

Imperfect Witnesses

S#1.

Text : I Samuels 16: 1-13 ; Acts 22: 1-11

Introduction :

A. The wisdom of God is awesome.

S#2.

1. There is no end to the ways God continues to awe mankind.
2. No man can comprehend the wisdom of God.
 - a. **I Cor. 1: 25** – ... the foolishness of God is wiser than men.
and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
 - b. **Rom. 11: 33** – Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

B. God's wisdom can be seen in the men He chose for great tasks and challenges.

S#3.

1. **Abraham** ... called as a father of God's nation / father of all faithful
 - a. Youngest son of a Mesopotamian shepherd.
 - b. Married to his sister (*childless, middle-aged couple called to father nation*)
 - c. Called him out isolating him in the desert. (**forced to depend on God**)
 - d. Lacking courage, he lied about his wife to avoid danger & conflict. (*Sarah in danger*)
2. **Moses** ... called to give God's law and lead His people out of bondage
 - a. Chosen as an infant, he was a slave, doomed to be put to death.
 - b. Raised in the presence of pagan power .. but fled to the desert to herd sheep.
 - c. Married the daughter of an idolatrous priest – later gave God's law.
 - d. He was eighty years old before he started his work for God.
3. **David** ... Called to be king while only a teenager.
 - a. The youngest of 8 brothers (*no status even in his own family*)
 - b. Called to be king while tending his father's sheep
 - c. Without the appearance of a leader
 - d. Known first as musician

C. God was able to make great leaders out of each of them.

This lesson will center on one of the unlikely men God chose in the Christian era.

S#4.

1. God had a job in mind for him before he was born.
2. His life developed the skills he needed within him.
3. We will then see that this lesson applies to all of us.

I. Saul of Tarsus was an unlikely candidate for Christ in several ways.**S#5.****A. More than David, Paul did not have the appearance of a leader.****S#6.**

1. Remember the prophet's selection of David ... **I Sam. 16:1f**
2. An early church historian (169 a.d.) described the Apostle Paul / Saul of Tarsus as :
 - a. *"He was a man of little stature, partly bald, with crooked legs, of vigorous physique, with eyes set close together and nose somewhat hooked."* (Acts of Paul – 160 a.d.)
 - b. His name was changed from Saul (asked for) to Paul (little one) ... **Acts 13:9**
 - 1) **Eph. 3: 8** ... It's possible **"the least of the saints"** could be applied to his size.
 - 2) **Acts 14:12** .. Lycaonians called him Mercury (Hermes) who was a small messenger.
3. His adversaries ridiculed his physical appearance.

II Cor. 10:10 – For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."

S#7.

4. Paul did not consider himself to be a skilled speaker.

II Cor. 11:6 – But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

*** Did you ever know something well, but feel you couldn't explain it adequately.** **S#8.**

5. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. (*It curbed his tendency toward pride about his knowledge.*)

II Cor. 12: 7 – Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, **S#9.** to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me — to keep me from exalting myself!

- a. **Gal. 4:13-15** –cf- **Gal 6:11** ... Most likely he had a problem with his eyes.

- b. Physical infirmities were considered a curse of God. (ill. – **John 9:2**)

*** God overcame Paul's physical limitations and He can overcome ours.** **S#10.**

B. Paul was the worst enemy of Christianity.**S#11.**

1. He was watering the seeds of the gospel with the blood of Christian martyrs.
2. Steven ... **Acts 7: 58-60** (Cf -**Acts 6: 9** ... Paul from Tarsus in Cilicia.)
3. Persecuted the Jerusalem church ... **Acts 8:1-3**
4. Paul wanted to destroy the whole church.

Gal. 1: 13 – For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;

5. It defied his basic belief system. (*Paul was a radical Jewish cleric. / cf- Islamist*)

*** If God could overcome Paul's past and use him, He can overcome your past.** **S#12.**

C. Paul was a member of the most radical separatist sect of the Jews – a Pharisee.

1. **Acts 26: 5** – since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to **S#13.** testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

- a. Very influential among people ... They were devoted to restoring the theocracy.
- b. Estimated to have only 6000 members ... The Pharisees were powerful politically.
- 2. The Pharisees were strict separatists ... “*set aside ones.*”
 - a. They resisted the cultural influence of the Greeks and Romans. (*Like the Taliban*)
 - b. They resisted Roman rule. (*Sadducees were collaborators*)
- * **God called a divider to unite all peoples in Jesus the Christ.** S#14.
 (**He became the apostle to those gentile whom he formerly hated.**)

- D. Paul was one who sinned and was even guilty of murder.** S#15.
 - 1. He had murdered Christians just because they were believers.
Acts 22: 4 – I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,
 - 2. He called himself the foremost of all sinners ... **I Tim. 1: 15.**
 - 3. He struggled with sin and often lost ... **Rom. 7: 14ff**
- * **God called a weak sinful man to lead sinners to holiness in Christ.** S#16.

II. God used this unlikely candidate to accomplish great things for his cause. S#17.

- A. Only Jesus did more to establish the kingdom than the Apostle Paul.** S#18.
 - 1. Paul wrote more books of the New Testament than anyone.
 - 2. Paul established more congregations than anyone.
 - 3. Paul preached the gospel in the seats of power.
 - 4. Paul established the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.
 - 5. Some Jewish scholars have said Christianity would have failed without Paul.
- B. Paul was specifically chosen by God.**
 - 1. Chosen before birth, he was called for a specific work.
Gal. 1:15 – But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased **16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,** S#19.
 - 2. Jesus personally called him ... **Acts 9: 1-9 / 22: 1-11.**
 - 3. God knows the potential of every man and has a plan for each. (**He knows you.**)
- C. Like Moses, Paul's whole life prepared him for his last 30 yrs of service** S#20.
 - 1. He was born a Jew in the loyal Roman city of Tarsus. ... **Acts 22: 24-29, 19: 21**
 - a. Roman Citizenship enabled him to travel and have access.

- b. Reputation of Tarsus caused Paul (Jew) to be accepted by Romans. (“no mean city”)
 - c. He grew up exposed to many cultures. (University City .. gathering place of scholars)
 - d. He was fluent in multiple languages : Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek (Probably Latin ?)
2. He was an **educated man**. (*God sent him as ambassador to many educated people.*)
- a. Festus told Paul, “Your great learning is driving you mad.” ... **Acts 26:24** –cf– **Ax 4:13**
 - b. Quoted from the poets and prophets :
 - 1) **Acts 17:28** ... Sermon on Mars Hill ... Greek poet “*We are his children.*”
 - 2) **Tit. 1: 12** ... Cretan prophet “*liars, evil beast, lazy gluttons*”
 - c. Academically qualified to stand before educated gentile kings. (cf– **Peter Acts 4:13**)
3. His Jewish education and former position **demanding respect** from Jewish leaders.
- a. He had been a student of **Gamaliel**, the best teacher and a revered scholar.
 - 1) **Acts 22: 3** (History records that Gamaliel became president of Sanhedrin.)
 - 2) Only the most elite were accepted as students of Gamaliel.
 - 3) It was like graduating from Harvard Law School and then clerking in Supreme Court.
 - b. Paul had great influence for a young man. (**Eastern people respect age.**)
 - 1) **Gal. 1: 14** ... He was advanced beyond his peers.
 - 2) Was able to lead the persecution. ... **Acts 8: 1-3**
 - 3) He had access to the High Priests. ... **Acts 9:1-2**

D. Paul’s life experience combined with his faith to give him confidence.

S#21.

- 1. He was afraid, but his faith enabled him to overcome his fear.
 - a. **I Cor. 2: 3** – I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,
 - b. **II Cor. 7: 5** – For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but
(*he reaped as sowed*) we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.
- c. **Acts 23: 2**– The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. **3** Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?”

S#22.

*** There is no fear one cannot overcome for Christ.**

S#23.

ill. - Mothers forget fear when protecting their child. (*apply to Christ*)
(**My mother killed snake threatening me, though afraid of them.**)

- 2. Though he feared, Paul stood before governors, proconsuls and kings.
- 3. Though he was afraid, Paul stood before those who would persecute him.
 - a. After beatings and imprisonments, he continued preaching.
 - b. After being stoned, he got up and resumed his ministry.
 - c. He went to Jerusalem knowing what awaited him there. (**You can overcome fear,**)

III. The same wise God chose you (every Christian) to proclaim His gospel today. S#24.

A. Christians are God's chosen messengers to save the world.

1. **Matt. 28: 18-20 / Mark 16: 16** ... Go teach is a **COMMAND**, not suggestion.
2. **I Pet. 2: 9** – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; S#25.
3. **Col. 4: 5** – Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

B. Many Christians don't think they're up to the task.

1. **Moses** didn't think he was up to the task either, but GOD ...
 - a. God refused to accept excuses from Moses. (*He also refuses them from us.*)
 - b. With God's help, Moses became one of the greatest leaders in history.
 - c. Like Abraham ... The Christian has faith that God will provide and care.
2. **God is able to make you / me up to the task.** S#26.
 - a. Have you asked God to help you / us to be up to the task ?
 - b. Have we, have you really tried to evangelize ? (“ *I can't' never did do anything.* ”)
 - c. God has used your life to prepare you.
(**Every experience of our lives has prepared us to serve God.**)
3. Imagine how **Noah** felt when told to build that huge ark, **BUT** he did the impossible.

C. Many are so afraid to share, they haven't even tried it.

1. Imagine the fear in Abraham when he left home ... **He had faith enough to go.**
2. Imagine the fear in little Paul as he : (cf - **II Tim 4: 17**)
 - a. fought the wild beasts at Ephesus ... **I Cor. 15: 32.** (*Can you face your neighbor?*)
 - b. repeatedly witnessed to the Jews who wanted to kill him.
 - c. stood friendless in Caesar's court ... **II Tim. 4: 16.** (*He prayed for boldness.*)

Remember : **I Cor. 2: 3, II Cor. 7: 5** ... Paul overcame his fears because of love for God.

3. Faith is greater than fear.
 - a. **I John 4:4** – You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. S#27.

You never serve alone. ... **Matt. 28: 20**– I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- b. **Rom. 8:31** – What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

- c. A wise man doesn't fear what might happen if he **does** obey God (share gospel) but fears what will happen if he **does not**. S#28.

Matt. 10: 28 – Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

D. Many don't share the gospel because they have sin in their lives.**S#29.**1. Who among us has killed Christians ? **Paul killed many !!**2. Paul said God chose him because he had been so sinful.

I Tim. 1: 16 – Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost,
 Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an
 example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

3. Having overcome sin gives one a powerful testimony. (**“God can save you too.”**)a. People in the world have sin so they need Christ. (**They're hurting. 30% seeking**)

b. They need to know that Christ forgives even great sins.

c. Hearing how you struggled will help draw people to HIM. (**No one is w/o sin I John 1**)

4. One who has never felt wicked doesn't appreciate Jesus / grace

S#30.**CONCLUSION :****A. How unlikely is it that Jesus chose you / me to carry His message the lost ?****S#31.**

1. No more unlikely than when He chose Abraham or Moses.

2. No more unlikely than when He chose Saul of Tarsus.

3. God knew what was in them and He knows what's in you.

B. Never doubt the wisdom of God.1. **II Thes 2: 13** – We / you were chosen for salvation and for proclaiming.2. **I Cor 12: 18** - God set you in the church just as He wanted you. **He knows you.**3. He entrusted His treasure to us. (**I Cor 4:7 -cf- Matt 25:14-30**)* **God knew / knows what He's doing.****S#32.****C. He allows men the freedom of choice. (He is not ignoring rebellion. .. II Pet 3:9)**

1. People choose to accept or to reject the gospel.

2. Christians choose whether to serve God or to serve themselves.

3. EVERYONE faces the consequences of his decisions.

D. Many “Christians” have chosen to rebel against God. (They refuse to serve.)

1. Day after day they meet non-Christians, but don't take advantage of the opportunity.

2. Week after week they don't bring visitors to services with them.

3. As month after month passes they don't even try to set up bible studies with loved ones.

4. The day is coming when every Christian will give accounting for how he has used the treasure God entrusted to us. (The gospel)

INVITATION : JUDGMENT IS A DAY OF JUSTICE.**II Thes. 1: 5-12****S#33.****S#34.** ... Communion slide

Lesson Text :**I Samuel 16: 1-13**

1 Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 "You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you." 4 So Samuel did what the Lord said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" 5 He said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." 9 Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." 10 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." 11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

Acts 22: 1-11

1 Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."

2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,

3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. 4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

6 But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 "And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' 9 "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10 "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' 11 "But 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.