



SERMON NOTES

US N°. 123

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Title: The Road to Rome

#32 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. Back story
 - a. Bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem where Paul would end up in chains.
 - b. Accusation of the people in regard to the Temple.
 - c. Arrested by Romans.
2. Paul before the Sanhedrin
 - a. The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish tribunal, of 71 members, in Jerusalem and was the final authority on Jewish law; any scholar who went against its decisions was put to death as a rebellious elder. Paul was sent by the Council to Damascus to arrest those of the Way.
 - b. Paul's greeting.
 - i. *"Men and brethren..."* Paul greets them as a familiar.
 - ii. *"...I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."* As a Jew, Paul acted upon the principle of his conscience, when God opened his eyes to see the nature of Christianity, then he became a Christian because God persuaded his conscience that it was right for him. He was sincere through the whole course of his religious life, and his conduct had borne the most unequivocal proofs of it.
 1. Paul would never consider a clear conscience a way to be justified before God, which can only be done through the blood of Jesus.
 2. A man or woman of God must, according to the best of his knowledge, keep from whatever is evil, and cleave to what is good. They are conscientious in all their words and conduct.
 3. Acts 24:16, *"I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."*
 4. Rom. 2:14-16, *"when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."*
 5. Titus 1:15-16, *"To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work."*
 - c. The brutality of Ananias. History records that Ananias was one of the most shameful profaners of the office; he was both greedy and ruthlessly violent, using beatings to extort tithes from

common priests' allotment and leaving them destitute (Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.205-7). As a Sadducee, he was complicit with the Romans and rich, so that when war broke out in 66AD, he was dragged out of his hiding place and put to death by the Jewish nationals. Ordering Paul to be slapped is very much in character for high priest Ananias.

- i. Ananias doubtless saw Paul as an apostate from the Jewish religion, a renegade, and a turncoat. How could one who had turned from Judaism to Christianity claim such innocence?
- d. The honor of the office.
 - i. Paul rebukes Ananias for ordering him to be struck, *"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?"*
 1. Paul's predictive curse follows proper Old Testament form.
 2. Old Testament law commanded that judgment be righteous, *"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."* (cf. Lev. 19:15)
 3. Dt. 25:1-2 permits that a convicted man may be beaten, but until he is convicted he must be treated with justice.
 - ii. However, although Paul's response may seem right, it is, as Paul quickly admitted, still wrong. Blessing, not cursing, is to be on our lips; the Lord Jesus calls us to turn the other cheek (cf. Luke 6:28-29). Paul's prophetic curse, given in hasty anger, had violated a basic biblical precept lived out by David in his dealings with Saul. Though an officeholder dishonors the office through his conduct, one does not have liberty to dishonor him (cf. 1 Sam. 24:6; 26:9-11).
 1. Ex. 22:28, *"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."*
 2. Jude 1:8-10, *"Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves."*
 - iii. Paul is rebuked for his insolence to God's High Priest and he quickly apologizes. How do we cope when a cynic's punishing rejection drives us to lash out in anger? Like Paul, we must respond in humility, quickly admitting our fault and subordinating ourselves again to the authority of God's Word. *"It is not our mistakes that do us in; it's our pride that keeps us from admitting them."* (Ogilvie 1983:316).
 1. There are many reasons given for why Paul did not know that Ananias was High Priest.
- e. The declaration of the resurrection, *"...concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"*
 - i. Paul cannily recognizes the controversy that exists between the two parties in the Sanhedrin.

1. Sadducees were the theological liberals of their day, denied the reality of life after death and the concept of resurrection. *"Sadducees say that there is no resurrection; and no angel or spirit."* (cf. Acts 23:8, Mt. 22:23) They only accepted the writings of Moses.
 2. Pharisees were more likely to find some ground of agreement with Paul, being the more the *"Bible"* believers in the Jewish world of that time. They took the whole book seriously (*what we consider today the Old Testament*), even if they did err greatly by adding the traditions of men to what they received in the Bible.
- ii. This is more than a clever diversionary ploy. Paul's declaration focuses on the central aspect of the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth the Christ. This is the key issue that determines the nature of the continuity and discontinuity between Jews and Christians as part of the true people of God. The hope in the resurrection of the dead is the vindication (justification) of God over sin and Satan. (cf. Is. 61:1-2) Paul specifies Israel's future hope of messianic salvation by the event that inaugurates it – the resurrection. This was indeed Israel's understanding, and as Christians affirmed it they stood in direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God (cf. Dan 12:2; 2 Macc. 7:14). But the belief that the foundational fulfillment of that hope had occurred in the raising of Jesus created the discontinuity. Paul finds himself on trial because of the Messiah's resurrection and the new realities it introduced. For if Jesus had not risen from the dead, he could not have appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road, or in the temple, and commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:15, 21). Paul would, then, not have promulgated a message or lived a lifestyle that his fellow Jews would have opposed.
1. The gospel's worldview assumptions will always challenge the givens in any of today's many cultural, religious, philosophical and ideological outlooks. Like Paul, we need to so know our audience's worldview so that we may communicate the truth in love, where possible identifying common ground yet knowing there is always bound to be disagreement.
- iii. The Pharisees recommended a return to advice of their great leader Gamaliel as recorded in Acts 5:38-39.
- f. The Roman guard rescues Paul and returns him to the fortress.
- g. Jesus visits Paul in the night.
- i. This must have been a difficult night for Paul, his heart longed for the salvation of his fellow Jews. (cf. Rom. 9:1-4) Maybe he even blamed himself or questioned the future of his ministry. *"Bold, courageous, fearless during the day, the night of loneliness finds the strength spent, and the enemy is never slow to take advantage of that fact."* (Morgan)
 - ii. It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him. Jesus' physical presence as it seems was the case with Paul was a unique manifestation, but Jesus promised every believer to always be with them. (cf. Mt. 28:20) Jesus knew where Paul was; He had not lost sight of Paul because he was in jail. God knows where you are today; even if you are hiding it from everyone else, God knows where you are.

1. Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before, but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell. We often demand that Jesus deliver us *out* of our circumstances, when He wants to meet us right *in* them. Sometimes think we are surrendering to Jesus when in reality we are only demanding an escape. God wants to meet us *in* whatever we face at the moment.
2. We may think that things are bad right now, but we may not even know the half of it. Jesus knows, and He still says *“be of good cheer.”* Not because everything is fine, but because God is still on His throne and His promise that *“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose,”* (cf. Rom. 8:28) still stands. Anyone can be of good cheer when everything is great, but disciples of Christ can be of good cheer when everything is rotten, knowing that God is mighty and wonderful no matter what the crisis of the moment.
- iii. Be of good cheer one word in Greek and is used five times in the New Testament – each time by Jesus. Jesus spoke it to bedridden paralytic (cf. Mt. 9:2), Jesus spoke it to the woman with the 12-year bleeding problem (cf. Mt. 9:22), Jesus spoke it to His frightened disciples on the Sea of Galilee (cf. Mt. 14:27), Jesus spoke it to His disciples the night before His crucifixion (cf. Jn. 16:33), Jesus spoke it here to Paul.
- iv. Paul’s next assignment was to bear witness of Christ in Rome. The greatest words a faithful child of God can hear are *“There is more for you to do,”* words that grieve the lazy servant, but bring joy to a faithful servant.
- v. The promise of more work to do was also a promise of continued protection; Paul had to live until he had finished the course God had appointed for him. Paul faced the next day with a smile, knowing his enemies were powerless against him. *“This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which from now on marks him out as a master of events rather than their victim.”* (Bruce)
3. Paul’s escape to Cæsarea.
 - a. The plot to assassinate Paul by the *“sicarii,”* or dagger-men, who targeted the Romans and their supporters. More than forty men take a *“curse oath,”* declaring their lives forfeit if they did not kill Paul. Such a vow means death either way, for any ambush of a Roman military contingent would lead to the immediate death of most of the attackers. Those who place themselves under a curse in order to remove a curse assume that they are in the will of God but are really picturing what is already true of them.
 - i. These devoted plotters are also deceptive plotters.
 - b. Paul’s nephew learns of the plot and warns the Roman commander.
 - c. As the centurion reports to the commander, he gives Paul a title that will become for the apostle a mark of persecution and a badge of honor. From now on Paul is called *“Paul, the prisoner”* (cf. Acts 23:18; 25:14, 27). For freedom-loving ancients to identify with someone in prison, deprived of liberty because of alleged or proven wrongdoing, could be a matter of shame. (cf. 2 Tim. 1:8)

For Paul that shame turns to honor when he lengthens the title to say *“Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus”* or *“prisoner for the Lord”* (cf. Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Philem. 1, 9).

- i. All Christians who suffer shameful circumstances in persecution ought to realize the honor that rests on them because of the One for whom they suffer.
- d. The unmasking of the plot shows God's providential ruling in the affairs of man to fulfill his saving purposes. (cf. Prov. 21:30; Is. 8:10)
- e. A detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen demonstrates the Roman opinion of the seriousness of the threat and the importance of the prisoner. They are to leave under the cover of darkness, around 9:30 p.m., for Caesarea. The might of Rome's legions willingly deployed to protect one witness to the Lord Jesus is silent but powerful testimony to who is really Lord in that world and in ours.
 - i. The letter Lysias writes recounting Paul's rescue deals loosely with the truth in order to place himself in the best professional light. In fact, he learned Paul was a Roman citizen only after the rescue-arrest and at the point of scourging as a part of interrogation. (cf. Acts 22:25-29)
 - ii. By example and testimony the commander reminds us of three things about the interrelationship of the Christian and the state:
 1. The state's proper role is to protect the rights of its citizens (cf. Rom. 13:4; 1 Tim. 2:2-4). Christians may insist on this.
 2. The state is incompetent to make judgments on theological/religious matters. Whenever it does so it transgresses the boundary articulated by Jesus. (cf. Luke 20:25)
 3. Christians must follow their Lord's example in guarding their innocence before the laws of the state. (cf. Acts 23:14-15, 22, 41, 47; Acts 25:8, 10-11, 18-19; 26:31-32)
- f. *“One of Luke’s prime motives in writing his twofold history is to demonstrate that there is no substance in this charge of subversion brought not only against Paul but against Christians in general - that competent and impartial judges had repeatedly confirmed the innocence of the Christian movement and the Christian missionaries in respect of Roman law.”* (Bruce)
- g. This began a two-year period of confinement for Paul in Caesarea after which he spent at least two years in Rome. Together with travel time, the next five years of Paul’s life were lived in Roman custody.
- h. Felix asks Paul his province of origin, either because he wonders about the need to show courtesy to a monarch of a client kingdom or he seeks a way to be rid of a troublesome case involving a Roman citizen in an imbroglio with the Jews. Paul's reply, however, gives Festus no relief. Eastern Cilicia at that time was part of the united province of Syria-Cilicia.
- i. Felix's first wife was granddaughter of Antony & Cleopatra; 3rd wife was daughter of Herod Agrippa
4. Take aways
 - a. Though an officeholder dishonors the office through his conduct, one does not have liberty to dishonor him (cf. 1 Sam 24:6; 26:9-11). *Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people* (cf. Ex. 22:27)
 - b. Know to whom you minister; their beliefs, etc.
 - c. Christ perfectly comforts in...

- d. Shame turns to honor when Paul lengthens the title to say “*Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus*” or “*prisoner for the Lord*” (cf. Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Philem. 1, 9)
- e. The interrelationship of the Christian and the State

Felix – Tacitus said that he "practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of king with all the instincts of a slave" (*Histories* 5.9).