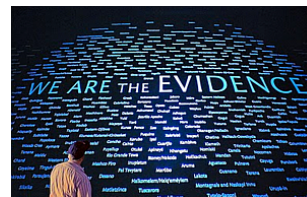


I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we talked about the importance of personal testimony. For many of the people around us, we ourselves are the only evidence for the Christian faith that they see. So it is important for us to be good witnesses for Jesus, sharing our testimony in words and deeds whenever we can.



In particular, we looked at the personal testimony that Paul gave from the steps of the Antonia Fortress. Although chained to the Roman soldiers, Paul got permission from the Roman commander to speak to the crowd that had attacked him moments earlier, and the crowd was quiet until Paul referred to the Gentiles. **Acts 22:21-22, "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' 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!'"** Paul was only telling his own story, but the Jewish crowd could not tolerate the idea that God wanted the Gentiles to hear the message of salvation.

Let's look at the rest of Acts 22 and see what happens next.

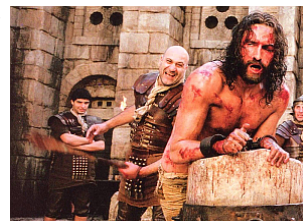
II. Scripture Reading (Acts 22:23-30, NIV, 1984)

23 As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned 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 big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. 29 Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. 30 The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them."

III. Teaching

The crowd basically went crazy in their anger at Paul over his mention of the Gentiles. The Roman commander wanted to know what was going on, so he ordered Paul to be taken inside and flogged. The commander planned to do to Paul the same thing that had been done to Jesus before His crucifixion. Roman flogging, or scourging as it is also called, was a brutal punishment far worse than an ordinary whipping. The scourge was not just a whip; it was multiple-thong whip with bits of metal, bone, or glass at the tips to tear the flesh.



The Romans thought that beating a person almost to death would cause them to tell the truth. This does not work, because under torture a desperate person will often lie even more in order to stop the pain. The Roman scourge is no longer in use, but sadly, other forms of torture are still common in the world today. It grieves my heart that even my own nation has sometimes resorted to torture in recent years as part of the war against terrorism.

Acts 22:25 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?" In the Roman Empire, it was illegal to use scourging or other forms of



torture on Roman citizens. The Romans used such methods on the nations they occupied, but not on their own people. They were startled to hear that Paul was a Roman citizen. It was unusual for a Jew to have Roman citizenship, but not impossible. Since Paul says he was born a citizen, we can only guess that perhaps his family had been given citizenship as a reward for some past service to the Roman Empire.

Paul was not afraid of taking a beating. In fact, in **2 Corinthians 11:24-25**, Paul says, **“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,”** Paul knew suffering and was willing to suffer when it brought glory to Jesus. But on this occasion Paul’s assertion of his rights as a Roman citizen will actually bring greater opportunities to testify about Jesus.

When he heard that Paul was a Roman citizen, the commander released Paul from his chains, but he still wanted to investigate the reasons for the disturbance. **Acts 22:30**, **“The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.”**

The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was composed of 70 elders of Israel and it was the highest legal body of the Jews. But at this time, they were completely under Roman control. The Roman commander ordered them to assemble and they had no choice but to obey quickly. I am sure they resented this greatly and were probably in a foul mood. Let’s read Acts 23:1-11 and see what happens when Paul is brought before them.



IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 23:1-11, NIV, 1984)

1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." 2 At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" 4 Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" 5 Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" 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."

7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) 9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" 10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks. 11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

V. Teaching

Paul began his defense before the Sanhedrin saying (**Acts 23:1**), **“My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”** Paul was not claiming that he had never sinned, but he was saying that he repented whenever he became aware of his sin. Specifically, Paul is telling the Sanhedrin that all he had done in preaching Jesus had been in obedience to his conscience as duty before God. In other words, the things he had done were not motivated by any personal agenda other than doing what was right in God’s sight.

For this claim, Ananias ordered Paul to be struck on the mouth. This sudden and unwarranted punishment was a clear violation of the rules of the Sanhedrin and Paul rightly protested, saying in **Acts 23:3**, **“God will strike you, you**



whitewashed wall !” This rebuke refers to the Jewish practice of marking tombs with whitewash so that people would not accidentally touch them and become ceremonially unclean.

Jesus used the same rebuke on the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:27-28**, **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”**

Paul’s protest was warranted, but even so, when Paul was told that it was the high priest who had given the order, Paul apologized. Some may wonder why Paul did not immediately recognize the high priest. This might possibly have been because of poor eyesight, but in any case, it would not be surprising for Paul to fail to recognize the high priest if he was not dressed in his official robes. And, since the Roman commander summoned the Sanhedrin on short notice, the high priest may have come in whatever clothes he was already wearing. We remember also that Paul had probably not seen the members of the Sanhedrin for 20 years, and Ananias was not the high priest then.

Acts 23:6, **“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.’”** With these words, Paul focused the attention of the Sanhedrin on the key issue, the resurrection, and he did it in a way that was certain to divide the assembly. As we have seen in our study of Acts, Paul preached the resurrection of Jesus at every opportunity. Paul preached that Jesus is alive and that this is cause for great joy and hope, because we serve a living Lord who will give us eternal, resurrection life.

The members of the Sanhedrin belonged to two competing sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees believed all of the Old Testament Scriptures and all of the miracles described in the Scriptures. Of course, they had their own interpretation, which led them to expect only a messiah who would be king of Israel, not a Savior for the whole world. But they recognized that the Scriptures taught the resurrection and they believed it. At least a few of the Pharisees even become Christians. In contrast, the Sadducees rejected the Old Testament prophets and focused only on the five books of Moses and the temple worship. They did not believe in angels or demons and they did not believe in the resurrection. Paul’s words brought this doctrinal division in the Sanhedrin to the surface.

The Roman commander had to take Paul back to the barracks in the Antonia Fortress to protect him from the violent dispute that broke at. **Acts 23:11**, **“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”** Paul had to be rescued by the Roman commander after each of his two attempts to witness to the Jews in Jerusalem and the commander still held him prisoner. It is likely that he was feeling very discouraged. But our Lord Jesus came to Paul and strengthened him.



Jesus said, **“Take courage,”** or in some translations, **“Be of good cheer.”** Jesus recognized Paul’s faithful testimony in Jerusalem, and the Lord told Paul that he must also testify in Rome. Jesus’ words must have been a great encouragement to Paul and they are also a great encouragement to us. Have your attempts to share the Good News sometimes ended badly? Twice, Paul’s testimony before the Jews was met with violence and threats. Paul called them brothers, but they would not listen to him. Perhaps your family or friends have also reacted in a negative way to your own testimony. But even when there is little or no visible fruit from our efforts to share the Good News, God is still at work and the fruit will come in time. And, we know that the Lord Jesus recognizes and commends our faithfulness when we boldly speak His Name.

The Lord told Paul, **“you must also testify in Rome.”** In other words, don’t worry about getting killed in Jerusalem; it isn’t going to happen, because I have more work for you to do. In effect, the Lord promised Paul that his life would be protected until he finished his mission. Paul had long wanted to go to Rome and testify there. In fact, only a few months before coming to Jerusalem, Paul had written to the church in Rome telling them that he wanted to visit them. We have that letter. In **Romans 1:13**, Paul wrote, **“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.”** The Lord has now promised that Paul will get his chance to go to Rome and

preach there.

Of course, Paul might have preferred different circumstances. As it is, Paul will travel to Rome under Roman guard. For the rest of the book of Acts, Paul will be a Roman prisoner. However, there is an advantage in being chained to a guard for the trip. You can't get away, but your guards can't get away either. So you have many opportunities to preach to them. Some Christians feel trapped like a prisoner because they are the only believer in their home. But if you live with your non-believing family members, remember that they cannot escape your influence if you faithfully witness to them about God's love in word and action.

VI. Conclusion

The words the Lord Jesus spoke to Paul were very encouraging, but the fact that the Lord Jesus came to stand at his side in his time of need must have been a huge encouragement. Because of the resurrection, like Paul, we are never alone. We may not see Jesus with our eyes, but He is here through His Holy Spirit. He walks with me and He talks with me. The Lord has risen. Jesus is alive. He is here with us now.

- Because of the resurrection, death is a defeated enemy. (Ref: Romans 6:9, 2 Timothy 1:10, Revelation 21:4)
- Because of the resurrection, Jesus is able to intercede for us always before the throne of God. (Ref: Revelation 8:34, Hebrews 7:25)
- Because of the resurrection, we are born again into a living hope when we trust in Jesus. (Ref: 1 Peter 1:3, Titus 1:2)
- Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we know that the promise of resurrection and eternal life has been proved true. (Ref: 1 Corinthians 15:4, John 11:25, 1 Thessalonians 4:14)
- Because of the resurrection, we are never alone. Jesus is alive and He is always with us. (Ref: Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5)
- Because of the resurrection, we know that the promises of God in Scripture have been proven true and faithful. (Ref: 2 Corinthians 1:20, 2 Peter 1:4, Philippians 4:19)
- Because of the resurrection, we know that we serve a living Lord who understands our struggles in this world. (Ref: Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 2:14)
- Because of the resurrection, we know that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, with justice and mercy. (Ref: Acts 17:31, Acts 10:42, Philippians 2:9-10)
- Because of the resurrection, we know that the love of God conquers all of the sin and death of this world and provides healing for all who believe. (Ref: John 3:16, Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, Acts 4:10)

Amen? Amen! Let's close with, **1 Peter 1: 3. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** Let's pray!

VII. Prayer