

Paul's Sermon from the Stairs

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction: Acts 22:1-21

A. Phil. 1:17 - "I am set for the defense of the gospel."

B. Outline

1. The Uprising in the Temple - Acts 21:26-30
2. The Intervention of the Army and Paul's Arrest - Acts 21:31-36
3. Paul's Identification, Petition, and Permission to Speak - Acts 21:37-39
4. Paul's Defense - Acts 21:40 - 22:21
5. Another Riot, Further Identification, and Paul's Release - Acts 22:22-30

C. How Paul made a stand for the faith

1. He clearly identified himself and his credentials - Acts 21:40 - 22:3.
 - a. After Paul had been arrested for inciting a riot, he was permitted to speak to the crowd about the charges brought against him. He used the Hebrew tongue with his Jewish listeners and established his credentials
2. He was honest with his listeners by admitting what he had done in the past (vv. 4-6).
 - a. Being a sinner in the past does not disqualify one from being included among the redeemed in the present. After all, Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and every man is one.
 - b. Paul placed himself on the outer limits of God's saving grace for two reasons:
 - 1) Self-righteousness inherent in his training as a Pharisee, calling himself the chief of sinners (1Tim. 1:15).
 - 2) He persecuted Christians.
3. He made a simple statement of how he was saved (vv. 6-10).
 - a. 1Peter 3:15-17
4. In humility and reverence, he confronted those who accused him of evil motives and sinful actions.
 - a. 1Peter 2:21-23, 4:12-14, 19

D. What were the results?

1. He was released from bonds only to stand trial and eventually be sent to Rome under arrest. To all appearances, it was an ineffective defense
2. But, I do not believe it was intended to have a significant effect in the first century; God wanted Paul in Rome.
3. Rather, I believe it was intended to have its most potent effect today

I. THE POWER OF PAUL'S SERMON ON THE STAIRS

A. In 1747, Lord Lyttelton (1709-1773), a Member of Parliament, wrote a letter to Gilbert West (1703-1756) concerning Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul. Lyttelton's friend, Gilbert West wrote at the same time a book on Observations on the Resurrection of Christ. In the course of their quest to scorn the Bible, both men ultimately wrote in defense of the Scriptures as God's Revelation to humanity. Initially, both Lyttelton and West sat down with their prejudices to overthrow the truth of Christianity, but, in the course of their separate attempts, these two men were converted

by their efforts to put an end to the validity of Christianity. Their findings were published in separate accounts in 1747.

B. In the early twentieth century, two names stand out from skepticism to belief in Jesus: Frank Morrison and C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). Morrison wrote his book in 1930 in defense of the resurrection of Jesus, which was not his original intent. He was an English journalist who set out to prove that the story of Christ's resurrection was nothing but a myth.

C. C. S. Lewis, started out as a skeptic, but he became a believer through analyzing the evidence for the Christian faith. His book *Mere Christianity* is one of the most outstanding books in the field of Christian apologetics to this day. He writes that one cannot maintain that Jesus was a good man and at the same time deny His claims.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the Devil from Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else he is a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come away with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher."

D. The common factor in the conversions of these four men is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Christ. The conversion of Paul is sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation from God, not some mythological story about the gods of the ancient world.

E. All historians worthy of that title acknowledge the two great events that rocked the Jewish world in the first century was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

1. From a human perspective there was no rational nor practical reason for Saul to convert to Christianity, apart from him witnessing the resurrected Christ in the middle of the day in the middle of a mission for the Jewish council.

2. Now wonder the Way was such a threat to the Jews of the first century.

II. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF THE FAITH

A. Paul was not swept up in some foolish enthusiasm for a fashionable new doctrine. It certainly was not fashionable, and Paul was not given to foolish enthusiasm.

1. He was an educated, rational thinker. No one could write the book of *Romans*, a complex study in perfectly constructed logical arguments for Christ and be a fool at the same time.

2. His two descriptions of his own conversion reveal soberness and gravity in his reaction to the Lord's call and decision to serve Him

B. Paul paid a steep price for obedience to Christ: fortune, reputation, and friends

1. Phil. 3:4-11 - In prison, Paul wrote this letter from Rome about AD 61.

2. If the encounter with the resurrected Christ did not take place, we wonder why he gave up his friends, relationships with colleagues, and possibly members of his own family

- a. Gal. 1:11-17

C. What Paul lost

1. Gal. 1:14 - If Paul had not had a visit from the risen Christ, why would he have chosen humiliation and poverty and persecution over fame, fortune, affluence, prestige, status, and power.
2. As a result of his actions against the Pharisees, horrible retribution was inflicted against him that would have frightened away any impostor, fake, or fraud, especially one knowingly engaged in a hopeless scam.
3. For Paul to endure such harm, he would have to be absolutely out of his mind to defend what the religious leaders hated with passion.
4. Prior to Paul's conversion, he shared that fury - Acts 9:1-2
5. What force could possibly have the power to change his mind and his heart and his lifelong faith except seeing the resurrected Christ?
6. His conversion is the unanswerable argument that infuriated and stymied the Jews

- a. 2Cor. 11:23-33

D. He sacrificed all interest in personal glory and power

1. 1Cor. 4:9-13; Eph. 3:8-9

E. He never exalted himself above anyone in Christ, nor did he assume pre-eminence over other apostles.

1. 1Cor. 15:9-11, 1:12-17, 3:5; Phil. 2:14-17
2. Are these the words of a fraud? 1Cor. 2:1-5
3. Why would an up and coming young lawyer, the darling of the Sanhedrin, being groomed for greatness give up any hope of advancement in exchange for humiliation and rejection?

F. He had to use borrowed power and give credit to others

1. 1Thes. 1:4-5; John 3:1-2; 2Cor. 12:11-13
2. If Paul were a fraud or a lunatic, would the power of the Holy Spirit operated through him so effectively before so many people?

Conclusion:

A. Paul's conversion is the definitive apologetic for the authenticity of Christianity. There is only one reason for believing Paul's conversion to be true, and that is: one cannot help but believe it is true. The evidence is overwhelming. Either Paul saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, or else 2000 years ago a Jewish doctor wrote the most carefully constructed fraud in the history of the world. Why else would a man whose star was rising among the Jews chose a faith that took him from riches to rags?

B. 1Cor. 15:12-19; 2Cor. 5:17-21; 1Cor. 4:9-13