

## **“PAUL BEFORE THE COUNCIL AND GOD.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**July 24, 2022, 10:30 AM**

**Texts for the Sermon: Acts 22:30-23:11**

### **Introduction.**

My plan this morning is to do what I did last week, to give a brief summary of the text and then draw out four applications from it.

### **Acts 22:30, Paul and the Roman Tribune**

The Roman Tribune now does what he should have done in the first place the day before. He unbinds Paul, and commands the chief priests and council to come and bring their charges and give Paul a fair hearing. Certainly these men would be concerned about justice.

God is sovereign over this entire situation. He rules and over rules every action, every decision, every word, every thought. God intends for His Gospel to go to Rome and the Roman Tribune is God's instrument to make that happen. Remember Proverbs 21:

**Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

The Roman Tribune is a godless pagan, he has no interest whatsoever in God or the Gospel. But that doesn't matter, nor does it hinder God in the least.

Apply this truth to all of politics everywhere. Apply this truth to what you hear on CNN and Fox. Apply this truth to what you hear about or think about the January 6<sup>th</sup> hearings, or the Supreme Court rulings. Apply this truth to how you vote next week. Apply this truth to how you pray for all of those whom God has put in positions of authority.

### **Acts 23:1-5, Paul and the High Priest Ananias**

Paul is now before the council, the Sanhedrin, the ruling Supreme Court. The last time Paul was before this courts was so many years ago asking for letters to take to Damascus so he could arrest and kill the Christians. What a change, no one saw coming. God is God.

To most people this would be a daunting experience, but Paul is without fear. That is the fruit of a good conscience.

“My conscience is clean, I am not guilty, but innocent of the charges of overthrowing the worship of God in the Temple. The charges are false and unjust. Whatever you think of me, I am approved by God. I have sought only to please God and do good.”

This is still an angry mob, and violence is still on their minds. Something about what Paul said or perhaps just his presence offends the high priest who demands Paul be struck for no apparent reason.

This disorderly, uncivil conduct is unbecoming of a leader who shows no restraint or moderation.

Paul charges the highest law upholder of breaking the law. Paul pronounces a prophetic curse of God’s judgment from Deuteronomy (28:22).

How Paul didn’t recognize the high priest is a source of much speculation on the part of commentators. Poorly lit room, Paul’s poor eye-sight, Paul’s poor hearing and not knowing who said it. In the hastily called meeting the high priest was not in his formal garb.

In any case, Paul’s quote of Exodus seems to be a genuine and real apology.

**Exodus 22:28** You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

### **Acts 23:6-10, Paul and the Pharisees and the Sadducees**

“Now when Paul perceived ... ”

Just as he took advantage of his Roman citizenship in our last text, and escaped flogging from the Romans. Now he takes advantage of having been a Pharisee in this text, and escapes again. Paul is astute, he takes advantage of the spiritual rivalry between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

He says his case and the charges against him have to do with the resurrection of the dead. It is true there were other charges, but Paul puts the focus on this one theological point the two parties disagree about.

“In respect to this one thing I am still a Pharisee. This is the Gospel I preach, the resurrection of the dead through faith in Jesus Christ’s life, death on a cross and His resurrection from the dead.”

Talk about whacking the beehive. All Paul had to do was stand back and watch the fireworks.

The Sadducees were total materialist, they denied the resurrection of the dead, they denied any after life or existence of the soul beyond this life. They denied the existence of angels or spirits, no heaven, no hell, no hope. They were at best deist, practical atheists.

It is a sad and sobering thing that such men would be in spiritual leadership. And it is today as well.

The dissension became violent. Don't think they suddenly started liking Paul and became his friends. It is not as though this had been a reasoned court hearing, and having heard the facts, they became persuaded of the truth and arrived at a good and sound judgment on the matter.

Their out of control emotions of hatred were just redirected from Paul to the Sadducees.

The Roman Tribune of all people was the one who stepped in and pulled Paul out of the fight. Remember he is God's instrument, God's tool for protecting Paul and rescuing Paul out of the jaws of death. God again uses this blind, godless, pagan for His purposes and glory.

### **Acts 23:11, Paul and God**

Think about where Paul is and what is going through his mind. The last couple of days have not gone well.

It started with false charges and accusations, then arrest and beating, mob violence, upheaval, evil words spoken. Every attempt to remedy and clear himself only gets worse, and now in custody, guarded by soldiers, alone, frustrated, confused, troubled about his future, Satan no doubt assaulting him with more lies and accusations, calling into question God's promises. Where is God?

Who knows what thoughts, troubles and cares may have filled his mind and interrupted his sleep? Paul was human, flesh like us. In various letters he confesses to fear and anxiety.

And then the Lord stood by Paul and spoke the most comforting words. Words that would sustain Paul over the next few years as he was kept in custody until he finally got to Rome.

Jesus speaks to renew his faith, strengthen his courage, restore his confidence. Jesus doesn't say he will be set free, that the road ahead will be smooth, but he is still useful to God, he is still God's chosen instrument to be a witness for Jesus in Rome.

Jesus affirms his desire to honor Christ in Rome and preach the Gospel there.

### **Conclusion and application.**

God in His perfect wisdom inspired Luke to give us this faithful, detailed account of Paul's trials and afflictions in Jerusalem for our spiritual benefit. Paul's example is for us today.

*Keep a good conscience.*

Paul uses a word here that we all know, or assume we know, but if I were to ask you to define it you might have a hard time of it. What is your conscience?

We might call it that little voice in the back of our head.

We might think of that old depiction of a good angel dressed in white sitting on our right shoulder and a bad demon dressed in red with a pitch fork sitting on our left shoulder. The bad demon is tempting us to do wrong and the good angel is trying to persuade us to do what's right.

Our conscience is our inward consciousness (sense, awareness) of what we believe is right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral (Andrew Naselli and J.D. Crowley).

We have a conscience because we are made in the image of a moral God, so we are moral creatures who make moral judgments. Jesus has a conscience, but unlike us, Jesus conscience perfectly matches God's will. None of our consciences perfectly matches God's will.

Like speech and reason, humans can exercise their conscience to different degrees.

The word conscience occurs 30 times in the NT and this is the first of two times in Acts. From these 30 texts we learn a lot about our conscience.

Positively, it can be good, clear, clean and pure. It can be cleansed, perfected, purified, washed, purged and sprinkled clean.

Negatively, it can be weak, wounded, defiled, hardened, evil, guilty and seared. We can neglect, ignore, resist, oppose, silence, kill our conscience. Paul talks about those who have seared their conscience as with a hot iron (I Tim. 4:2).

We need to pay attention to our conscience and we need to adjust and calibrate it all along our Christian journey. There are times when we need to see something may be a sin for us that isn't for others, like in our use of our money, time, energy, hobbies, Sunday practices, etc.

When we become a Christian, and receive a conscience cleansed by the blood of Jesus, why do we feel our consciences convicting us more and more? Because we have the Holy Spirit in us opening our eyes and making us more conscious of our great and many sins, sins we didn't even know about before.

Consciously make Jesus Lord of your conscience, submitting to Him and His Word.

**Hebrews 10:22** Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

*Respect the office.*

**Exodus 22:28** You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

God's Word teaches us the offices of those who hold positions of authority, civil or religious, are to be treated with respect even if those in the office may not be worthy of it.

Historians tell us that Ananias was indeed a most unworthy holder of this office and he would later be removed and killed. Paul's prophetic word came true.

I am as guilty of breaking this law as Paul was, and my conscience is convicted on this matter to do better. To mock and vilify those who hold offices of authority over us is to heap shame on the Gospel. Christians should set a much better example than late-night comedians and journalist on CNN or Fox.

**Ecclesiastes 10:20** Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king.

This is not to say faults and sins may not be spoken of, they can and should be, but always in a manner that shows honor and respect because the Word of God requires respect toward God's authorities. "Your honor, I respectfully disagree."

May our consciences be increasingly clean and clear in this matter.

***Control your anger.***

The hot tempers of the Pharisees and Sadducees leading to great clamor, sharp contention and violent dissension needs personal reflection.

Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors, take special notice of this, anger seldom bears any good fruit, and almost always leads to something worse, to bitterness, disorder, chaos, and greater sin.

When we are angry we quickly lose control of ourselves and other emotions kick in and sin abounds. Satan is right there gleefully stirring the pot and throwing gas on the fire.

**James 1:19-20** Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

**Psalms 37:8** Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

**Proverbs 14:17, 29** A man of quick temper acts foolishly.

**29** Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

**Proverbs 15:1, 18** A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

**Prov. 29:22** A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Nothing good or positive comes from angry words, shouting, yelling, cursing, throwing things, tearing each other apart. I am concerned about the increase of anger in our world and homes.

When you start feeling the temperature rising in a conversation, someone be the Christian first, someone call time out, someone actually acknowledge what is going on and suggest a different way forward. Someone humble themselves, die to themselves, don't match their volume or anger. Stop and pray and ask for God's wisdom and help. For the sake of Jesus, for the sake of your souls, stop and pray, please.

And when you make a mess of things, when your anger gets the best of you, which it will, go back and clean up your mess. Confess your own sin, your own contribution and ask forgiveness. Be reconciled. Don't sweep it under the carpet, don't just pretend it doesn't matter anymore. We will all sin in this way, but we all have the hope of forgiveness through Jesus.

Forgive each other as God has forgiven you repeatedly.

Keep your conscience clean and clear with regard to anger.

***Take courage.***

Take courage, take heart. One word in Greek, tharseo (Θάρσει) , spoke only five times in the NT and it is unique to Jesus, it is only used by Jesus to those needing great comfort.

**Matthew 9:2** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

**Matthew 9:22** Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

**Matthew 14:26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

**John 16:33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

Tharséō means have confidence, be of good courage, be unafraid. This is a word of divine favor or approval. Take courage, lift up your head and heart, I am with you and I am for you.

As the Lord stood by Paul, so He stands by us. We are never alone. If the Lord is for us, who can be against us? As the Lord spoke to Paul, so He speaks to us.

Listen to God, rest your weary souls on the Word of God. Find your strength, courage, confidence right here. This is the wisdom and help of your Father in heaven, this is the best fatherly advice you can ever have. Is your father gone? Turn here.

If Paul needed divine help, how much more do we need divine help. Don't neglect God's Word.

It is the wisdom of God for you in keeping a clean and clear conscience.

It is the wisdom of God for you in dealing with the politics of our day.

It is the wisdom of God for you in dealing with and controlling your anger in a godly way.

Do you need to hear that word spoken to you today? Do you need to hear our Lord's "tharseo"?

**Isaiah 43:1-3** Thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.