

42b ACTS

We resume our study now in Acts. I know you might have been expecting Ezekiel, but I've got Acts on the brain and sometimes it's like that song, I've got the music in me and it's got to come out. Well, Acts is in me and I've got to cover it while it's fresh on my mind.

So, as we continue looking at Acts chapter 22, realize now that Paul has completed his three missionary journeys. That's what we studied in this whole middle section of the book and beginning here in Acts chapter 21 and going forward now, this section of Acts is all about Paul's arrest and trial. A gentleman named I. Howard Marshall has this to say, With this section we begin the lengthy account of Paul's imprisonment and trials both in Jerusalem and Caesarea.

If you remember, Jerusalem is the traditional capital of Israel, but Caesarea is the capital of the Roman province. The Romans draw their lines in different places, don't they? They say we conquered this and this is how we're going to divide it up and this is what we're going to call it. So, this is the Roman province of Syria and the Romans have assigned the capital as Caesarea.

So, Paul is first sort of arrested and questioned in Jerusalem where he went by mistake. Eventually, he's going to be shipped over to the capital. This would be like your court case going up to the state supreme court, so to speak.

He's going to be tried there and then it's going to be kicked up to the federal supreme court, which is what is going to send him to Rome. So, he starts out at the local, he's going to go to the state, and then he's going to go to the federal in terms of the Roman system. So, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and ultimately Rome.

And this account is going to occupy one quarter of the book of Acts. Fully 25% of the book, this last quarter of the book, is all about Paul's roundabout journey to Rome and these trials. During the course of these trials, he is going to be talking to princes and procurators.

The same sort of office that Pontius Pilate held will be Felix and then Portius Festus. And then he will finally be on his way to Rome. He is going to retell the story of Damascus Road and his conversion to Christ two more times.

Besides the account we have back in Acts chapter 9. So that the book of Acts gives us three separate full accounts of the Damascus Road encounter. Where Saul is met by the Lord Jesus, is given his commission to be an apostle, is blind for a couple of days. That story is going to be told over and over.

Well, we ask ourselves, why? Why do I care about this? Acts has been in my Bible all my

life. Why should I have a renewed and exceptional interest in it now? Well, because I want you to. That is one reason.

Because we are going through Acts and it is fascinating. But what does it mean to us? Is it helpful to us at all? Well, as we saw in our first session tonight, it is very helpful to be sort of shaken out of ourselves. Do you remember the story of King David? When he sent Joab out to fight the battle.

And he stayed back in Jerusalem and he slept late. Slept clear into the afternoon. And he got up toward evening and decided he would go up and catch some breeze on the roof of the palace.

And he looked over the palace and he looked down through somebody's window. Next door neighbor's window. And there was the lady taking a bath without her clothes on.

And he said, wow, that is a beautiful woman. I need to get to know her better. And the next thing you know, she is getting ready to have a baby.

And David says, well, this won't do because her husband is off with Joab fighting in the army. There is no possible way he can be the father of the child. This is going to really be what you might call a royal fiasco.

Right? And so, David says, we have got to find a way to make him think that it is his baby. So, he gets an excuse and has Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, come back from the battle under the pretense of saying, well, how goes the battle, Uriah? Give me an eyewitness account. And so, Uriah tells what he knows.

And David says, well, I know you have had a tough time of it out there on the battlefield and a long sweaty journey back here to give me a report. Really appreciate it. Go on home now and see your wife and have some rest and refreshment there.

Take a couple of days of R&R and then we will send you back to the battle. Uriah says, it has been good to see you, my sovereign king. And then he leaves.

But the servants come to David and they say, you know that Uriah that you brought back from the battle? He is sleeping down in the guard shack right outside the palace. He is just curled up on the stone floor there. He did not go home.

And David smacks himself in the head and he says, this is ruining my plan. The whole reason I brought him back is so he could spend time with his wife. And he would think that this child is his.

And Uriah does not go. So David calls him up and he says, Uriah, I thought I told you to go home and take a couple of days of R&R. And Uriah says, my lord, while the armies of Israel are in the field fighting the Lord's battles, I am not going to go home and take a

rest.

I belong out there with them. What is the implication? Uriah, a much lower ranking soldier, understands that the place for a fighting man in the armies of Israel is out there fighting the Lord's enemies, fighting the Lord's battles. What does it say about David? He is the king.

He is the commander in chief. And he is dallying around doing one thing and another in Jerusalem instead of being out there doing the commission that God gave him. We have been talking about the apostle Paul and his commission to give the gospel to the Gentiles.

God gave a commission to King David to go fight, drive the Canaanites out of the land so that there could be a place where the temple could be built by his son Solomon. David is not doing that. Uriah, by his example, is sort of shaming the king, isn't he? Uriah says, I would rather sleep in the guard shack than go home and be sleeping in a nice cozy bed like the king is doing.

And so David tells him again to go down there and he doesn't go. And so finally he has to send him back to the battlefield with a message in his hand that is sealed. And he says, now this is a sealed message.

Just give it to Joab when you get there. And of course he trusts Uriah being a man of integrity that he won't open the letter and read it. And of course Uriah does not.

Well, inside the note are instructions to Joab to put Uriah up in the front right next to the enemy and then retreat from him and leave him all by himself so the enemy will kill him. And that's exactly what happens. Joab is disgusted, but it's an order from the king.

And he says, you just be sure to tell the king when we make this dumb tactical maneuver and we lose some people. We learned this a long time ago. You remember when so-and-so got too close to the wall and a woman dropped a rock on his head? We know we're not supposed to do this and the king is going to chew me out for making a bad maneuver.

I just want to tell him now we're going to make this bad maneuver and we're going to lose Uriah. But they go ahead and do it and Uriah is killed. Well, David is not caused to see.

If he was sensitive, if he wasn't in the grip of a zeal, if he wasn't all worried about his career and worried about the scandal and worried about Bathsheba, he could be objective and he could see what's right and what's wrong. But he can't see it, can he? It's like he's got a blindness. He doesn't see that he's becoming a murderer.

He doesn't see that he's making himself a murderer. He's making himself an adulterer.

He's making himself a sneak and a liar and breaking all kinds of promises and breaching all kinds of trusts.

He doesn't see it. It makes sense to him. It seems like the thing that needs to happen.

Do we ever feel this way? Do we feel like we're kind of in a situation and something needs to happen and we just push forward and try to make that thing happen and we don't always step back and ask ourselves, how does this fit into the plan of God? Is God pleased? Is the light of Christ shining forth from my soul and my life in this situation? Or am I just kind of pushing headlong because there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. What does it take? Here's my point in digressing and talking about David. What does it take to finally wake David up? Do you remember? God sends Nathan the prophet.

Nathan, by the way, his name comes from the verb natan in Hebrew. N-a-t-a-n means to give. He is the one that gives.

One of the famous men in the Israeli government today, Benjamin Netanyahu. Netan, that's Nathan. That's the same word, natan.

Netanyahu means given by the Lord. What a great name. Benjamin Netanyahu.

Son of the right hand, given by the Lord. It's a super name. It would be a hard name to live up to.

Nathan comes to David and gives him the word of the Lord. The Lord says, Nathan, I want you to tell David a little story. And that's what Nathan does.

Nathan tells him a story about somebody who has nothing to do with the palace, nothing to do with David, nothing to do with Uriah, Bathsheba, or anything. Nathan comes and tells David a story. There was a poor man who had one sheep.

And he loved it like a daughter. He cared for it, he nurtured it, he raised it from its youth. It was his constant companion.

He lived next door to a rich man. The rich man had lots of sheep, lots of herds. One day, a guest came, a visitor, a traveler came and visited the rich man.

And the rich man wanted to give the traveler a meal, wanted to give him something to satisfy his hunger. And so, instead of taking one of his own sheep, he went and had his servants grab the sheep away from the poor man and have them slaughter it and kill it and feed it to the stranger. And David's anger waxes hot and he says, the man that did this thing, this rich man that took the poor man's one lamb ought to be punished severely.

He ought to have to restore it fourfold. And Nathan looks at him and says, you are the

man. You are that man.

And it takes David up short. And then he begins to realize he is the king. He has many wives.

He has access to all kinds of things in the palace. Uriah is the poor man that has his wife Bathsheba. David, in the grip of a passion, in the grip of a kind of zeal, decides he must have that woman and it costs Uriah his life, his wife and his life.

You are the man. Sometimes it takes looking at a third situation to convict us and show us a truth about ourselves. That's why we're looking at this Acts chapter tonight.

Because all of us have a hard time. We all have a deceitful heart. We all have a deceitful nature.

All of us have areas in our life where it is very difficult to be objective. It's very difficult to see things as they really are and recognize that we need to change. That we need to strive to be better, strive to do better, strive to please God and to glorify God in this particular area.

It's really hard to see. And I'm not preaching at you. This is all of us.

All of us as human beings. It's a part of the equation. It's just because we're human and we're fallen and we have a sinful nature.

But we all recognize that problem. I think anybody who's honest knows we have a hard time. We sometimes think we're doing something right in the heat of the moment and then we look back and we say, Ooh, I shouldn't have said that.

I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have gone there. I shouldn't have let that happen.

But we do. Well, here's the real question. How do we stop that? How do we do better? We can spend our whole life wishing we had done better and never getting any better.

God gives us the power through His Word. The man who meditates in His Word is blessed. The man who meditates in God's Word has power because the Word is powerful.

The Word of God is alive and powerful. We have the same advantage that King David has. The prophet comes to David and gives him the Word of God.

The Word of God says, You are the man. And David, to his credit, acknowledges that he is the man. And in the Psalms, he prays to God and he says, Lord, against Thee and Thee only have I sinned.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. And because a lot of people get confronted and they just don't want to admit, you can

tell them all the stories in the world and they're just, look, it seems right to me.

I'm going with it. Don't bother me with the facts. My mind is made up.

This is where our free choice comes in. You and I choose every single day, don't we? So right now, we have to choose. The Word of God is here.

We're seeing from the Word of God this picture like Nathan telling the story of the sheep. We're seeing the Israelites who are hard of heart and hard of hearing. God's man is in their midst trying to tell them about Christ, trying to tell them about the plan of God, trying to help them do better.

They don't want to hear it. They're comfortable. They look at each other and they all agree.

We're okay. This guy is the nut. Let's get rid of him.

Let's tear him limb from limb. Let's lynch him. Well, you and I are seeing this story and so now we have to ask ourselves, am I teachable? Am I amenable? Can God work with me and give me a true view of myself and the way I think and the way I live? This is the gift that Jesus died to give us on the cross.

Relationship with God. A connection to the truth. Why would you want to live a lie? Why would you want this? You remember the movie The Matrix? Why do people want to get out of The Matrix? People say, why don't you just stay plugged in? Why don't you just have a vision of a normal life? Why do you want to live this awful, dark life outside the comfort zone, outside the dream? People say, well, because I want the truth.

I want to see life as it is. I don't want a sugar-coated version. I don't want a deceived version.

I don't want a version that has no substance and no reality. I want life as it really is. Well, this is what God is trying to give us.

Jesus said, if you come to me, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. It is a great life that God offers us, but we have to get out of the rut that these people are in. We have to not be blind.

We have to be able to receive the truth. Now we know this. That's why you're here.

It's not like we had a free giveaway tonight and that's why people came. You're here because you already understand this truth, right? You know that the word of God is important. So the question we ask ourselves now is, if we realize that we need to listen, what should we be hearing? And we find that out in Acts chapter 22 because when Paul finally gets the crowd to be quiet, he's going to give them the truth.

What is the truth? He's finally... He didn't get torn limb from limb. They are finally quiet. What is it to be heard? What is this truth that they should hear and should respond to? Well, take a look at Acts chapter 22 verse 1 because once the Apostle Paul talks to the Tribune, he says, Tribune, come here, let me talk to you.

Back in verse 37 of chapter 21. And the Tribune says, Do you know Greek? Because Paul is speaking Greek to him and he assumes that he's a rabble-rousing Jew of some sort that's uneducated and doesn't know Greek. And what you find here is kind of an odd thing because the Romans are surprised that Paul speaks Greek and at the beginning of chapter 22, the Jews are going to be surprised that he speaks Hebrew.

Everybody gets a taste of the unexpected here. The Romans, Oh, you speak Greek. And the Jews, Whoa, you speak Hebrew.

So one of the first things we see here, why is this even important? Many times the truth is going to come from an unexpected quarter. It's going to come in a package that we did not expect. It's going to come in a way that we did not anticipate, that we didn't see coming.

Paul isn't a package where people can see him coming a mile off and say, Boy, you can tell he's an Apostle. He's got the Apostle jacket on. It's kind of like a letter jacket, you know, with the sleeves.

Maybe it's a prophet jacket with a camel's hair and he's got bugs and honey with him. Oh, you can tell he's a prophet right away. Nobody knows quite what to make of the Apostle Paul.

They can't tell by looking what he is. The Romans can't tell that he's a Roman citizen. The Jews can't tell that he's a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

He's not immediately visible. He's not laying right out there on the surface to be picked up like a shiny rock. People have to listen to what he says to even have the hope of getting at the truth.

So the first principle for us is we have to be willing to listen. We have to be willing to listen even if something comes from an unexpected quarter, maybe from a quarter where we didn't assign any credibility, we didn't give it any weight. It is one of the most difficult things in the world to be a good listener.

Do you feel like I do in a conversation where sometimes you hear two or three people talking and basically you're just waiting for somebody to slow down long enough so you can say your thing? You have a thought, you don't want to lose it, so you're kind of holding it and say, well now you go ahead and finish that and as soon as you finish, boom, I'm going to launch my thought. Well, I mean, that's normal. I think most of us are that way.

I am certainly that way. But it's a discipline to be a good listener and see if there's something useful, see if there's something good in what is being said, something that you can respond to, something that you can be an encouragement for. And it is a discipline.

It is an art. It is something you can cultivate to be a good listener. The Tribune, if he doesn't listen to the Apostle Paul, is never going to find out that he's a Roman citizen.

In fact, he still doesn't ask the right question here. He still doesn't know that Paul is a citizen. Even after Paul says, I am a citizen of Tarsus, no mean city, nudge, nudge, Tarsus, big Roman city, the Tribune doesn't catch that he should ask a few more questions.

The Tribune still doesn't know that Paul is a Roman citizen. He's going to find out the hard way here in a minute. So, the Tribune, as soon as he finds out that he knows Greek, he says, oh, are you the Egyptian? Let me read you again from Howard Marshall's book here.

The Tribune wondered whether Paul was an Egyptian brigand who had recently stirred up a revolt in the desert. According to Josephus, this is from the Wars of the Jews, the second volume, there had been an Egyptian false prophet who had led 30,000 men to the Mount of Olives in order to capture Jerusalem. He promised that they would see the walls of the city fall down.

He's sort of like a David Koresh type of guy. Remember what Jesus said over Matthew 24? In that day, many will come saying, I am He. A lot of times when we read that, people think that Jesus says many will come in that day saying that Jesus is the Messiah, they'll be claiming Jesus.

That's not what Jesus is saying. Many will come in that day saying, I myself am He. I am Jesus.

I am the Messiah. And there were early sort of foreshadowings of this in the days of the Lord Jesus, and sometime after, many people had the book of Daniel, knew that it was time for the Messiah, and so they said, well, hey, if there's time for a Messiah, why don't I be the Messiah? And that's what this Egyptian guy did. He was an Egyptian Jew.

There was a Jewish community down there in Alexandria. We have some of their manuscripts of the Bible. So this Egyptian Jew came up and said, I am He.

And he gathered a bunch of followers. It probably wasn't 30,000. Josephus says 30,000.

Here in Acts, the Tribune says he had 4,000. And so Josephus probably blew up the number. Brought them to the Mount of Olives in order to take Jerusalem.

He promised they would see the walls of the city fall down. The governor, Felix, killed or captured his followers while the prophet himself managed to escape. Clearly, the Tribune thought that this person had reappeared.

So he says, oh, are you the one that got away? Obviously, you're able to stir up a big crowd of Jews here. Maybe you're this Egyptian. You're a Greek-speaking Jew.

Most of the Greek-speaking Jews had come up from the south. So Paul says, no. I didn't lead the 4,000 assassins out into the wilderness.

The Sicarii, this is the word. They were called Sicarii because the Sicar in Latin was a short dagger that these assassins would use. And they were sort of, it's kind of like the little wiggly knife you see in the Middle East sometimes, that little snaky-looking knife.

Well, the Sicarii was that type of a little dagger that was used by assassins. They could sneak it in their sleeve. So they called them the Sicarii, the dagger men, if you will.

Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city. I beg you, let me speak to the people. So the tribune gives him permission.

Paul stood on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. When there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, brethren and fathers, hear the defense which I now make before you. When they heard that he addressed them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet.

He said, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel. We saw Gamaliel back in Acts 5, verse 34, I think, around in there, where Gamaliel, when Peter and John are arrested, and they're arguing that they should kill them, and Gamaliel says, look, not a good idea. These guys that rise up and have a temporary following, they're going to disappear.

And if it is from God, you don't want to stand in the way. So Gamaliel was popular and well respected, it says, over in Acts chapter 5. This is 20 years later. And all he has to do is mention the name Gamaliel, and people know who he's talking about.

He was very famous. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. Educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today.

What did Paul's zeal do in the early chapters of Acts? Acts 7 and 8 and 9. He held the clothes while they stoned Stephen. He was on his way to Damascus. He was responsible for the imprisonment and the murder of many Christians because of zeal.

He says, I was like you once. I was zealous. I was all caught up in my cause, thinking my cause was right.

And look at the harm that took place. Paul says, of all sinners, I am chief. Just as you are today.

I persecuted this way to the death. Now, he's gotten a hearing. What is the big problem? Why is there a riot? There are accusations against Paul, saying you're leading people astray.

You're telling them not to keep the law of Moses, not to circumcise their children. So Paul, as soon as he gets everybody quiet, does he say, Men and brethren, I'm not telling you not to circumcise your children. I'm not telling you to forsake the law of Moses.

Didn't you see me down here in the temple? Look at my shaved head. I've been down here sanctifying. Where are these four guys? Will you four guys please raise your hands? See their shaved heads? I paid these guys' expenses.

I am all about the law. I'm a big time Hebrew of the Hebrews. Is that what he says? What does he do? He says, look, I was just like you.

I am one of you. He speaks in their language. Identification.

Drawing them in, right? I persecuted this way to the death. Binding and putting both men and women into prisons. The high priest and the council of the elders over here, the Sanhedrin, they can testify.

It wasn't that long ago, 20 years ago, a lot of these men were on the board at the time. I received letters from them to the brethren. Started off for Damascus.

Look, it says, from them I received letters to the brethren. What kind of brethren were these letters to in Damascus? Fellow Jews. He says, brothers, I was a part of the brotherhood.

I had letters from your foremost leaders here to other brethren in Damascus. I was in the very thick and life blood of this whole group. Just like you.

Started for Damascus to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. But, it happened as I was on my way approaching Damascus about noontime. And now he's going to tell us the story of the Damascus Road.

What is Paul trying to do here? He establishes rapport with his group. He speaks their language, literally. He reminds them that he is one of them.

But, he's not making a defense against those charges, is he? We would be saying, now you say that I am leading people away from the law. That's not true. What does Paul do? He is making an issue out of Christ.

And, this is what one should do. Now, I've argued that I don't think Paul should have ever

come to Jerusalem. But, he's here.

And, this is what he does. He does not defend himself. He says, look, what I am doing is a result of an encounter with Christ.

It's the Lord Jesus Christ that gave me these instructions to do what I am doing. He doesn't directly bring up the charges or refute the charges. He says, you know, this conflict is about Christ.

I was confronted by Christ. I changed my mind. The reason I am not in your group anymore is because of Christ.

I fell to the ground. I heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I answered, who are you, Lord? He said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you are persecuting. I am Jesus the Nazarene.

Why does he say the Nazarene? Instead of, I am Jesus the Christ. Or, I am Jesus the Son of God. Have you ever wondered that? Why does he say the Nazarene? What does the Gospel of Matthew say about that name for Jesus? His family takes him up there after he is born in Bethlehem.

Dedicates him at the temple in Jerusalem. Takes him up to Nazareth where he grows up. That the scriptures might be fulfilled that said, he shall be called a Nazarene.

And, we've studied that before. It doesn't say that anywhere in the Old Testament. But, it says there will be a root shoot from the stump of Jesse.

And, the word is Netzer in Hebrew. And, it's a word play. Nazareth, Netzer.

He is the Netzerine. He is the root shoot. Paul is saying, Jesus himself is an offshoot, an offspring from the tribe of Judah.

Jerusalem is the capital of Judea. And, Jesus is part of you just as I am. He goes on to tell this story.

Is it going to work? Not at all. They are going to riot. They are not going to care.

Even hearing this story of Paul's encounter on the road does not shake them out of their blindness. We want to be different. We can ask God.

Lord, help the scales drop from my eyes. Help me to see my life as it really is. Help me to make good decisions.

Help me to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight. We don't want to be in this kind of blindness, do we? It's a waste of time. It's a waste of our life.

Well, we'll pick up this study on Friday night. But, let's close in a word of prayer. Father,

thank you for the privilege of studying your word.

We do pray that you will open our eyes so that we can see our lives and see the truth as it is. So that we can live in a way that glorifies the Lord Jesus who died to save us. We ask it in his name.

Amen.