



Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 45 and respond to God with an opening prayer

My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer. You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (Psalm 45:1-2;6-7)

Psalm 45 describes a royal wedding and the bridegroom, which Hebrews (1:8-9) says is Christ himself. In him we have the ultimate king who rules with humility and saving power. Take a moment to start today by meditating on the glorious ways of God and that he has included you in his kingdom plans, and is accomplishing the fullness of our salvation as his beautiful bride.

Acts 21:40 - 22:29

Passage Introduction: Paul's Speech in Jerusalem

Paul begins his speech by addressing the Jewish people as brothers and fathers (22:1). This expresses Paul's desire to respect the crowd, despite the manner in which they have acted toward him. As Paul begins to speak, the crowd hushes in silence (v 2). Why? The text says it is because Paul is speaking in the Hebrew language. Though Roman guards surround Paul, his mind is set on the Jewish people. Paul continually assesses how he can steward his circumstances toward gospel proclamation. How might that encourage you today?

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Use the space in the margin to jot down notes, or themes/ideas that stand out as important.

Acts 21:40 - 22:29 - 21:40 And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: **22:1** “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.” **2** When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: **3** “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. **4** I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, **5** as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

vs. 6-11

People then and now have tried to find any explanation for Paul's experience other than the one which means that it actually happened, that Jesus really is alive and addresses people and transforms them from persecutors into preachers. Paul is not finished with his story, but he has staked out the ground. He has spoken the Name. Now Jesus has led him to face a mob of people just like the person he himself had been.

vs. 25 -27

There were severe punishments for anyone claiming untruthfully to be a citizen. Some sources say you could even be put to death for it. But in fact there was a way of proving it. It may seem unlikely that Paul still had the proof about his person after all he'd just been through, but there was an official badge, a little double-faced tablet, made of bronze most likely, known as a "diploma." It functioned both as a birth certificate and as a citizenship token. This may be another example of Luke assuming his readers would know what was going on without him being explicit.

6 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. **7** I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' **8** " 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. " 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. **9** My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. **10** " 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. " 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' **11** My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. **13** He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. **14** "Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. **15** You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

17 "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.' **19** " 'Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. **20** And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' **21** "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

22 The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" **23** As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, **24** the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. **25** As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" **26** When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he

asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.” **27** The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered. **28** Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied. **29** Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- What does this passage today show me about God for which I can thank or praise him?
- What does this passage tell me about people, myself, my neighbor, or perhaps humanity in general?
- What hope do you find in Jesus that might seem like folly to others?

Key Takeaway:

What truth do I most need to remember from today’s passage? How would this truth change my life if I took it seriously? Why might God be bringing this truth to your attention today?

Close in Prayer:

What are some ways God has called you and equipped you for the work he’s given you to? Give thanks to God for the hope he has given you. Ask God to guide you in how you might use the gifts he has equipped you with for the sake of his kingdom.