

Book of Acts Series - Part 39 | Finishing the Work

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of bearing witness to Jesus, even in the face of adversity and fear, and highlights the role of the church in spreading the gospel to a world in need.

Duration: 27:17

Scripture: Genesis 41:40-44, Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 16:16-18, John 3:16, Acts 23:11, Romans 1:16, Philippians 1:6

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of bearing witness and giving testimony about Jesus. He highlights the uniqueness of each person's testimony and how God counts on us to share it. The speaker uses the example of the Apostle Paul, who was ordered to bear witness in Rome. He encourages the congregation to be bold in sharing their testimonies, whether through short-term mission trips or in their everyday lives. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God's strength and grace to help them bear witness to who Jesus is.

Transcript

Paul is completing his third missionary journey in our series we've been doing in the book of Acts. He ended up in the temple where he was grabbed and mauled. The apostle Paul, the Jewish people who did not believe his message that the Messiah was Jesus, and had come and they had rejected him.

He's saved literally by the Roman soldiers, and now the Roman soldiers don't know what to make of him. They find out he's a Roman citizen, and now they're trying to figure out what do we do with this guy, because this crowd wants to kill him. What's he guilty of? What did he do? So we find this passage in the book of Acts.

The commander wanted to find out for sure what the Jews were accusing Paul of, so the next day he had Paul's chains taken off and ordered the chief priests and the whole council to meet. Then he took Paul and made him stand before them. Paul looked straight at the council, the Sanhedrin, and said, my fellow Israelites, my conscience is perfectly clear about the way in which I have lived before God to this very day.

The high priest, Ananias, ordered those who were standing close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul said to him, God will certainly strike you, you whitewash wall. You sit there to judge me according to the

law, yet you break the law by ordering them to strike me.

It was against the law to strike a fellow Israelite. The men close to Paul said to him, you are insulting God's high priest. Paul answered, my fellow Israelites, I did not know that he was the high priest, for the scripture says you must not speak evil of the ruler of your people.

When Paul saw that some of the group were Sadducees, the others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, possibly almost in panic because of what was happening. Fellow Israelites, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial here because of the hope that I have that the dead will rise to life.

As soon as he said this, the Pharisees and Sadducees started to quarrel and the group was divided. So for the Sadducees say that people will not rise from the from death and that there are no angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all three. The shouting became louder and some of the teachers of the law who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and protested strongly.

We cannot find a thing wrong with this man. Perhaps a spirit or an angel really did speak to him, for he had given his testimony. The argument became so violent that the commander was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces.

So he ordered his soldiers to go down into the group, get Paul away from them and take him to the fort. That night, the Lord stood by Paul and said, don't be afraid. You have given your witness from me here in Jerusalem, and you must also do the same in Rome.

In this picture, in this dramatic scene, there's three parties I just want you to look at. There's the Sanhedrin that is made up of Pharisees and Sadducees. There's the apostle Paul who's there before them.

Roman soldiers brought them down there to learn more about what the charges were. And then lastly, there's the Lord coming at night to stand by him and to speak to him. So let's just briefly see what we can learn.

To understand the gospels and the book of Acts, you have to know a little bit about the makeup of the Jewish religious establishment of that day. It was made up of two leading parties, just like in the Muslim faith. Now you have the Shiites and the Sunnis who fight and are violent against each other.

Back in that day, you had the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees were smaller in number, but they were well connected with the government and they had great power. And they were liberals.

They were liberal Jews. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. They didn't believe in angels.

They didn't believe in the invisible world of spirits. The Pharisees, which were more numerous and had more effect on the people and were looked up to by the people, started their sect began in between the end of Malachi to the birth of Christ during those 400 silent years that we call that because there's no scripture that's given to us in that time period. And their name came from the root of the word separated.

They were the holier than anybody else. They were the ultra Orthodox. They were the Hasidim of their day.

They believed mostly in the oral law. They didn't so much read and propose the Old Testament scriptures, the writings of Moses and the prophets. They knew that and quoted it, but they began a long series of tradition which ended up in a written document called the Mishnah.

And the Mishnah is the collection of all the oral teachings, what all the famous rabbis said. So they would take laws and then interpret the laws from the Bible and say, this is what it means. Then people would interpret what that meant.

And it went on and on so that you had actually more traditional oral laws, then finally written down. Then you had the word of God. Remember where Jesus said, you follow your traditions rather than the word of God.

The Pharisees, of course, were the leading adversaries of Christ. And now he's gone. And Paul preaching the good news of Jesus is standing before the Pharisees and the Sadducees who make up the Sanhedrin, and they hated each other.

So as he's talking there and giving his background, before he can even speak or just starts to speak, the high priest Ananias says, smack him in the mouth. And he does get a hit in the mouth. And then as we saw, he says back to the high priest, who it seems he didn't know it was the high priest, you whitewash wall.

Well, to the Jewish people of that day, any contact with the dead or being around anything that had died was something that would make you ceremonially unclean. Orthodox Jews to this day will not go in a building if they know a funeral is going on, if they can avoid being around that, and it's not one of their own. So to avoid coming near the dead, what would happen is they would paint the tombstones and put little walls around where the caskets were, and they would paint them white so people could see them from afar.

Remember, Jesus said, you're whitewashed walls. He said himself, what does that mean? You look good on the outside, but inside you're full of dead men's bones. You're full of corruption, but you look good on the outside, you've been painted white.

He picked up that visual example that they all knew about. After Paul says that, they rebuke him. And he goes, oh, I'm sorry.

I didn't know that that was the high priest. This is a very controversial part of scripture because we're not sure what's exactly happening here. And it could be that Paul had been caught losing his temper from all the strain of everything.

He apologizes that I shouldn't have spoken that way for the scripture says you shouldn't speak evil of the ruler of your people, quotes from the Old Testament. And then out of nowhere, almost possibly, we don't know what the span of time, to just distract everything and to get himself together, he says, wait a minute, I'm a Pharisee. His background was Pharisee, but he was a Christian.

I'm a Pharisee. I'm the son of a Pharisees. And you know why they're all attacking me here? Because I'm preaching that there's resurrection of the dead.

He didn't mention Jesus's name, but that was his testimony. This Jesus who died and rose again, spoke to me on the road to Damascus. So that's what this is all about.

I declare to you that I, what I'm being judged on is I believe in the resurrection of the dead and that the Pharisees were like, yeah, we believe in that. And the Sadducees said, get out of here. Be quiet.

We don't believe in that. That's a bunch of craziness. And a fight broke out between the two of them.

The focus went off of Paul, but it got so wild that the soldiers had to come and grab him out of there before he got caught up and hurt. That night, the Lord came and stood by him and said, don't be afraid. You've borne witness to me here in Jerusalem.

And now you're going to bear witness to me in Rome. And earlier on in the book of Acts, God had put it in Paul's heart. I got to get to Rome.

I believe the Lord wants me to go to Rome and he's going to go to Rome, but not in the way that he thought he would go to Rome, which is the way God often does things. He puts a desire in your heart and he fulfills it, but not in the way that you thought he would. He answers, he's faithful, but not in the way that we thought.

Just like Joseph in the old Testament went to the right hand of Pharaoh and he had was, became a ruler over his own siblings, but not in the method that he thought it could ever happen. God's ways are not our way. So what can we learn about all of that? I want to make this brief.

Paul is human. It's my judgment that Paul made a mistake here because compared to Jesus, when Jesus was struck, what did he say back? Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth. While he was speaking, he would be bold.

He would give truth. Always remember this brothers and sisters, truth always cuts. If we have meetings and sermons and preachers and nothing ever bothers you or cuts you or cuts me, then we're just having religion.

But truth always cuts, cuts away bad stuff, but it cuts. This is why Jesus ended up on a cross. He didn't entertain the people and tell jokes.

He spoke the truth in love. Paul spoke the truth in love, but truth cuts because men love darkness rather than light. And when you present light to them, there comes a conflict.

So it shows, and yet the Lord comes to him and encourages him that night. I'm so glad that God is merciful. And when we lose it sometimes and speak ill advisedly, he doesn't throw us away.

How many say amen to that? How many like Paul and like me, most of all, how many have made mistakes since you've been a Christian? A lot of mistakes. Wave your hand at me so I can just see it. And how good is God? Am I right? Is he merciful? Is he full of love? Come on, let's say amen to that.

If you stretch a rubber band and it's a Christian rubber band, it can still break. You put anyone under enough tension and think of what's happened to Paul. He almost got killed.

If you haven't been here, the previous message was about the fact that they were close to killing him. They pull him out of the temple, going to kill him. The Romans come in, he's been beat half to death.

And now he's standing there and someone just gives him a wallop in the mouth and he reacts. And he says, God will strike you, you whitewash wall. And then when he's corrected by unbelievers in Jesus, he takes it.

He says, you're right. I'm sorry. I didn't know that was the high priest.

So the Bible says, the word says in the old Testament, shouldn't speak evil of the leader of your people. So we're humans, aren't we? What was the great thing about this story? Why did Luke put this into the book of Acts? What's the point of it all? The point of it all is it highlights what all of our lives are supposed to be about essentially. The Lord peers to Paul to encourage him.

What I like about that so much encourages me. Paul has failed probably and spoken ill advisedly, and yet the Lord doesn't throw him away. Thank you, Jesus.

Number two, he's really under the gun because now he thinks, I'm not going to make it to Rome. These people are going to kill me. I'm not going to get out of here.

Why else would the Lord say to him, don't be afraid? Because Christians get afraid sometimes. The Bible is so clear about this that even though we're Christians, we have this treasure in earthen vessels. We can lose our temper and speak ill advisedly, but thank God he doesn't throw us away.

Number two, we can be under strain. The Bible tells us that in that moment of crisis, the Lord came and appeared to him, stood by his side and said, don't be afraid. I want to say to any of you that are here today, it looks bad for you right now, but you love the Lord.

You know what? I can't make him stand by your side, but I'm looking at you and I stand by your side. I'm telling you, don't be afraid. The Lord is going to see you through.

The work that he has begun in your life, he's going to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. God would not start something and not finish it. Come on, let's say amen to that.

If you're up against it and the bottom just dropped out, the Lord wants you to know today, don't be afraid. Fear is never of God for he has not given us a spirit of fear. If you're anxious, you're having all kinds of attacks of what's going to happen to me.

That is not of the Lord. The Lord wants you to be of good cheer and rest in him. Though you don't understand what's happening, he's got the whole world in his hand.

He's going to see you through this thing. He's going to help you through this thing. And he came to Paul and he said, don't be afraid.

So listen, because even as you've borne witness of me in Jerusalem, you're going to bear witness to me in Rome. That's interesting. The gospel must go to Jerusalem where Jesus is crucified, was crucified, and where the Jewish people had their capital.

But the gospel must also go to the Gentile capital of the whole Roman empire, Rome. The gospel will be spread to Jerusalem among religious people. It will be spread among the people who have 10,000 gods, the Roman culture, for you must bear witness of me.

See, that's the whole point. The role of the church, the role of pastor Symboli, your role, the major thing about your life is you're supposed to bear witness about Jesus. You're not an apostle.

You'll never be arrested probably. Fortunate for us, we probably won't face a firing squad. We won't be tortured like people are being tortured today for their Christian witness.

But the Lord appears and says, don't be afraid. You must bear witness for me in Rome, just the way you've done so well in Jerusalem. Well, what does the witness do? A witness provides evidence.

Did you know that's the great thing that God's looking from all of us and from this church, whether it's overseas through missionaries, whether it's right here in Brooklyn, Bronx, Canarsie, Manhattan, we're to bear witness to who Jesus is. Who else will do it? This is an amazing thing about the Bible. The Bible says angels can't do it because they'd never been saved.

The only people who can effectively bear witness, it seems, Jesus in this warfare against darkness, in this warfare against black magic and voodoo, in this warfare against the destruction of people's souls through the plots of Satan and his minions, evil spirits. Jesus spoke about these things. In case you think I'm being fanatical, I'm just quoting Christ.

In this spiritual warfare that's going on in the earth today, God says, no, I've sent a savior and I'm going to call out a group of people who will belong to me and I will deliver them. But the instrument I'll use is my own people. I will not use angels.

I will not speak through the clouds. I will not use the Pacific or Atlantic Ocean to deliver the message. My own people will bear witness to me.

They will tell people that I am the son of the living God, that I was sent by God because he so loves the world that he sent me, he gave me so that people might know salvation. That I died on a cross, that I rose again from the dead on the third day, that I'm now ascended and I sit at the right hand of the father. No, my own people will give that message.

My Pauls and Peters and Jim and Carol and the choir and Jason and Jonathan and Pastor Charles Hammond. We're the only ones who can spread that message. We not only are to tell the message, but it seems like God chose us to do it because we have the experience of it while no one else has that.

The angels can't say he died for me. No angel can say he shed his blood for me. Not one angel can say that.

The only people who can get up and give a testimony and share what the Lord has done is us. And the Lord appears to Paul and says, Paul, you don't be afraid. I'm going to be with you because you must notice, you must bear witness for me in Rome.

How else will people get saved? How will anywhere you live, how will anybody call upon the name of the Lord unless they hear about the Lord? But how can they hear about the Lord unless somebody speaks about the Lord? No, we're going to pray. No, that is unbiblical. Pray all you want, but unless someone speaks, nobody can believe.

You can only believe what you hear, but how can people hear unless someone speaks? So the whole battle that's going on right now is who's going to reach the Briannas in New York City? Who's going to reach them and pray for them and tell them about Jesus and say, don't be afraid. That's not God's plan for your life. God has something better for your life.

That's the warfare that we're all supposed to be in. Every Christian is supposed to be in the army. That was the concept of the Salvation Army of General Booth and Catherine Booth.

Why did they call it the army? Because it's a fight. If you are going to be a Christian, you are in a fight. If you say, no, I don't want to fight, then you can't be a Christian.

All Christians are in a fight. How many understand that? Lift your hand up and say amen. All Christians.

I'm not even talking about the fight on you. If you're sleeping and you don't know what I'm talking about, Satan has you sleeping for a reason. You're not a threat to him.

But if you become a threat to his kingdom, you are automatically attacked because Satan knows exactly who knows the name of Jesus, who uses the name of Jesus. The demons tremble, the mountains shake at the mention of your name, King of Majesty. Come on, let's say amen to that.

But somebody has to speak that name. The only reason Brianna was up here is someone spoke the name of Jesus. Notice she's learning to use the name of Jesus.

Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus. So that's what the whole battle is about. Not being comfortable, not living in the best apartment, not driving the best car, not having the nicest clothes.

That's not what it's about once you become a Christian. You must also go to Rome. Why? To bear witness of me.

So that raises this as I close. If I would say to all of you today and to myself, does God have a plan for our lives? How many would say amen to that? Yes, you believe. Yeah.

Okay. So how has that plan worked out? What do you mean? I mean, how does any plan work out? You have steps in the plan. When the post office is going to revamp something, they said, we're going to change a whole delivery system or whatever.

We're going to deliver things within 24 hours, this new system that I've heard they have. So now they implement steps. So over a period of days, you have to do what you need to do so you can fulfill the plan.

That's the way it is with us. God's trusting us to surrender every day and say, I will bear witness for you. I will bear witness of you.

I will wait for opportunities and I will speak your name. I will not only tell people who you are, I will tell them what you've done in my life. Everyone has a testimony.

How many have a testimony just like Brianna? Different, but you have your own testimony. Lift your hand up. Well, of course.

How else? Why would we be here unless we had a testimony? So my friend, Tim Adams and his wife, they have a testimony much different than Brianna, much different than my sister here and Jerry and all the rest of them. And I have a different testimony and the Lord is counting on us. You must bear testimony for me in Rome also and in Brooklyn.

So the whole purpose is my son, James is going to go places where nobody else goes. He's going to run into people. Pastor Craig was playing golf yesterday and he runs into a guy on the first tee box and they begin to talk.

And by the seventh hole, as he's playing some golf, he's able to mention and witness the name, bear witness to the name of Jesus and who Jesus is. Right on a golf course, in a supermarket, in the building, in your park, not in a church setting always. Although you can bring them to church, but this is what the whole battle is.

This is what the whole warfare is about. What believers in Jesus will get full of his spirit and full of his love and open their mouth and start bearing witness to Jesus. And some of us here, really, if the truth be told, we're a little bit embarrassed because we hardly ever open our mouths and tell people who Jesus is.

We want to stay cool. We want to be accepted by people. It's amazing.

Everyone's coming out of the closet, no matter what lifestyle they have, and the Christians are still in the closet. It's amazing to me. We got, wait, we got secret Christians.

Nobody else is secret about anything now. Am I correct or not correct? I mean, just anything goes. I'm proud.

This is the way I am. This is what I believe in. I'm going to get up in your grill and say it.

But the Christians are like, I'm going to be bold to bear witness for Jesus. Come on, be bold. Okay.

I'm ashamed sometimes when I think of us Americans, Christians, because I was in Bangladesh two years ago, and I met this minister, young guy, his face all scarred, but I knew I had been scarred because I was looking forward to meeting him. I had heard about him. Then we'll sing, but just listen.

He was listening to me preach. Maybe I should have been listening to him. He witnesses in a 98, 95% Muslim nation, some very heated opposition to Christianity there.

He witnesses to some young Muslim woman. She receives Christ like Brianna has, like I have. She goes home and tells her husband, I'm a Christian now.

No more Muhammad. No more Allah. It's Jesus.

He goes, oh yeah. Oh yeah. Wait here.

I'll take care of you soon. Gets a gun, goes, walks up to this guy who I believe was either preaching or counseling someone and shoots him with a small bore gun, shoots him in the face, but doesn't kill him. The bullet ricochets all over his face, all in his head.

He survives and he goes to the hospital and he heals. You know what he did? He went back to the village to tell people about Jesus. What was it that you and I were nervous about? What was the pressure you face? Oh pastor, you don't know my family.

You don't know where I work. You don't know how ungodly this country is becoming. Hey, the dude took one in the face.

The brother took one in the face and then went back to risk his life again. What is my problem? What is your problem? Brothers and sisters, what God said to Paul, you must bear witness for me in Rome. I'm telling you, we must bear witness or God will take the Holy Spirit from the church.

Did you know why God sent the Holy Spirit? To help us bear witness to Jesus, not to have good meanings, not to feel good. That's not why the spirit was sent. I grew up around that stuff.

Why was the spirit sent? So we could have good meetings, Pentecostal meetings. That is not the reason why God sent the Holy Spirit. God sent the Holy Spirit so that when you open your mouth, power will come.

Wisdom will come. When you look for that open door, the door will be open. And when you're speaking and bearing witness to Jesus, giving your testimony to anyone, amazing things will happen.

Amazing things will happen. The alternative is to sit around and have church every Sunday. I'm not down for that.

I am not down for that. I want to bear testimony all over New York and all over the world that Jesus is Lord. Let's pray.

Father God, I pray in the name of Jesus that we will bear testimony for you. The highways and the byways and the streets and the schools and the supermarkets, wherever you open a door, office buildings, among the police officers, the firefighters, the board of ed offices, among the musicians on Broadway. We will have the boldness to speak your name, wait for an opportunity and not be embarrassed or ashamed of the name of Jesus.

For did you not say, if you're ashamed of me, then in that day, I'll be ashamed of you. We will not be ashamed. We will be bold.

You will help us to be bold. How can anyone believe unless we speak? Even as you said to your servant, Paul, as you bore witness to me in Jerusalem, you will also bear witness for me in Rome. God, send us to the Roams of our world, where you want us to be.

Short-term mission trips, long-term missionary assignments, assignments right in the Bronx, in Brooklyn, wherever we might live, going back to North Carolina, the visitors that are here. God, open up our mouths and help us to bear witness and give testimony to who you are. And we know that's what Satan is against, but we plead your strength and grace in Jesus' name.

And everyone said amen. Turn around and hug somebody. Give somebody a handshake.

God bless you.

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