

5/12/24 - Acts 21:37-22:21 - "The Familiar Hand & The Unfamiliar Path"

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[0 : 00] Listen to these words from our Lord, starting in Acts chapter 21, verses 37. We'll be reading through chapter 22, verse 21.

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, May I say something to you? And he said, Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness?

Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. 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, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.

And he said, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, as all of you are this day.

[1 : 22] I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

From them, I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand of those who were with me and came into Damascus.

[2 : 32] And one, Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very hour, I received my sight and saw him. And he said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth, for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

And now, why do you wait, rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name? When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.

And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another, I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[3 : 53] Praise the Lord for this time to enter into this series. My name is Brent. I serve here as the lead pastor. If you're new with us, it's great to have you here.

And what we had just read for us today is like no ordinary text that you may find on a bookshelf. We believe that these words are inspired, perfect, without error, and hold authority over our lives and something words that we submit our lives to.

In other words, it's God's word for us today. And so if you're new, this is all new to you. Open one of those Bibles that are found in the chairs.

Turn to Acts chapter 21. And keep your finger through the numbers of the verses as we go through, because that will help you to see that it's not my opinion.

It's not my prerogative. It's not my agenda here. This is God's agenda through his word. Amen? Amen. And so as we look through this, we're going to see that life is certainly messy.

[5 : 04] But we'll also see today that we can identify God's hand even amid the mess. As we enter Paul's sixth speech in this book called the book of Acts, and actually his second retelling of his conversion experience, we must recognize that we're in chapter 22 of a 28-chapter book.

We're nearing the end. How is the road ending for Paul? Well, last week we saw that it's getting a little dicey.

Paul was nearly killed in the temple. He's here with chains. We see the road even leading up to this incident has been really interesting.

If we were to look back at the entire book of Acts, you might see two chunks, one relating to the mission of Peter, the apostle Peter, and then the other half relating to the mission of Paul.

So from Peter from chapter 1 to chapter 12, or Paul from chapter 13 all the way to the end, chapter 28. As we reflect the road previous, we might see it broken up into three different parts that kind of like fall in accordance with Acts chapter 1 verse 8, where Jesus commissioned the apostles to be his witnesses in the world.

[6 : 34] And we see that the gospel was in Jerusalem in chapter 1 through 6, spread to Judea and all Samaria, Samaria and all Judea in chapter 6 through 12, and the gospel reaching the ends of the earth, where we're at right now with Paul in chapter 12 through 28.

The gospel is going. And as we reflect back, so is Paul in this passage. Paul's going back to a story he's already made known to people.

It's a story that Luke has already put together back in chapter 9. And what unfolds in this text is literally a man bound with two chains, reflecting back on things that are certain in the past, as he is facing situations quite uncertain.

Certainly he's at the end of, towards the end of his accounts and his mission into the ends of the earth, as we're in chapter 22.

And this is his defense, church. The form of this reflection, as Paul is thinking back and proclaiming to these people, he's reflecting back, and this reflection acts as a defense to his entire case.

[7 : 58] He's defending it for his life against the Jews in Jerusalem who are calling for his death, against the three accusations we saw last week in the text, that Paul is anti-Semitic in chapter 1, 21, verse 27.

He's anti-Moses, and he's anti-temple, as he defiled the temple of the Jews, presumably from the Jewish audience. But what is Paul facing?

He's looking back upon what is certain, and this is important for us to be hearers today. What is he facing right now? He's facing uncertainty, as he's defending his case.

In fact, as we unpack this passage, we will see that his entire commission from God has led him down an unfamiliar and strange path.

This is nothing that he would have ever guessed that he's on today. But it was a path that's led to hope for him in the present, uncertain situation.

[9 : 13] And by the end of our time, I believe the same hope will be unfolded for us today. And the main point that we'll uncover today in the text is that the unfamiliar path of God will always be guided by the familiar hand of God, according to the sovereign plan of God.

And we'll see all of that blossom for us by the end of our text today. I want us to dive into this sermon title, The Familiar Hand and the Unfamiliar Path.

And I want us to really see this unpack, bloom for us today along four different paths. We're going to kind of break the passage out into four sections.

It's not four points. It's one main point with four sections that will reveal that main point. And we're going to quickly unfold section by section. I've never done a sermon like this in quite a while.

So we're going to be section to section to section to see what in the world Paul is trying to drive home for us and his audience back then. But before we do, let us pray and ask the Lord to help unpack this, not only into our heads, through our ears, but unpack and dwell within our hearts.

[10 : 29] Let's pray. Father, we are grateful for your word that it is supremely authoritative, objective, objective, and good for our souls.

That it directs us in the path of truth in a world full of lies. So help us to see that truth and let it rest deep within our hearts as we depart this week.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And so the first path that we have here is the divine path of credibility.

Things seem to have gone pretty well for Paul in relation to his audience. Picking up in the scene that unfolded last week, Paul was rescued from this mob, from the mob violence by a Roman officer to sort things out.

this thing was mad chaos that we saw last week. Just a complete riot going on in the temple. Hundreds and hundreds of people rushing to kill Paul, swarming him like bees to somebody who disturbed a nest.

[11 : 47] And Paul certainly disturbed a nest. And verse 37 in the passage today, just before Paul is brought to safety, Paul requested the tribune to speak.

And it seems to have surprised the tribune in the passage because he says, do you know Greek? Apparently all along this entire mob, this standing back and seeing from the barracks, he saw what he presumed to be a Jewish nationalist.

That previously, years ago, from this incident, led to a mob trying to overthrow the Roman government. These were Jewish nationalists.

They tried to insurrect the temple using our modern terminology in our day today. Tried to storm the capital and take over. This whole time he was mistaken.

Paul, for this Egyptian false prophet who believed to be God's chosen instrument to drive out those Romans in the name of Jewish nationalism. And this was chaos.

[12 : 56] He didn't even know he spoke Greek. Imagine the look on this tribune's face when he spoke Greek and Paul asked to speak. Paul identifies himself as a Jew from a high-ranking city and he was granted permission to speak.

And standing upon the steps of this Antonia fortress, I did have a pic but I failed to put the picture up on the screen but it's this fortress it's sort of like a castle-like structure on the side of the temple, Jewish temple.

You had the outer court and where was the court in the area of the Gentiles and it overlooked the entire temple. And this is where Paul was granted to speak.

Standing upon the steps of this fortress Paul motioned with his hands Do you see him in your mind? And he addressed the people and he begins this forensic case in defense that will carry us on a few chapters forward.

He begins with an exordium Latin word for basically just laying out the introduction for the case and he says brothers and fathers hear the defense that I now make before you in verse 2 he says that when they heard that he was addressing them in Hebrew language they became even more quiet.

[14 : 22] You see how Paul just his bilingual nature brought credibility they listened he related well to his audience not only the tribune but also this audience he's no ordinary man they became quiet and he said the narratio begins in this forensic case now in verse 3 he brings sort of like ethos exposition of credibility of who he used to be in his previous life he says I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia but brought up in this city educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers being zealous for God as all of you are this day Paul's saying I got the same desire as you I want to worship God he says I even took it a step further guys he says

I persecuted this way to the death the way being capitalized in our text meaning Christians the Christian group was referred to as the way he had the same cause he didn't like the message of the gospel and as the high priest and the whole council of elders he says can bear me witness from when from them I received letters to the brothers and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished I mean this guy had the same desire as these Jews who mobbed against him he has the same cause as the Jews he had the he was a Jewish agent secret agent man of the Sanhedrin to do their bidding Paul relates the common ground that he has with the Jews and identity and purpose in other words Saul's life was good Saul's life was credible what Paul thought was familiar a familiar path by the way was being led by the familiar hand of God but would turn into the greatest unfamiliar journey ahead let's see what

God did next in the story he says in the second path divinely arranged conversion we see this this path to conversion he says in verse 6 as I was on my way and drew near to Damascus this is the path of Saul about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me in verse 7 he says I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me Saul Saul why are you persecuting me and I answered who are you Lord and he said to me I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting church upon Saul's path of rebellion he found himself actually upon the sovereign path of God the light of God appeared and it outshined the sun in the sky at noon on this day what's Paul do next in verse 9 he registers some evidence into the record says now those who were with me saw the light

I'm not nuts people who were with me saw the light first hand eyewitness accounts and they heard they not only saw but they heard a voice but didn't understand the convo they could not see the light or they saw the light but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me the evidence is in the record they're with Paul they saw and they heard a voice but didn't understand the convo as we saw previously in Acts chapter 9 verse 7 and he says in verse 10 and I said what shall I do Lord he's blind he can't see what do I do now and the Lord said to me rise and go into Damascus and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do and since I could not see because of the brightness of that light I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus in other words church the Lord

Jesus himself the risen savior provides blind orders for this man who interrupted his path of rebellion against God interrupted him dead in his tracks and provides these blind orders going a little bit deeper what Paul could not see the Lord could see and put another way it's an unfamiliar path guided by a familiar hand that led up to this point you see the Lord divinely arranged this appointment to reveal himself to Saul and set him upon the blind path could not see ahead but what does God have in store next the third path divine path of confirmation commissioning he says in verse 12 and one

[20 : 16] Ananias a devout man according to the law well spoken of by all the Jews who live there he's a familiar name to those credible himself came to me and standing by me said brother Saul receive your sight and at that very hour I received my sight and saw him Paul moves straight to his encounter of restoration now obviously in comparison to the actual conversion account here his conversion experience that we unpacked back in chapter 9 there's quite a bit of details that are left out as Paul seems to be getting straight to the point you got to appreciate this you might be asking well what's the point well we're almost there in verse 14 he says and he said Ananias said the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will upon this blind path of unfamiliarity to see the righteous one and to hear a voice from his mouth for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard in verse 16 and by and now why do you wait rise

Ananias says and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name in other words from this moment forward Paul's life was changed Paul became a chosen instrument of God his life was radically changed from a path of worldly success worldly credibility friends with the world he was religiously zealous all to be stopped dead in his tracks God chose Paul and God commissioned Paul for his unfamiliar mission and church you're probably asking Brett we've heard all this before we've seen all this before we've unpacked all this before we've heard this in chapter nine and we're asking what does

God have in store next well upon this question leads to a testimony that Paul has never never once yet revealed in the book of Acts concerning the moments the course of God's mission was actually determined which attributed to the chains that bound him what does God have in store next what's the point here's the point this is the reason for the chains he says in verse 17 on the path of confirmation says when I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about me and I said Lord they themselves know that that in one synagogue after another

I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you in other words I'm in with these guys they know me I'm Saul of Tarsus you know how many how many Christians I have beaten imprisoned and killed they'll listen to me and better yet in verse 20 taking a step further they know Stephen and when the blood he says to the Lord in this temple he says the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him he's resting on familiarity to push the mission of the gospel forward but the Lord said to him in verse 21 listen and he said to me go for I will send you far away to the Gentiles what the

Lord told him was he is sending Paul down a path of unfamiliarity his degrees in the law are no good over there in that land they're not going to want to hear from him they're not going to understand anything that he's talking about with the God of our fathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob strange land nowhere but here church do we see the events that transpired in this temple in this day apparently Paul is pro-temple after all regardless of the accusations these Jews are making against him in fact this occurrence from chapter from verse 17 all the way to 21 occurred probably three years after his conversion experience between verse 16 and verse 17 is a undesignated three year time period that lapsed of which

[25 : 44] Galatians 1 informs us about a time where he grew in his faith and church do you see what's unfolding three years after being commissioned Paul received a recasted confirmation in the 15 days that he spent at this time in Jerusalem that we saw in unfolding Galatians chapter 1 it turns out Jesus Christ commissioned Paul to be his witness but not for the people living in Jerusalem not his friends not his homeboys in Jerusalem wouldn't this take everyone by surprise even Paul what did God have in store next uncertainty in the path ahead and unfamiliarity in the path ahead you see church familiarity is man's default while God requires faith in the path of we always go back to the things that we know and we rest on our degrees and our knowledge and our this and that and God is calling us to the unknown as the frozen song goes deep into the unknown trusting in him to guide us by our faith and most of all

Paul defends himself in this speech and the uncertainty in the presence the unfamiliarity of the path what does he do he he defends everything by speaking about Jesus this is absolutely fascinating how Paul do it he says Jesus is alive Jesus saves Jesus directs if only we would rest in such faith like that in defending ourselves not in the worldly credentials not in our track record with our friends and our homeboys in the bar that we used to have and that we'll go back and evangelize but in Christ alone we stand as the only credible witness to the gospel message you see Paul's defense retold the movement of the good news from the historic Israel to the restored people of God Jews and Gentiles which is not only which is not exclusive only to the

Jews as they thought salvation is not exclusive only to Jews but it's inclusive to all who believe on account of faith can you imagine for a moment I wish I had that picture on the screen I failed miserably today I want you to sense the weight of the passage the emphasis along the path of redemption can you see this I mean Paul is just he's at the end of his defense here in 21 and we might as well do an altar call to have people who want to come to know Christ to come forward to come to faith in this God who intervenes along the path of his rebellion who commissioned him it's undeniable the offer to believe in the good news was available to every ear within that temple court and guess what it's available today stepping back we should see this radical reversal in your mind you see the chains that he's bound to are speaking the persecutor became the persecuted it's a great reversal happening in the passage in Paul's unfamiliar path and uncertain path it was that unfamiliar hand though or it was that familiar hand though that guided

Paul's scholarly esteem it guided his life in zeal to the Lord and it's the same familiar hand leading him down this unfamiliar path of God many of us today may have certainly felt as you reflect upon your life and years before your conversion sort of like you were wandering all those years leading to it but today's text reinforces that God's hand was with you all along on that path in fact maybe today the hand of God led you straight here to hear the gospel to hear hope you thought you were here to attend church with mom you're here because God brought you here today to hear the gospel what do you do with the gospel what do these hearers do in the temple what do we do with the gospel that Jesus died the penalty that we deserve that Jesus rose from the grave eyewitness accounts victory over death and that by your faith

God places you with Paul with every Christian of old on a new unfamiliar path of life well sometimes that's the reason for such reluctance no one wants change everyone is reluctant to a new path the unfamiliar but the gospel radically will change your life and maybe today God is calling you from that familiar path you're resting into a new path and so the invitation to you is to come to Jesus Christ Jesus says in Matthew 11 come to me all who labor and are heavy laden are you here today heavy laden burdened by this world Jesus says in chapter 11 I will give you rest take my yoke just like the yoke of a horse take my yoke upon you and learn from me follow with me side by side let me show you how to walk in this life learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light come to faith today and embark upon the uncertain guided by the only one who secures and sustains you see for Paul the intended path that God had in store was very unfamiliar it was strange would have made logical sense from a human perspective to just be a witness to his home boys in

[32 : 57] Jerusalem the ones who knew him right but God said go did not make sense from a human perspective but it begs the question when has God's will ever needed to submit itself to our finite perspectives to make us feel good about the path and the journey ahead where is the faith if all we trust in is our feelings church where is the faith if all we trust is in our feelings you see the unfamiliar path of God will always always be guided by the familiar hand of God according to the sovereign plan of God always and in that we know regardless of our feelings that God saves and he sends and in our pilgrimage we rest in the security of his guiding and familiar hand along the way you wanted a Mother's

Day sermon didn't you today well here it is let me tell you there are certainly mothers here today who embarked upon the uncertainty with kids my wife and I experienced it we didn't know what we were getting ourselves into we thought we were going in for a third kid and popped out two talk about stretching our faith unfamiliarity indeed some future mothers are currently right now struggling today to have kids in fact seeing mothers standing in a church praying for mothers really hits the heart of some mothers who desire so desperately for God to bless them with kids today but guess what remember that familiar hand of God that guides and sustains down this unfamiliar path there's uncertainty God may call us to bear children God may call us to bear children and that's just the beginning of the journey then you gotta figure that out and when you leave the the the labor and delivery floor at the hospital you're responsible for those souls until they turn to an adult age and go off on their own it's all us unfamiliar it's uncertain but it's all according to the sovereign plan of God and we can see his hand that familiar hand guiding us down that unfamiliar path and that journey church he's with you he'll always be with you kids are no kids in this life the familiar hand that was with you as you survey your days maybe you're not a mother maybe you're a drug former drug addict and you see your past just as Saul is seeing the past with his homeboys that knew him you think back to all the people who knew you you see that familiar hand that was once with you that was back with you in the days of drug addiction is guiding you today according to the sovereign plan of

God in sobriety free of drug addiction the familiar hand that was with you in the days of porn addiction is guiding you today according to the sovereign plan of God in purity maybe the familiar hand that you look back upon your life that was with you in the days of homosexual practices is guiding you today according to the sovereign plan of God in pursuing God's sexual design for humanity the familiar hand that was with you in the days of maybe even adultery committing adultery is guiding you today according to the sovereign plan of God just as Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery go and sin no more you got a past great paid for at the cross go and sin no more the familiar hand that was with you in the days of unbelief is guiding you today according to the sovereign plan of

God by your faith you see the gospel changes us radically upon an unfamiliar path and as we survey our lives in the defense of our own faith we cannot simply identify the sin that we found familiar credentials that we find familiar anything that we boast in but we see the familiar hand of God and in that we boast in salvation and our security in this life how does a Christian have hope in the present how does Paul have hope bound in chains motioning with his hands you put put the image in your hand how this looks how pathetic it is as he's addressing this temple full of people that want to kill him Paul look back and we look back as well and recall we see that familiar hand a hand that has never let us go even during the darkest sin that we can recall one thing we can learn from

Paul bound in chains bloody bruised from the swings of his mom and the kicks to his stomach is that the path of God is hard if you signed up to be a Christian for an easy life I'm sorry you're sold a lie the path of a Christian is all but easy if there's any ease in it it is finding rest in the one who brings us rest Jesus Christ alone our relationship with Jesus alone unfamiliarity is hard uncertainty is hard going home with kids in a little basket that you're responsible for yeah that's hard dealing with infertility issues hard looking back at all these things is so hard but as Paul testifies to his hope in the gospel of Jesus

[39 : 33] Christ we are to sustain through the pain through the doubt through the worry through the fear amen God is with us all along upon this path but it is in Jesus who calls us upon a new path reaching out his familiar hands to guide an unfamiliar path may we follow him deeply rooted in faith upon our pilgrimage and journey through this life let's pray so I will live another Richard is a preacher got