10:2) wrote concerning the Jews, I testify of them. They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. But here he is not insulting them. He just said, I was zealous just like you are.

And ⁴*I persecuted this Way* (In early Christianity it was known as the Way. So I persecuted this Way) *to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,* The Bible says that Paul wrecked havoc in the church. He was zealous in his attempt to stamp out the church. He thought he was doing God a service.) ⁵*as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.* Paul in talking about the righteousness that he once had in the law (Philippians 3:6), said, concerning his zeal, persecuting the church. So now Paul is being persecuted. They were zealous for the law of God. They thought that Paul was violating the law, in teaching Jews to violate the law, and so they are going to kill him. Paul said, I understand that zeal. I was the same way. I was ready to kill those who were not wanting to live according to the law of God. Going to Damascus to imprison, bind those, bring them back to Jerusalem who were calling upon the Lord.

⁶*Now it happened* (It's interesting that Paul is not giving them some theological treatise. It may be that that was his intention. This could have just been Paul's introduction. But Paul is witnessing to them with personal testimony. And one of the most powerful witnesses that you can give to a person is your own personal testimony of your experience with Jesus Christ. Of what Jesus Christ has done in your life. Of the changes that He has wrought in you, is often is one of the most powerful witnesses that you can give.

You see when Raul Rees stands and he gives his testimony, what the Lord did for him. Or Mike McIntosh, or when they give their personal testimonies, what can you say? You know God has done wonders. You can't deny it! They are standing there. A miracle of God's grace and love and the power of the Spirit to transform a life! And so the personal witness always makes a great testimony and Paul is giving them his personal testimony of his conversion.)

Now it happened, *as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven 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*So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?'* And He said to me, *'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'* Paul's personal encounter with Jesus Christ. You often heard it said that God doesn't you to become religious. God wants a relationship with you. A personal relationship. Paul is now introduced personally to Jesus Christ, the one whom he is persecuting. There the Lord meets him. There the Lord talks to him. Now as we go on into the next few chapters, we are going to find that Paul is going to stand before Felix, the Roman governor. And then Festus, and then Agrippa. And so in each case as he stands before these men, to make his defense. In each case he testifies to them of his conversion. And so we're going to be going over this conversion of Paul in the next couple of chapters as he will be again making his defense. But every time he has an

opportunity and has to face a court trial, he takes advantage of that opportunity in sharing the power of Jesus Christ to change a person's life.

You remember that Jesus told his disciples that they would be arrested and they would be brought before the magistrates and before kings, and the Lord said don't take any forethought of what you will say. Don't make any prepared speech. But in that hour the Holy Spirit will give unto you the words that you should say. Just trust in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So Paul, Jesus said it shall turn to you for a witness. And so Paul took every opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ before the magistrates, in fact he sought to convert Agrippa. And he used that as an opportunity to share his personal testimony. So here he encounters the Lord, a personal encounter.

⁹*And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.* Now at this point in the various accounts, the account of his conversion in chapter nine and as he relates it again, there seems to be a discrepancy, which is cleared up by the Greek text. For in another place it said, they heard the voice but here it says they heard not the voice of Him who spoke to me. So how can it be that they heard and they didn't hear? Here it is in the Greek, the *phone*. They heard the *phone*. We get our word phonics from this Greek word. They didn't understand it. They heard the sounds, the phonics, but they didn't comprehend because God was speaking to him, probably in the Hebrew language. And only the scholars knew the Hebrew language. And the Lord probably spoke to him in Hebrew. So they heard the sound, but they didn't hear the voice, that is the phonics, the understanding. They didn't comprehend what was being said. They saw the light. They heard the noise, but they didn't understand the words. It was a personal encounter of the Lord with Paul. So that's where the discrepancy, seeming discrepancy, is cleared up as you get into the Greek language.

¹⁰*So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'* Now that's conversion. If thou shall confess with thy mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. Believe in your heart God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved. Paul is here, immediately surrendering himself to the Lordship of Jesus. What shall I do, Lord?

And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' So the first step is just going to Damascus. The Lord leads us one step at a time. We so often want God to spell out the whole picture. We want God to say, you're going to go here and when that happens, then you are to do this. And then when you've done that and we want the Lord to spell out the whole thing you know. But God only leads us one step at a time. Go to Damascus. There it will be told you what you are to do.

¹¹*And since I could not see for the glory of that light,* (The light that shone on him was so bright. Brighter than the noonday sun! That Paul was temporarily blinded as the result of the brilliance of that light.) *being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.* Now there is another account that says Paul was breathing out murder against the church. I mean he left Jerusalem empowered by the high priest, threatening, breathing out murders against these believers, coming with others to imprison and all. But here he is led in meekly by the hand. He can't see, you know! He's been blinded on the way by the brilliant light in his encounter with Jesus Christ. It's not the way Paul pictured himself coming into Damascus.

¹²*Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law* (He was a Jew.), *having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,* (He was a devout man. He had a good report among the Jews.) *He¹³came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.'* *And at that same hour I looked up at him.* I was able to see him.

¹⁴*Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One,* (Or the righteous One) *and hear the voice of His mouth.* God has chosen you, Paul. You are to be a special instrument. God has chosen that you should know His will. That you should see the righteous One, Jesus, and that you should hear the voice of His mouth. Paul, when he was writing to the Ephesians, said, thanks be unto God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with

all spiritual blessings in Christ in heavenly places. Then he begins to list a long list of blessings that are ours in and through Jesus Christ. But the top of the list is that we were chosen in Him before the foundations of the world! God chose you! What a glorious truth! Chosen by God that we should know His will. That we should see Jesus Christ. That is that our eyes of understanding being enlightened and opened, we may see the truth of Jesus Christ. That He is God's anointed One, that He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God, who came and died for our sins. And God has chosen that we should know this truth in order that we might be converted and be saved. And that we might hear the voice of Jesus.

¹⁵*For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.* So here Paul is bearing witness of what he saw and what he heard. This was Paul's ministry. To share his testimony of his experience with Jesus Christ.

¹⁶*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'* Why wait, Paul? Get up. Be baptized. Wash away your sins as you call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁷*Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem* (Now Paul leaves a gap here of three years. From the time of Paul's conversion in Damascus, it was three years before he came back to Jerusalem. Those three years were spent out in the desert of Arabia. Those three years were spent in solitude with Jesus. Paul went out and there for three years, Jesus ministered to Paul, opening his understanding of the Scriptures. It's hard to realize what a total revolutionary experience this was for Paul. One moment, determined to wipe out the believers. Meeting Jesus Christ and the next moment being a believer. Chosen by God to share the truth of Christ with a Gentile world. So three years gap, Paul was receiving the gospel of grace during those desert experiences.) *and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance* ¹⁸*and saw Him* (Another time when Jesus came and personally visited with Paul. Throughout his ministry the Lord on several occasions stood by him, guided him, spoke to him. Paul said that he was in a trance on this occasion.) *saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'* The Lord warned Paul. Get out of here! They're not going to receive your testimony.

¹⁹*So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.* ²⁰*And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to (or voted for) his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'* ²¹*Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'* " Now the Lord, the first time Paul came to Jerusalem, said get out of here. They're not going to receive. But notice Paul is arguing with the Lord. Now whenever you find yourself arguing with the Lord, just know you're wrong! So many times we do find ourselves arguing, but Lord, I know what they are feeling. I'm sure Lord! That I can convince them. The Lord said, they're not going to listen. Get out of here, Paul! Now I believe that for twenty years, Paul has felt that the Lord was wrong! I believe that down deep in his heart, Paul felt that if I can just talk to them. If I can just share with them. I know that I can convince them! It surely teaches us that it isn't our words of wisdom that convinces a man to follow Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaking to a person's heart that opens their hearts to the truth that helps them to believe. The greatest argument in the world, the strongest apologetics, will not convince a person of the truth of Jesus Christ. It is the work of God's Spirit within their hearts that draws them to believe and gives them faith to trust in Jesus. And so Paul has for twenty years, and of course it was seventeen years ago that Paul came back. And for this seventeen years, I think that he felt, well the Lord really doesn't fully understand. I know that I can convince them. And so here he is. He's shining. Here it's happening Lord. You know you thought I couldn't do it. Their listening you know. They're quiet! I've got them in my hand, you know.

But suddenly when Paul mentioned this word, gentiles, ²²*And they listened to him until this word(until he said, Gentiles), and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow*

from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" Kill him! A huge uproar ensued. ²³Then, as they cried out (They were screaming,) and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, (They tore off their clothes. They threw dirt in the air. They are an emotional group! And Paul has pushed a button. And suddenly there is chaos. People screaming, tearing off their clothes. Throwing dirt in the air and yelling, kill him. Kill him! Making a surge toward the Antonio Fortress.)

So ²⁴the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. You see, Paul was talking to them in the Hebrew language. The Romans couldn't understand what he was saying. All of a sudden, all that they knew was that the crowd went berserk! It went wild. So he said, examine him by scourging. Or give him the third degree to find out what he said. Now this examining by scourging was a practice of the Roman government in order to force the truth from a person. They would tie the person with leather thongs to a post, in a position where his back was stretched, was taut. And then they would take a whip. A leather whip that has little bits of bone and cut glass tied in it. It was designed to sort of rip the flesh. And the one soldier would begin to lay the whip across the back, snapping it and pulling out little chunks of flesh. It was extremely painful. The idea was that as the scribe stood by, you would cry out a confession. You would start confessing what you had done wrong. And a person under this third degree type of pressure would soon begin to spill everything and tell everything he knew because if you would cooperate and if you would open up and tell what you knew, then they would lay the whip on a little easier. If you would refuse they would lay it on harder and harder until you would be forced to confess. Many people died before the scourging was finished because of the loss of blood and the extreme pain. Now this is the scourging that Jesus experienced as Pilate ordered that Jesus should be scourged. Generally the scourging was thirty-nine stripes. In the Scriptures the number forty is a number symbolic of judgment. Whenever you read of forty days it usually is a period of time that is referring to judgment. You remember when the flood came, it rained for forty days and forty nights. It was the judgment of God. It is numerically a number of judgment in the Scriptures. The number thirty nine, numerically, is the number of mercy. I might say not much mercy. And so because justice must be tempered with mercy, the scourging was usually thirty-nine stripes. The prophet said (Isaiah 53:5) concerning Jesus that He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of His peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed. The scourging. The stripes laid across His back. Thus it was prophesied by Isaiah. Also Isaiah said (Isaiah 50:6), that I gave My back to the smiters and my cheeks to those who plucked out to the beard. To the spitting. The suffering that Jesus endured. But Isaiah went on to say, as a lamb before His shearers is dumb so He opened not His mouth. You see the purpose was to elicit confession of wrongdoing. But Jesus has nothing to confess. And thus He took the full brunt of that horrible scourging process. The suffering of that scourging process that by His stripes we may be healed. Oh, the wonderful love of our wonderful Savior! Willing to suffer for us! Wounded for our transgressions! Bruised for our iniquities!

So it was very common (they figure Paul was a Jew), scourge him! Find out what he said that created that uproar out there!

²⁵And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The truth of it is, it was not lawful. Cicero said, a Roman should never be bound with thongs. And to scourge a Roman, those guilty should be put to death. So Paul just asks the question of the centurion, is it lawful for you to scourge a Roman who is uncondemned.

²⁶When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman." ²⁷Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He (Paul) said, "Yes." ²⁸The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." (I was born a Roman. I am free born.) ²⁹Then immediately

those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. It was not lawful to even bind a Roman unless there are charges.

³⁰*The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.* So now Paul is going to have his official hearing before the Sanhedrin. That religious body of which Paul was once a part. And now he gets his hearing before them.

It is interesting how God prepared Paul as he said to the Galatians (Galatians 1:15), I was separated from my mother's womb unto the gospel. God had perfectly fitted Paul for the ministry that Paul was to accomplish for the Lord, as God always prepares the instruments in advance. The men that God uses are men that God has prepared. And Paul from his birth was being prepared by God for a very special ministry. A ministry in which Roman citizenship would play an important part. So He had Paul born free. Born with a Roman citizenship, which meant that his father had probably done some great deed for Rome and was granted to the family automatic citizenship for the family members, which often happened. In order to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he needed to have an understanding of the Greek culture. So he was born in Tarsus, no mean city of Cilicia, a city of Greek culture. And his earliest childhood experiences of playing with the kids on the block, he was being exposed to the Greek culture. The early schooling in Greek culture. However, because he was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin. His father was a devout Jew, when it came time to go to college. His father sent Paul to Jerusalem, that he might study in the Hebrew university, under Gamaliel, that he might have this great, thorough understanding of the Hebrew scriptures, being taught by one of the most respected rabbis of the day. So all the way along this was all part of God's preparation. To prepare a man thoroughly versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, knowing the Greek culture, having the advantage of a Roman citizenship, intellectually keen and sharp, to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. So God had been working all the way along, preparing and fitting the vessel to the use.

There is a song that we sing, "All the way my Savior leads me. What have I on earth beside?" You know, as you get along in years of serving the Lord, you begin to realize that all the way, the hand of the Lord was upon your life, preparing you for the ministry that God was going to do through you.

As I look back on my own life, the different experiences, the background, all that I had, I can see now. I recognize now how that God's hand was upon my life from birth, even before birth. A few weeks before I was born, my cousin had died of spinal meningitis and my sister contracted spinal meningitis. She went into convulsions and stopped breathing. Her eyes rolled back, her jaw set, and my mother ran up the street to a church. The pastor lived next door to the church. She was holding her little lifeless daughter. And as the minister began to pray and my mother was praying, the minister said, get your eyes off your little girl and get your eyes on Jesus. Focus on Jesus. Good advice. Don't look at the difficulty of the problem. Look to Jesus, He is the answer! And you see, if we look at the problem, it only gets bigger, but if we look at Jesus, the problem fades because of the greatness of his power.

In the meantime my dad who had been at the pool hall. He was a pool shark. He came to the apartments where they were living. The nurse that happened to be there said, your little daughter died. Your wife ran up the street. She said she was going to a church. And my dad went running up the street to the church intending to beat up the minister, take his daughter to the hospital and get proper treatment. But when he saw her he realized it was too late and he fell on his knees and began to cry out to the Lord. My mother said, Lord, if you will just give me my little daughter back again, I will give my life to you and I will serve you. My sister began to breathe again, opened her eyes and was healed instantly. Two months later when the doctor told my mother that you've got a baby boy, she closed her eyes and said, Lord, through my son I will fulfill my vow to you. So from I was a child, she

started teaching me the Scriptures. She started me memorizing the Scriptures. She would follow me out to the yard. As I would be swinging, she would be quoting Scriptures, helping me to memorize Scriptures. She taught me to read when I was four years old, reading out of the Bible. We had a large print Bible. She taught me to read. You see God's hand was there, preparing. The years that we went through difficulty in ministry, hardships in ministry. Difficult times. They were all a part of God's preparation. I can see the hand of God all the way. It's a thrill to look back and realize, God had His hand on your life from the beginning. And those circumstances, those situations that you were going through. They were all a part of God's plan to bring you to this place of service.

God thoroughly prepares the vessels He intends to use. As Paul said (Ephesians 2:10) you are His workmanship, created unto Christ Jesus for the good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. God has a plan for each of your lives if you are open, God will work out that plan. Sometimes it looks to us like God has taken detours. Sometimes we think that God has given up on His plan. And yet God continues to work even when we don't understand what He is doing because we are trying to understand the puzzle when we have only a few pieces together. But as God patiently and slowly begins to put the pieces together and as the puzzle begins to get complete then we begin to see the picture. And we say, oh my! Isn't that beautiful. Look at that! You didn't dream it was that beautiful. The plan of God for each of our lives as we are yielded to Him and allow Him to put the pieces of the puzzle together. That it makes sense! Beautiful!

So here is Paul, God is working. God has prepared him. And God is working and has fit him for the this ministry to the Gentiles. Paul's problem is that he thought he could minister to the Jews. It's not to be, Paul. That's not your calling.

You know, the most difficult thing in the world is to try to be something God didn't make you and to fulfill a ministry God didn't give you. But the most wonderful thing in the world is to be just what God has made you and to do just what God wants you to do. That's just coasting. That's glorious! So many times I found myself trying to be something God didn't make me. And God had to teach me. I can't be something that he didn't make me. I've got to be what He made me to be. I've got to be obedient to His calling upon my life. So God works in each of us. He is working in you. He's is preparing you. He is giving you the background. He is giving you those experiences. All part of God's plan as he is working out His eternal purposes in your life. And as you yield yourself to Him, the picture will begin to unfold and you will begin to see exactly the purpose and the plan that God has for you. That wonderful life when it's committed fully to Jesus Christ.

Thank You Father for the work of Your Holy Spirit. As You have worked in us to conform us into the image of Your Son. And as You have worked in us to prepare us for those good works that You have before ordained that we should accomplish. Lord we thank You that You are still working in us. Unfold Lord, Your plan day by day as we walk with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.