

# Acts Series Part 61

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[ 0 : 00 ] Pastor Youssef Nadarkhani is on death row, or the Iranian equivalent. His crime, as I commented in the bulletin today, is the crime of testifying to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The death sentence decreed by the judge provided him with an escape clause. He simply needs to repent of his conversion to Christianity and recant his faith.

The response that he has given to that demand, just in this past week on three occasions in the court, has been reported as follows. Repent means to return.

What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ? First, it's unclear what the current situation is as of today.

There have been reports today that the death sentence has been commuted, or in any case, there seems to be some hope that it will not be carried out. I was trying to find a verification of that report, but was unable to do so.

[ 1 : 12 ] In the absence of that, I would imagine that there is still, at some level, the real possibility. That he could be executed, and that his wife and two children would be left without a husband and a dad.

Testifying to Jesus Christ is no picnic. It is a serious business. And for many, as with Pastor Youssef and many other believers in Iran and in other countries, it is a dangerous one.

We, too, as believers in Jesus Christ, must testify to Jesus Christ. And the verse that I want to consider this evening provides us with important lessons concerning this task that we have been given.

We rejoin at Paul in Jerusalem. You'll remember that he arrived in the city in possession of the repeatedly confirmed prophetic knowledge that he would face arrest and the danger of death itself in the city.

As had been prophesied, he was indeed the victim of an attempt on his life. We read of that in chapter 21, and in verse 31, while they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in uproar.

[ 2 : 46 ] He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd and rescued Paul from the mob. Now, the passage that we are considering this evening really is a follow-on from this same account.

The Roman commander rescued him from the mob. Paul attempted to speak to the crowd, but to no avail. He once again finds himself imprisoned, as it were, there in the garrison, the temple garrison.

And the Roman commander wants to get to the bottom of these things, so he calls the Sanhedrin that Paul might defend himself versus the accusations that they were making against him.

We've read in the passage the debate that ensued there before the Sanhedrin, and it is the final verse, following the conclusion, really, of that debate, that we want to focus our attention on.

We read there in verse 11, The Lord himself speaks of Paul's testimony.

[ 4 : 02 ] And from these words that Jesus addresses to Paul, words whose primary purpose was to bring encouragement and comfort to Paul in a seemingly hopeless situation, from these words we can draw important lessons concerning this duty that is laid upon each and every believer to testify to Jesus Christ.

And I want to divide my thoughts as we consider this verse and what Jesus himself says concerning this matter as he addresses Paul. I want to divide our thoughts in the following way. First of all, consider the content of our testimony.

What is the content of what we must testify concerning Jesus Christ? The second thing, to consider the audience for our testimony.

To whom are we to testify? Then we'll move on to consider the necessity of our testimony. We'll find an important word that Jesus uses that illustrates the necessity of our testimony.

But then finally, also to notice the encouragement for our testimony. First of all then, the content of our testimony. Just what is it that Paul said concerning Jesus Christ that arouses such a violent response from his enemies?

[ 5 : 22 ] There are three aspects of this that I want to note under this heading of the content of Paul's testimony and by implication also our testimony.

Three aspects of this testimony or the content of it. First of all, it is personal. Paul testifies to the impact of the person and work of Jesus Christ in his life.

We have already seen in recent chapters, on recent occasions where Paul is given the opportunity to preach or to give a discourse to varying audiences, we've seen how personal testimony looms large in Paul's discourse.

To a skeptical audience, he declares, this is my story. This is what happened to me. This is how I met Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus Christ has done for me in my life.

He does not shy away from introducing this very personal element to the message that he brings. And on this occasion, the occasion that closes with these words of challenge and encouragement from the Lord to Paul, on this occasion before the Sanhedrin, though the personal element is less prominent, it is nonetheless present.

[ 6 : 45 ] Notice that in his reference to the resurrection, which was the central element of this particular debate with the Sanhedrin, Paul's focus is not only on the fact of the resurrection.

He not only declares that this is something that happened, but he also focuses on what he describes as the hope of the resurrection. Notice there the manner in which he expresses himself in verse 6.

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

And so there we have a personal element. It's not just that he says, I believe Jesus rose from the dead. Though clearly he did, and clearly this was central to his message, no, he speaks of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

He speaks of his own personal hope, that he would rise from the dead, grounded in the defeat of death that had been achieved by Jesus Christ. And so here also, there is this personal element in the content of Paul's testimony.

[ 7 : 59 ] And this personal element is very important. The very word that is translated here in verse 11, testified and then subsequently testify.

These words are, the original Greek word has as its root the Greek word martyreo, which means witness, from which we have the English word martyr.

And so in the very language that Jesus is using, this personal element is integral. Believers testify to what they have experienced, to what they have seen, to what they know to be true from their own experience of the risen Savior.

Our discourse is not a philosophical argument. We don't in some detached way declare, well, these are things that we believe to be true.

That is not sufficient. But no, we testify, we bear witness to what we have seen, to what we have experienced. We think of the words with which 1 John begins, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched.

[ 9 : 16 ] This we proclaim concerning the word of life. Now, our experience of Jesus Christ is not exactly the same as the one that allowed the writer to express himself in that way.

But this element of declaring our own personal experience is central to the content of our testimony, which immediately, of course, begs the question, do we have that experience of which we can speak, of which we can testify?

Are you able to say, I wanted to tell you, my friend, what Jesus has done for me? I want to share with you what he has done in my life, the way he has forgiven my sins, the way he has given me new hope and new joy and new direction.

Is that something you can do? Is there this personal testimony that you can share with others as you would testify to Jesus Christ? The content of his testimony, it was personal, but also it was

factual.

To recognize, as we have just done, that the content of our testimony is personal is not to reduce that content to the merely subjective, by no means.

[10:28] The content of Paul's testimony to Jesus Christ, as Jesus himself recognizes and validates, involved facts. This verse 11 is translated a little more helpfully in the English Standard Version in the following way.

Just listen as I read how that particular version translates this verse. The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

You know, in these words of Jesus, on two occasions, he speaks about testifying. You know, in the version that we have in the church Bible, as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, and then so you must also testify in Rome.

On the first occasion, Jesus says a little more. And that is what the English Standard Version is trying to capture. And I think, helpfully and accurately, in talking about how Paul had testified to the facts about Jesus in Jerusalem.

You see, the gospel message that we declare is grounded in historical events. It stands or falls on the facts that it declares.

[11:48] The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the identity of Jesus Christ, his death, and very particularly, his resurrection. Certainly this was the focus of Paul on this particular occasion.

We've already read, verse 6, how Paul declares to the Sanhedrin, I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul declares what for him is a fact that needs to be grappled with, that needs to be confronted, that needs to be dealt with by all who hear the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified, he died, but on the third day he rose again.

He defeated death. The fact of the resurrection is at the heart of the gospel message. It is something that really happened.

If it didn't, the whole edifice crumbles. We remember how Paul, on another occasion, in writing to the church at Corinth, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, discusses this matter in some detail and to just take one aspect or one small part of what he discusses on that occasion, he said the following, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

[13:13] The testimony of Paul, the content of his testimony was factual. It was presenting the facts of the matter. And we too, as believers in Jesus Christ, must testify to the facts concerning Jesus Christ.

For that to happen, of course, we need to know them, we need to be familiar with them, and we need to declare them. Declare them winsomely, but also with confidence and with security and with authority.

And as we do, some will be intrigued, others will view us with patronizing condescension, yet others may be discomfited or even offended by our confidence in these truths.

But so be it. These are the facts of the matter, and this is the heart of the matter that Paul, on this occasion, focuses in on. Jesus Christ, He is risen.

He is risen indeed. And as we declare this message, we declare the facts of the matter. And some will reject and some will embrace, but this is what we must do.

[14:19] The content of our testimony is personal, but it's also factual. But there's one other element that I want to notice before moving on, and that is the content of Paul's testimony was contextual.

Contextual. Now what do I mean by using this particular word? What I mean is that Paul knows his audience and both selects and presents his material in a manner that is suited to his audience.

We're told that very explicitly in verse 6. Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the other Pharisees. So what we're being told very clearly by Luke is that the message that he brought was a message that was molded by an appreciation of who it was that was in front of him. You know, he didn't have a view that, you know, one size fits all. You know, I've got my plan of salvation. You know, this is what you've got to do, and this is what I'm going to tell everybody, whoever they are and whatever their circumstances are.

No, he is careful to contextualize, to understand the context in which he is, the audience that he is addressing. He scratches what it itches.

[ 15 : 31 ] He finds bridges and points of contact, and he also knows how to stir things up when that will serve a purpose. On this occasion, he provocatively plays to the theological conflict that there was between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection.

The account tells us what it was, in essence. The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, but the Pharisees acknowledge that there is. Now, Paul knew that, and so what does he do?

He throws in this truth concerning the resurrection, knowing full well that this will generate a debate, that this will certainly curry favor in some regards with some of his audience and, of course, cause great offense to others.

But the last thing he wants is that the response be one of disinterest and apathy. Is that not the worst response we can get? Disinterest and apathy, and so certainly Paul was never guilty of boring people.

And so he, knowing who's in front of him, he ensures that the message he brings is appropriate and that will serve the purpose that he has.

[ 16 : 41 ] By no means will it result in people always agreeing with him or accepting what he has to say far from it. On this occasion, once again, he finds himself, indeed, his very life threatened by those who opposed him.

And as we consider that and as we would apply it to ourselves, we too, as we would declare, as we would testify to Jesus Christ, we must be careful to know our audience, know it is who we are speaking to.

Perhaps it's a one-to-one conversation to try and establish just where that person is coming from. You know, what they already believe, what their prejudices perhaps are, what their upbringing is.

You know, what things they have heard in the past or any number of elements that could be important in better presenting to them the good news.

Now, clearly, there will be circumstances when we're not able to know all of these things. But in the measure that we are able to know who it is that we are addressing, be it an individual or be it a group of people, then Paul gives us this instruction that it is good to know our audience and as we know our audience, also present the message in a way that is suitable and will have the impact that we are looking for.

[ 17 : 59 ] The content, then, of his testimony. But also, at the beginning, I said that in this verse we have instruction concerning the matter of the audience, the audience for our testimony.

Again, if we think of Paul and if we ask the question, who determines the audience for Paul? Well, the verse, verse 11, alone is sufficient for us to answer that question and say that it is the Lord Himself by means of the providential ordering of Paul's circumstances and also by the explicit directing of his ministry.

Here, we think of the two places that are mentioned by Jesus here where Paul had testified and was to testify. First of all, Jerusalem. Why was Paul in Jerusalem? Well, remember a few weeks ago when we were considering chapter 20.

What does Paul himself say there? Recorded for us in verse 22, he says that he was compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. So why is Paul in Jerusalem? Why is he there? Why is his audience the good citizens of Jerusalem?

Why is his audience the Sanhedrin? Why is he there? He is there because God had placed him there and God had placed him there that he might testify there to Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 15 ] And why would he subsequently testify in Rome? Well, he would subsequently testify in Rome because the Lord was sending him to Rome and the Lord would open the doors required to ensure that he made it to Rome.

So you must also testify in Rome is what the Lord says to Paul. What about us? Well, you must testify where God has placed you.

He has brought you to Aberdeen. He has placed you in the office where you work. He has placed you in the university or college where you are studying. He has surrounded you by the family that you have, by the acquaintances that make up your circle, of friends and acquaintances.

They are your God-appointed audience. It's not something fortuitous that these are the people who surround you. This is no matter of chance. God has determined that this is where you are and these are the people that you meet and mix with and have the opportunity to speak to.

They are your audience as Jerusalem was the audience for Paul, as Rome would become the audience for Paul. So for us, it is where God has placed us and indeed where in His providence He

will take us in the future.

[ 20 : 34 ] It is to them that you must testify to the facts about Jesus Christ. And so, I ask the question, do you do that? Do you do that? Do you testify to Jesus Christ, to those who surround you, in your workplace, among your classmates, among your friends and family?

Do you do that which God has placed you there to do? Will you? Are you forever waiting for the right moment? Just not quite the right moment.

Just waiting for that opportunity when everything seems to come together and you can say a word. And maybe you've waited months and maybe you've waited years and that right moment never seems to appear.

Perhaps it's time you grasped the moment. Perhaps it's time you made the moment. There is an audience for our testimony and as with Paul, the audience are those who surround us, whom God has placed us among.

But we notice at the beginning also that in this verse there is what we could call the necessity of our testimony. Notice the language that Jesus uses particularly as he speaks of Paul's subsequent task of testifying to Jesus in Rome.

[ 21 : 50 ] What is it that we read there in the final part of verse 11? So you must also testify in Rome. So you must also testify in Rome.

The language that the Lord uses is the language of obligation. The language of urgent necessity. Jesus is not recommending to Paul that he might give some thought to the possibility.

He's not saying to Paul, Paul, you know, I think it might be a jolly good idea if you would testify in Rome. Why don't you think about it? You know, look at your diary, see your plan, see if it could fit in, and if it fits in, well, on you go, Paul, and, you know, do your best.

No. What Jesus says is you must testify in Rome. Paul doesn't have the luxury of considering this or determining if it fits in with his plans.

No. The Lord has determined there is a necessity to his testimony. He must testify in Rome. Why? Because the Lord has so determined.

[ 22 : 55 ] Why? Why was it so necessary that Paul would testify, not only in Rome, but whatever it is that God would place him? Why is it necessary for us to testify to Jesus Christ?

Well, we can answer that question in different ways, different complementary and intertwined answers. There is the necessity of the divine decree.

God had so determined that in this case, Paul would testify in Rome, and so it must be. The divine decree must be fulfilled. God has determined, and it is necessary that that decree come to fruition in Paul's obedience to it.

there is the necessity that the name of Jesus be made known. It is necessary that the name that is above all names be made known. It is necessary that all be told the facts about Jesus Christ.

Both the honor that Jesus is due and the need in which all stand of Jesus make it necessary that his name be made known.

[ 24 : 06 ] not only something that is convenient or something that is nice or good. No, it is necessary that the name of Jesus Christ be made known to all men.

But there is also the necessity of rendering obedience to Jesus Christ. Jesus has commanded Paul, and Paul must obey. He is under orders, and to Rome he must go.

What about us? Well, there is also this necessity laid upon us. You must testify in Aberdeen.

You must do so. You don't have this as some optional extra. This isn't something that, well, some people, they're good at this kind of thing. You can't say, well, I'm so shy about talking to people, and that's just not me.

No, that isn't an option. There is an imposed necessity on you as a believer in Jesus Christ to testify to Jesus Christ. There we have this pastor in Iran.

[ 25 : 10 ] He's willing to die for testifying to Jesus Christ, and yet you, because of some fear of social embarrassment, remain dumb. Is that possible?

Is that reasonable? Is this something that will please the Lord? The Lord who said to Paul, you must testify in Rome, and who tonight says to me and to you, you must testify in Aberdeen.

The name of Jesus, the honor that he is due, demands it. The need of those around us demands it.

The obedience that we must render to Jesus Christ demands it.

The necessity of our testimony. But then finally, in this verse, we have also what we could call the encouragement for our testimony.

Let's work on the assumption that we have come to the point of knowing that we need to testify, that we know who we must testify to. We grasp something of the necessity of our testimony, but you know, it is tough.

[ 26 : 15 ] We do find it difficult. I find it difficult, and you find it difficult. And I would say to you this evening, Christian friend, take heart.

Paul also found it difficult. See, this is why Jesus comes to him, and he says to him, take courage. You're the great apostle Paul. He also found it difficult when he is faced with danger, and with rejection, and violence of one kind or another, and he languishes in these barracks in the temple garrison there in Jerusalem.

And it is necessary for the Lord to come and say to Paul, Paul, take courage. Take courage. You have been faithful in Jerusalem, and you will be faithful in Rome.

I will give you the strength. I am with you. I will give you the words to say. My spirit is in you. Take courage, Paul. There is encouragement given to Paul that he would continue to testify.

And the encouragement that the Lord brings is personal. It is for Paul there where he languishes in the garrison in Jerusalem. It is honest in its content. Jesus knows that Paul is afraid.

[ 27 : 29 ] Jesus knows that Paul is concerned as to what will happen as he continues to declare as he has done. the facts concerning Jesus Christ.

But the encouragement of Jesus is also expectant. Jesus expects of Paul. As Jesus comes and says, take courage, there is in Jesus an expectation that Paul will respond and will indeed continue to testify to him, and very particularly in Rome.

And so it is for us as Christians, as believers in Jesus Christ, as disciples of Jesus Christ, here where we are in this city. Tonight, through the word of God, applied to your heart by the spirit of God, the Lord addresses you.

He comes to us just as vividly, just as clearly, just as truly as he came to Paul that night and stood near him. He stands near you tonight and he says to you, testify to me.

Testify the facts concerning me. Tell others about me where you are. Testify about me in this city. Testify about me in Aberdeen.

[ 28 : 50 ] These are the words that the Lord addresses to us this evening. Now it is for us to determine how we will respond to them. Let us pray. sucker goes on, see you next time because a fresh is comun expressions of God against you.

Next time the man says, weh Lord will give youhui, what the hell of God is and the wind is What? What are you doing there here?