

**Acts 22: 23 – 23: 10; “Paul Knew Who He Was”, Sermon # 83 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
October 2nd, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.**

There are many things which all Christians can learn from, from the life of the apostle Paul. And we have been looking at some of them over the last few chapters. Today I would like to speak to you about the importance of Paul’s knowing who he was, and also the importance of your knowing who you are. It is important for every Christian to know themselves. Ultimately you cannot know yourself well unless you come to the knowledge of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you 3 observations on what Paul knew about himself.

1st of all – Paul knew that he was a Roman Citizen, and he made good use of it.

We see in these verses that the Roman commander did not quite know what to make of the apostle Paul. He did not even know that Paul was an apostle of Christ, or what that meant. He did not know why these Jews hated Paul so much. They just kept on shouting – Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live! And all this was happening because Paul had said that Christ had told him that He would send him far away from there to the Gentiles. When they heard that, they went wild! He couldn’t figure it out. But he was determined to try to figure it out! And so he ordered Paul 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.

And while the centurion was having Paul bound with thongs, Paul said to him – Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned? Scourging was a terrible form of punishment in that day. It was an awful form of torture and it was sometimes used on people who were wholly innocent of any crime. It was what Pontius Pilate ordered for our Lord Jesus, so that the Jews would be pleased by seeing our Lord humiliated. The leather cat-of-nine tails with pieces of bone or metal in the lashes, applied in such a way by a Roman soldier, so that it tore through the skin on the back. Depending on how it was used, it could produce long furrows down the back lacerating the skin and tearing it open in long gashes. It caused terrible pain.

Paul knew what was going to happen to him. It was not as though he was unwilling to suffer for Christ. He had done so on many occasions. But this scourging of him to find out why the Jews were crying out so much against him in this way, this seemed quite unnecessary. Paul knew how it could be legitimately avoided. It could be avoided by his questioning the lawfulness of the act. When the centurion heard Paul say that he was a Roman, he immediately went and told the commander. He said to his commander – Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman. This statement got through to the commander right away.

And so he came to Paul and he asked if Paul was a Roman. And Paul said – Yes. The commander was somewhat incredulous. He would inquire a little more. He tells Paul that he had obtained a Roman citizenship by purchasing it. But Paul told him that he was actually born a citizen of Rome. This must have come about because of Paul’s father’s being born into a distinguished or privileged family, or his father’s having done some patriotic deed whereby the citizenship was conferred upon him. We are not told. But when the commander heard this, there was no way, now, that he would even think about scourging Paul. He was afraid of the consequences to himself if others found out that Paul, a Roman citizen, had been treated in this way.

I want you to notice that because Paul had Roman citizenship, he had rights under Roman law. He could not be scourged until he was convicted of a crime that warranted his being scourged. This leads me to ask all of you who are here today if you, like Paul, know who you are? Paul knew

who he was. He was a Roman citizen. And being a Roman Citizen he had definite privileges and rights that went along with it. So does being a citizen of the United States of America. Being a citizen of a country like ours which has laws and inalienable rights, which protects its citizens from unjust treatment and punishment, is a very great privilege. It is no little thing when you as a citizen can be thought of as innocent until you are proven guilty.

Or if you have been charged with a crime, of having the opportunity of proving your innocence, and being tried by a jury of your peers. This is even greater than Roman Citizenship. Let me ask you whether you own yourself to be an American citizen in the sense that you are proud of it? Do you glory in the fact that you live in a free country? Paul in verse 28 of our text says that he was actually born as a citizen. He was born free. Let me ask you again; do you glory in the God-given rights and privileges which you have as an American citizen? Do you highly prize those rights which are enshrined in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Amendments to the Constitution?

If you do not see the value of our system of government which was established by the Founding Fathers at great personal cost to them, then you need to reconsider the greatness of all that you have been given. You need to come to see that our system of government was given to us by God's blessing the minds and hearts of the Founding Fathers with the wisdom to put together such documents and institutions of government which would protect us from tyrannical and unjust men. Freedom has a cost, and the cost is your giving your loyalty and if necessary, your life, to preserve the truths which make men free and keep them free. That truth is found in the Bible. The Founders based their work on the truth of the Bible.

You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free, and you shall be free indeed! That truth is found essentially and ultimately in the Person of our great Savior and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, when He was standing before Pontius Pilate, He made the good confession. Pilate asked Jesus in John 18: 37 – “Are You a king then?” “Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king.’” “For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.” “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

The apostle Paul had heard Christ's voice on the road to Damascus, and because of the greatness of Christ's power and grace, he responded to Christ immediately by asking the question – Who are You, Lord? Our Lord told him – I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Once his heart was changed and he realized the greatness and glory of the Person of Christ, he found his new identity in Christ! He never looked back. He did not try to go back to being the person he once was, apart from Christ. He now knew who He was. He was Christ's servant preacher. But he was Christ's freed man. He was freed from sin and he was freed from the law's condemnation. He would now go on to fulfill all that Christ had called him to do.

2nd – Paul knew how he had lived his life in relation to his conscience, and he declared it.

Verse 30 of Chapter 22 says – “The next day, because the commander wanted to know for certain why Paul was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priest and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.” “Then Paul looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’” “And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.” “Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!’” “For you sit to judge me according to the law, and you order me to be struck contrary to the law?” “And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God's high priest?’” “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.’”

So we see here that the Roman commander had great power over legal matters being initiated in the city of Jerusalem, for he, desiring to know for certain why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he commanded the chief priests and all their council, that is the whole Sanhedrim, to appear to listen to Paul and evaluate his testimony. The commander brought Paul down there to where they were, and he set him before them. What an opportunity this was for Paul to testify for Christ! How does he begin? Well, he begins by telling these men, most of whom were probably his enemies, of how he had lived his life in all good conscience before God until that day! What a statement this was!

The high priest Ananias thought that it was bold presumption for Paul to make this statement. And so he ordered those who stood by Paul to strike him on the mouth. We need to think about what this meant to this man and to Paul himself. In regard to Ananias, he thought Paul was a real troublemaker; a man whom he heard used to be on the side of the Jews who did not believe that Jesus Christ was their Messiah. But now He preached in Jesus the fulfillment of the law, and that Christ was the only way that either Jews or Gentiles could be saved. He now no doubt thought to himself – How could such a man possibly have a good conscience before God when he was preaching Jesus as the Son of God, and righteousness coming not by the works of the law, but by faith in Christ? He thought Paul greatly erred in his assessment of himself.

This is also the way it is with many people who do not know the Lord, but they think that they know God because they are very religious people. They are sacramentalists who believe in a works-righteousness. They think that they know God because they have been baptized as infants and they go church regularly now and partake of the Mass or the Lord’s Supper. They do good works, humanly speaking, and they trust in themselves that their own righteousness is good enough to bring them to heaven. They look down on others who are not as religious as they are. This is how this man thought about the apostle Paul.

On the other hand, Paul had a true assessment of himself when he made this statement about his conscience. The conscience in man is that faculty within our mind and heart, placed there by God to be an umpire within ourselves. Conscience is an umpire that acts as a judge to what we are doing or what we intend to do. Our conscience commends us when we do what is good, and it condemns us when we do what is wrong or sinful. Because of sin’s entrance into the world, conscience, as well as the mind and the heart, has been defiled by sin. It does not always judge correctly. And so, after we are converted to Christ we need to instruct our conscience in relation to the truth of God’s word so that we will draw right conclusions about our own thoughts and behavior.

But Paul knew that he had had a good conscience before God, and so he was ready to answer any and all questions which the Council of the Jews might have. Instead of being allowed to speak and explain, he was struck on the face! And his response was really quite amazing. He said to the high priest – God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be stuck contrary to the law? And those standing by said to him – Do you revile God’s high priest? So Paul then answered them by saying that he did not know that he was the high priest, for it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.

How should we understand this? Well, evidently, the council had gathered that day and it was not an official meeting of the council, and so the high priest Ananias did not wear his official robe, and thus Paul did not know that this man was the high priest. You will notice, also, that Paul did not confess any sin here. He was confessing that he made a mistake. He made a misjudgment in

his speaking in the way that he did. I am quite sure that he still believed that the high priest was a whitewashed wall. Paul really did believe that the high priest was a hypocrite. When Paul said that he had lived his life with a good conscience, his meaning was that he had lived his life both before and after his conversion to Christ according to a good conscience.

But how can this statement be true you ask? Well, it was very true, and Paul would confess it, that he was a great sinner in many ways before he was saved. But in terms of his conduct, he acted consistent with what his conscience was telling him to do. This will be seen if we turn over to 1st Timothy 1: 12-15 – “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” “And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

You can see here that during all of his life, Paul was trying to live according to the light that he had. Even when he was persecuting Christians, he was doing it because he truly believed that they were undermining the truth of God, the Scriptures, and salvation. He thought that he knew God before he was converted. He thought that he understood the Scriptures when he did not, and he thought that a person was saved by their own works righteousness. And so he sought to get rid of those people who were undermining Judaism; even the Christians. This is why when he was converted that the Lord Jesus had to say to him – Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

Paul did not realize how wrong he was, and yet he still had a good conscience until that time. May you ask yourself now – Do I have a good conscience in relation to God, to Christ, and other Christians. You will if you are sincerely trying to live your life according to the Bible. Let us be willing to be corrected in order to come to a better understanding of Christ and the truth. Ask yourself – Do I know who I am? Am I willing to see that sometimes, even my conscience may not tell me what I need to know in terms of loving Christ and other Christians? But if you are sincerely trying to receive wisdom and understanding from Christ, the Holy Spirit will help you to better instruct your conscience as to how you ought to look at yourself. Christ is simply looking for sincerity from you.

3rd – He knew that he was a Pharisee, and even more, a Christian, for he believed in the resurrection of the dead.

I haven't much time to develop this truth concerning Paul here in this sermon, but let me close by saying this. When Paul realized that one part of the Council were Sadducees and the other part 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! Paul knew that this was his entrance into being able to preach the gospel to these men if they would let him. He didn't know whether he was going to be allowed to go into detail with them about Christ's having died for sinners, but he knew himself.

He knew that before he was converted that he himself had believed in the resurrection of the dead, but he also knew that he himself did not understand that it was only by faith in the risen Christ that any person could be saved. And so, in making this statement, that he was being judged concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, he was saying to them that the Pharisees were right to believe in the resurrection of the dead. He hoped to make them think more about their own life and their own resurrection from the dead. He knew that they needed to understand what he had come to understand by revelation of Christ to himself.

They needed to see that it was only by Christ Jesus their Messiah coming into the world and laying down his life for sinners, and taking His life up again in His resurrection, that any person could be saved, and really know God, and really have eternal life. Let me close this message by asking – Do you see that it is the most important thing in all of your life for you to believe in Christ’s resurrection from the dead? If you will believe this, you will have a good resurrection from the dead. Know yourself and you will see your need of Christ.