

“COURAGE IN A CRISIS” (Acts 22:1-30)

Paul has been beaten and almost killed by a mob for doing the right thing in obeying the leading of the Lord to go to Jerusalem. For the sake of the gospel and the unity of the NT Church he went to the temple and was attacked there. Sometimes doing the right thing means we have to suffer. That's part of living the life of Christ. Now you might have thought that speaking to a mob that just tried to kill him would be the last thing on Paul's mind. Most people would be so terrified that they would be speechless, but not so with Paul. His calling to proclaim Christ supersedes all his other concerns. This was a God-ordained opportunity that he would not miss. The Holy Spirit gave Paul grace to be calm and eloquent in the midst of danger.



Men, brethren, and fathers, bear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) (v1-2)

Despite his beating and, no doubt, aching wounds, Paul begins by addressing this murderous mob with the utmost concern and courtesy, “Men, brethren, and fathers.” He uses Hebrew, which silenced them because it made clear that he was an educated Jew. This is the second of three times that the story of Paul's conversion is told in Acts and this is the first of six defences he will make. (He also shares his testimony in Philippians 3, 1 Timothy 1, and in Galatians 1). His first defence address to them can be divided into three parts:

- (1) **Life before his conversion (Acts 22:1-5);**
- (2) **His conversion experience (Acts 22:6-14);**
- (3) **His calling and commission to preach the gospel to all men, including Jews and Gentiles (Acts 22:15-21).**

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. (v3)

Paul knew how to respond to these people better than anyone as he once was just as prejudiced and angry towards Christianity. The zeal of false religion has been one of the greatest opponents of biblical Christianity throughout the ages. Being devout, sincere or zealous is not the test of truth.

Paul takes time to establish his impeccable Jewish credentials that they admire, “*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel.*” It also shows them that he knows what he is talking about, and demonstrates he is not anti-Jewish. Paul shows he was a true Jew by birth, by training, and by conviction. Throughout this defence, he seeks to maximize similarities and points of contact with them and avoids acting superior to his hearers, “*and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*” Sovereign grace should take away all pride in our salvation. This is a good example of being as wise as a serpent yet harmless as a dove while seasoning our speech with salt.

And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. (v4-5)

Paul's previous life as a persecutor of Christians may well have surprised many in the audience. This gives another insight into the depth of Paul's zeal against the Christians before he was saved. Although our experience must demonstrate the objective power of Christ, there is power in relating a personal testimony in the right context. There was a number in the audience who could verify what he had done. He calls in the high priest to be his witness, which probably was a masterstroke as it verified his testimony beyond reproach and made this high priest feel uncomfortable.

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. (v6-10)

Everything about Paul's recounting of his conversion is emphasized to have come from God (Gal. 1:15). It was God who opened his eyes. It was God that gave him eternal life when he was dead in his sins. Left in his natural state, Paul's free will would never have chosen Christ if God had not intervened. Paul was not won over by the arguments of Christians but the intervention of God. To attribute any of it to Paul's efforts would rob God of His rightful glory. Steve Cole points out,

“There are many who say that the reason that God chose Paul, or that He chooses anyone, is that He foresees that the person will one day choose to follow Him. But to say

this is to base God's sovereign election on the fallen will of man, ignoring the plain biblical truth that unless God first does a work of grace in our hearts, no one would ever choose Him. No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). No one is able to come to Jesus unless it has been granted him from the Father (John 6:65). No one knows who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Luke 10:22)."



The description of his personal encounter with the risen Christ was an indirect way of confirming the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul sets forth further eyewitness testimony that they could verify. The others with him heard the sound of the voice but clearly could not understand it (Acts 9:7).

Although Paul made clear that his salvation was a work of sovereign grace, he underlines his duty as a new believer to obey the call of God, "And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do." Man has a responsibility to respond to the Sovereign work of God. The two sides of this doctrine must be emphasized and Paul makes this clear here.

And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest bear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (v11-16)

Ananias' reputation with the Jews was what was important for Paul to flag up here in light of his audience, "a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there." But when God saves a person, He doesn't save the person to do nothing. We are told we are saved to serve, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before

ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10) Saul of Tarsus is given his orders, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest bear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou?"

This washing referred to in the final instruction is emblematic of salvation, "arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Scripture often closely associates the act of baptism with what that act symbolizes. If Paul wanted them to think that water saves, then why does he explicitly ignore this in Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 1:17 etc? Kent Hughes explained the real reason for this statement, "Baptism symbolized the method of salvation (identification with Christ) and washing symbolized the result (cleansing from sin)."

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. (v17-21)

Paul wisely brings up his continued respect for Jewish institutions after he was converted. It may be that Paul here thought he was the best man to witness about Christ to these people but God overrules him. As God has all knowledge, we can never seek to use natural wisdom even with the right motive to do His Will. God's will for us does not always coincide with our desires for ourselves. God knows better than our interpretation of circumstances. Paul correctly obeyed and how God used him.

Paul wisely points out that his ministry to the Gentiles was God's instruction and not his choice, "And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." If they are upset, then they have to contend with God. By exalting the Lord throughout, Paul was ensuring that if the Jews rejected the message, they would be rejecting God, not him. That is a good method for witnessing to the lost. Frank Allen points out,

"With Paul the call of God took precedence over personal desires. At first, Paul did not have a personal desire to go to the Gentiles. He had a hatred of them before his conversion. He had a desire to stay with the Jews in Jerusalem after his conversion. While he was in the temple the call of God came to him to make haste and get out of Jerusalem. Even then he protested; he replied to God that he had persecuted the Christians and consented to the death of Stephen, and was evidently about to request the Lord that he might remain and testify at Jerusalem that he might counteract what he had done against the Christians. But the Lord told him: "Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21)."

And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, (v22-23)

They listened until he mentioned the Gentiles in v21 – the old hatred was still there. As MacArthur says, "All logic, all sense, all reason, all doctrine, all everything was consumed in the

flames of prejudice.” The Jews believed that God created Gentiles in order as fuel for hell. If a Jewish son married a Gentile, the Jewish father would hold a funeral to indicate his son was now dead to him. Probably this mob took their clothes off so they could stone him as they did to Stephen. Paul had gone as far as he could to reconcile them with his choice of words but still their depraved hearts would not listen.



The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them. (v24-30)

This Gentile captain did not understand the theological issues at stake probably because Paul spoke Hebrew or Aramaic to the crowd. We see Providence working here for Paul:

- (1) Captain and soldiers saved his life (2:32)
- (2) They carried him to the castle instead of leaving him (2:34)
- (3) He was a Roman citizen – there may come a time when your birth is a providence.

The chief captain was surprised by the riot and determined to find out the reasons. It was thought that the way to obtain truth was through torture by scourging. Bruce explains what scourging was,

“The scourge (Latin *flagellum*) was a fearful instrument of torture, consisting of leather thongs, weighted with rough pieces of metal or bone, and attached to a stout wooden handle. If a man did not actually die under the scourge (which frequently happened), he would certainly be crippled for life.”

Paul warned the chief captain that he was treading on dangerous ground in scourging a Roman citizen, “Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.” We are not required to give up our legal rights as Christians. There was a type of inferior Roman citizen – those who bought citizenship compared to those who were born Romans. But Paul was born one whereas the chief captain had to earn the right for his citizenship. As a free Roman born citizen, Paul’s father at least must have been a Roman citizen before he was born. The chief captain challenged Paul whether he was legally a citizen, “Tell me, art thou a Roman?” For Paul to falsely claim that was a capital sentence.

God gave Paul a special background and a special salvation because He had a special work for him to do. Guzik points out,

“Paul was an extremely rare individual. It was uncommon to find such an educated, intelligent, devout Jew who was also a Roman citizen. God would use this unique background to use Paul in a special way, even as he wants to use *your* unique background to use you in a special way.”

Just when we feel no miracles are happening in our life, we need to remember providence is still working in our circumstances. Most of our life is being lived by providence. We should not view that as inferior – it is just as much a miracle of God.



“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?”—Acts xxii. 25.