

*A Study of the Book of Acts
Sermon # 43*

“Finding Courage In Troubled Times”
Acts 22:22-30- 23:1-11

You never know when courage may be required in your life. It could be courage is demanded to face great difficulties in life. It could be courage is demanded to face grave illness. It could be that courage is required to face unexpected tragedy. It could be courage is demanded to stand up for your faith. But where can you find courage in times of trouble?

This morning as we look at Acts 22:23-23:11 we will find Paul standing up with great courage in an extremely difficult circumstance. As we examine Paul’s life it is my hope that we can find resources for courage in our own lives.

*Paul has been arrested because of a riot that took place in the Temple when Paul was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the restricted Temple area. Paul spoke to the crowd and at least for a little while held their attention. We pick up with the story in verse twenty two. **“And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!”**”*

(23) Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, (30) The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.”

*In verse twenty- two it says, “And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” The mob that had tried to kill Paul, and had then listened intently to his whole sermon, erupted into rage over the utterance of **one word**. That one word was “Gentiles.” The Jewish mob was infuriated that God’s salvation, which they had come to regard as they private spiritual possession, would be given freely to believing Gentiles.*

Notice three things that Paul drew courage from!

First, Paul Drew Courage From His Citizenship.

(22:24-29)

“The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. (25) And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemn-

ed?" (26) When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman." (27) Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." (28) The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." (29) Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him."

*As Paul is being stretched out in preparation for the flogging he asked a simple question, "**Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?**" (v. 25). The answer of course is, No! A Roman citizen could not be interrogated by means of torture and could insist on a trial in Italy rather than in one of the provinces.*

We can today draw courage from the fact that we are Americans. Because the power of our government stands behind us, it gives us the courage to stand for what we believe is right. We can draw courage from the Constitution and our Bill of Rights.

*But more than that, we can draw courage from our citizenship in Heaven. Paul reminds the Philippian believers, "**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**" (Phil. 3:20)*

But what does it mean to live as a citizen of heaven? To live as a citizen of heaven is to choose that which brings the most glory to God. To live as a citizen of heaven is to obey God rather than men. To live as a citizen of heaven is to view our lives from the perspective of eternity. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (18) So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 - NIV)

Paul Not Only Drew Courage From His Heavenly Citizenship but....

Second, Paul Drew Courage From His Clear Conscience. (23:1-10)

“Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

The next morning after spending the night in Roman custody the Roman commander has Paul brought before the Sanhedrin. The commander is still trying to uncover enough facts to determine whether a breaking of the law has actually occurred or is just another example of religious squabbling.

The “**council**” (v. 1) is the Sanhedrin with is the highest Jewish religious court. It is made up of the high priest – Ananias (who is appointed by Herod in around 48 AD and ruled for 10-11 years) and a council of seventy elders. As Paul stands before this council Paul chief concern is to be a faithful witness to the Gospel in whatever circumstances he finds himself in.

Once the council has assembled, without any formal charges being made against Paul, he began his defense with what may amount to a “**not guilty plea.**” Paul looked the Sanhedrin straight in the eyes and declared, “**Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day**” (v. 1).

How could Paul say that he had a clear conscience? He had persecuted the church. He was instrumental in the death of many believers, including Stephen. How could Paul then say, “**I have lived my life up to now with a clear conscience?**” Had lived with a clear conscience but he was wrong. It took the Lord’s direct intervention in Paul’s life to show him how wrong he was. He summed up his early life in Philippians 3:6 when he said, “**As for legalistic righteousness, [I was] faultless.**”

We find the word conscience throughout the Bible. The Bible speaks of a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:19), a conscience void of offense (Acts 24:16), and a pure conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). It also speaks about a

weak conscience (1 Cor. 8:12) which is a conscience that is not fully educated in the word of God. The Bible speaks of the conscience of an unbeliever which is called a defiled conscience (1 Cor. 8:7), a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) and an evil conscience (Heb. 10:22). In his letter to the Romans Paul says the conscience has the potential to either accuse us or excuse us (Romans 2:15). So while the conscience is something we can and should listen to, it not an infallible guide to right conduct.

Unfortunately, the conscience is not a reliable guide for life. Earlier in his life, when Paul was seeking to destroy the Christians, he also had a clear conscience. He was convinced that he was doing the will of God at that time as well. Our conscience does not tell us what IS right, it only tells us whether we are living by what we BELIEVE is right.

- *Paul Rebukes The High Priest. (vv. 2-5)*

“And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. (3) Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”

*Paul’s statement about having a clear conscience so enraged the High Priest that he had Paul struck across the mouth. (The term “**strike**” indicates more*

than just a slap, more likely a backhand across the mouth). This was an illegal and unwarranted act.

Now it is Paul turn to be enraged and he responding, “... *God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!*” This is one of those times when it would be helpful to know how Paul said these words. It would have helped to hear Paul’s tone of voice as he rebuked the high priest; was it an outburst of anger, or was it a calm, collected rebuke with that much more weight to it? Whatever the tone, the rebuke was entirely accurate and justified.

When Paul called the High Priest a “*white washed wall*” (v. 3) he was calling him a hypocrite (a rotting wall or grave with a coat of paint over it). Ananias had a bad reputation as a very violent and untrustworthy man. He was well known for his greed; the ancient Jewish historian Josephus tells of how Ananias stole for himself the tithes that belonged to the common priests. He was so hated that he was killed by his own people.

- Paul’s Apology (vv. 4-5)

“And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?” (5) Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Those around Paul rebuked him for speaking that way to the High Priest. Paul apologized saying he did not “*KNOW*” it was the High Priest.

How is that possible? There have been numerous suggestions offered.

Paul may have had eye trouble. He has several references in the Bible (specifically in Galatians 6:11) that seem to indicate he had some vision problems.

Paul may have been sarcastic: ***“I’m sorry I didn’t think that anyone who acted in such a way could possibly be the High Priest.”***

Since the group was gathered quickly order of the Roman commander it is possible that it was an informal gathering and the High Priest was not dressed in his usual garb.

Since Paul had been gone from Jerusalem for twenty years – he may not have known Ananias personally..

In any case, once Paul was informed that Ananias the High Priest, he apologized to Ananias and all those present for his outburst citing Exodus 22:28, to the effect that he was to speak evil of the ruler of the people. As citizens of the United States we have had to learn to respect the position even when we cannot respect the man (or woman) who holds it! Having done so he began his defense.

- Paul Divides The Sanhedrin. (vv. 6-9)

“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of

a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" (7) And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. (8) For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. (9) Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." (10) Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks."

Is Paul's shift in his defense simply a shrewd ploy to divide the Sanhedrin? Certainly there is wisdom, even shrewdness, in seeking to divide the enemy. For the Pharisee almost at once jump to Paul's defense. But more to the point is that the resurrection of the dead is the heart of Paul's defense because it is the heart of the Gospel, but it is also divided the Sanhedrin. As we have already noted the Sanhedrin was the Jewish high court, which consisted of seventy Jewish religious leaders, but is composed of two completely different groups, the Pharisees and Sadducees. These two groups have completely different views of God and the Scriptures.

The Sadducees were the modernist, the liberals of their day; they rejected the authority of Scripture other than the first five books of the Old Testament. They were pro-Roman and did not believe in the reality of life after death and the concept of the resurrection.

The Pharisees were the theological conservatives of their day, they believed in the resurrection of the dead and the authority of the entire Old Testament.

Paul Not Only Drew Courage From His Clear Conscience but...

Third, Paul Drew Courage From The Lord. (23:11)

“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

- *He Reassures Paul With His Presence. (v. 11a)*

“But the following night the Lord stood by him...”

(v. 11a) - this is the fourth (and as far as we know the last) time that the Lord has appeared to Paul. Of course this physical appearance by the Lord was a unique thing, but Jesus promised every believer to always to be with them (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus said “be of good cheer” and Jesus would not have said that unless Paul needed to hear those words. The Lord did not condemn Paul for feeling discouraged but neither did he allow him to stay there. “Take courage!” Six out of seven uses of this verb in the New

Testament are on the lips of Jesus. To bedridden paralytic, lying on his bed, Jesus said, "Take heart [courage], My son, your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). To the woman with the hemorrhage who touched the fringe of Jesus' coat, He said, "Daughter, take heart [courage]; your faith has saved you" (Matt. 9:22). To the frightened disciples, who thought that Jesus walking on the water was a ghost, He said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid" (Matt. 14:27). To the disciples on the night He was betrayed, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Truly, Jesus is the Lord who encourages those who are discouraged and without any other hope!

But note that it's a command. It's a gentle and gracious command, but it is a command. That implies that we can choose to obey it or disobey it.

➤ He Remembers The Work That Paul Has Done. (v. 11b)

".... For as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem" (v. 11b) - the Lord remembers what Paul has done in Jerusalem. Paul could have been discouraged about the lack of results from his sermon in Jerusalem. But the results were not his responsibility. I know that as a pastor we too often, judge our service for the Lord by the results that we can measure or see. How many

showed up at the meeting? How many made decisions for Christ? How many if any gave us positive feedback about what our last message? But the main criteria for evaluating our work for the Lord are: Was I faithful to God's Word? And, was I relying on Him and acting in obedience to what I believed He wanted me to do? If you can answer yes, then, even we are criticized; you know in your heart that the Lord was pleased with your service. You offer it up to Him, and you will hear from Him, **"Well done, my good and faithful servant"**

The Bible has many promises that the Lord commends His faithful servants. The writer of Hebrews says, *"For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints"* (Hebrews 6:10). Paul writes to the church at Corinth, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Whatever you do to serve Christ, He remembers and He will reward you for it. The Lord encourages His servants with His presence in their difficult circumstances and with His praise for their past service. And now the Lord encourages His servants with His promise of future service.

➤ *He Reassures Paul That He Has More Work For Him To Do. (v. 11c)*

“...for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” (v. 11c) The promise that Paul has more work to do was also the promise of the Lord’s continued protection. Paul could not die until he had finished the work God had appointed him to do.

“In June 1926 a young missionary in his mid-twenties, Raymond Edman, fell ill from typhus fever in a mountain village in Ecuador. So grave was his illness that he was carried by train and stretcher from Rio-bamba to Guayaquil, the port city of Ecuador. Soon his wife followed. When she arrived at the hospital, the attending North American physician told Mrs. Edman that her husband’s feet were already cold - he would soon die. A fellow missionary ordered a black, cloth-covered coffin for the missionary’s burial. Because Mrs. Edman had no black dress, she had her wedding dress dyed black. They even set a time and date for the funeral – 3 p.m., July 4th.

And he did die -Forty-one year later in 1967. Dr. Raymond Edman went on to be the fourth president of Wheaton College and had forty-one more years of fruitful service.” [As quoted by R. Kent Hughes. *“Acts: The Church Afire”* (Wheaton, Crossway, 1996) pp. 306-307. Earle E Cairns. V. *Raymand Edman: In the Presence of the King.* (Chicago: Moody, 1972) p. 51]

As someone has said, ***“We are immortal until our work for the Lord is done!”*** The prophet Jeremiah, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

“Finding Courage In Troubled Times”

Acts 22:22-30- 23:1-11

First, Paul Drew Courage From His Citizenship. (22:24-29)

Living as citizens of Heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Second, Paul Drew Courage From His Clear Conscience. (23:1-10)

- *Paul Rebukes The High Priest. (vv. 1-3)*
- *Paul’s Apology (vv. 4-5)*
- *Paul Divides The Sanhedrin. (vv. 6-9)*

Third, Paul Drew Courage From The Lord. (23:11)

- *He reassures Paul with His presence (v. 11a)*
- *He remembers the work Paul has done. (v.11b)
(Heb. 6:10, 1 Cor. 15:58)*
- *He reassures Paul that he has more work for him to do. (v. 11c) (Jeremiah 29:11)*

“Finding Courage In Troubled Times”

Acts 22:22-30- 23:1-11

First, Paul Drew Courage From His _____. (22:24-29)

Living as citizens of _____ (Phil. 3:20).

Second, Paul Drew Courage From His Clear _____.
(23:1-10)

- *Paul Rebukes The High Priest. (vv. 1-3)*
- *Paul’s Apology (vv. 4-5)*
- *Paul Divides The Sanhedrin. (vv. 6-9)*

Third, Paul Drew Courage From The _____. (23:11)

- *He reassures Paul with His _____ (v. 11a)*
- *He remembers the _____ Paul has done. (v.11b)*
(Heb. 6:10, 1 Cor. 15:58)
- *He _____ Paul that he has more work for him to do. (v. 11c) (Jeremiah 29:11)*