
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R2L: Maintaining a Positive Testimony in the Midst of Negativity

(Acts 22:22-30 -- Part 3 - The Action)

22 They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" 23 And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. 25 But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman." 27 The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." 28 The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen." 29 Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. 30 But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

Let me remind you that the goal of preaching the Word of God is two-fold; first, to make the text understood in a manner consistent with how the first readers would understand the text (thus we use the skills of observation [asking, “what do I see” in the text] and interpretation [asking, “what does the text mean” or “what did the text mean to those who first heard it]; and second, we seek to find a precept or principle from the text that is true and can be practiced by those of us who are hearing the sermon today, or what we call application [asking, “what does the text mean to me]. There is to be in preaching an explanation followed by an exhortation; an exposition of the text followed by an encouragement to act in accordance to the principle of the text.

As we work our way through the book of Acts, let me remind you as well that the kind of literature we have before us is narrative; we are reading a story. Unlike the New Testament letters which tend to focus readily on teaching God’s people how to live, a narrative is simply giving an account. It is showing us how a person or persons lived. For us then, to move from the realm of observation and interpretation on to the application, we must first discover the biblical principle or principles being taught. Sometimes such principles are easily discerned, other times it may be a bit more challenging.

In our text before us we come to the third of three movements in which we have been seeking to answer the question, “How can we maintain a positive testimony in the midst of negativity.” Beginning back in Acts 21:27-36 we saw Paul under **attack** as some Jews from Asia made false accusations and charges against him that caused the Jews in Jerusalem to riot and form a mob that was intent on killing him. In 21:37-22:21 we saw Paul giving his **apology**, his defense, the reason why he was doing and saying what he was, seeking to point this angry mob to see Jesus as their promised Messiah, Savior, and Lord. This morning we will see Paul take **action**. Having given his testimony of coming to faith in Christ, the crowd, as you may have noticed, did not respond favorably to hearing the gospel and once again sought Paul’s demise. I find it particularly interesting that we would see Paul’s action as he fundamentally appeals to politics in order to save his life as well as to give more opportunities to share the gospel.

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We live in some turbulent and fast-changing time politically and socially speaking. Christians are increasingly being targeted, ridiculed, marginalized and even punished for believing what we believe and standing on such principles. It is easy to become discouraged, to take on a mentality of “laying low”, of keeping one’s mouth shut, saying nothing. Yet, if we would maintain a positive testimony, if we have learned anything from Paul, it is this, that even if a Christian would be false accused; and even if a Christian would be beaten or punished for what he or she believes, the only way to maintain a positive, God-glorifying, Christ-centered testimony before others to speak up concerning the Person and work of Jesus and specifically, as we noted last week, of how Jesus has changed you. We must have our defense, our reasons for trusting in Christ ready to share with others. And this idea of being ready to give a defense or an apology for the hope that we have (see 1 Peter 3:15) became our principle or precept last week.

This week, let me offer you another Scripture that I see serves as the precept or principle behind Paul’s actions here in this text. You are very familiar with it. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we read...

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This is a command, an exhortation, an expectation that God has upon all His people. That there is nothing in our lives, whether we are gathered for worship, in our homes with our families, in the workplace, in the school, out playing sports, or taking a drive in the country; there is nothing that is not to be done to the glory, the exaltation, the praise of God. Beloved, we are not to live one part of our life as sacred to the Lord and the other part as secular to the world. While a Christian may participate in certain “secular” or worldly events, like taking in a concert, perhaps an appropriate movie, a sports game or the like, for the believer, he is to see his involvement as an opportunity to bring God right into that action or event. At this level, if you cannot bring God into an event or action, then you, as a believer, have no business participating in it.

Let me be clear. This does not mean that we are to separate ourselves from the world in the sense that we have no connection to it. There is no way to not participate in “secular” events; we are not called to only buy “Christian” products; we are not to avoid engaging in government or politics. We are never called to avoid, shun, and do away with everything that is not specifically “Christian.” We are called to be “Christian” – Christ-like, in everything and in every place we find ourselves. And this is what we see in Acts 22:22-30. We find Paul taking advantage of politics, government and the world. For Paul knows that God not only works through “Christian” things, but being Sovereign, in control of all things, He also works through things of the world.

Last week we saw Paul give his apology for his actions before a riotous, ravenous crowd who had been misled to think that he was against the people of Israel, the Temple, and the Law of God. Giving his testimony, he shared that he was born a Jew, educated by the renown and respected Pharisee, Gamaliel; that he himself became a Pharisee, a persecutor of the Christians, and that the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, had appointed him to hunt down Christians. He also shared that Jesus Himself stopped him on the road to Damascus, transformed his thinking, sent him to the well-known Jew, Ananias, healed him of the blindness he had received when encountering Jesus, and from there to bring the Gospel of God to the Gentiles. This was Paul’s testimony. So, what happened next? We really have two scenes here.

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I. The action of the people (22:22-24)

We might better say the reaction of the people. Up to verse 22, this once raucous crowd had hushed and was listening with great interest as Paul gave his testimony. But let me have you jump up one verse and notice what changed that attitude and action of the people. We read in verse 21, ***And [Jesus] said to me, “Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”*** In other words, Paul was saying that God sent him to the Gentiles in order to bring the faith of Israel to non-Jewish people. Paul was stating that God had included non-Jews to be the recipients of the blessings of the Messiah, to become part of the covenant that God made with their father Abraham. This outraged the crowd. Notice that verse 22 says that the crowd, ***“listened to him up to this statement...”*** It was this idea that Gentiles could be blessed with salvation from God that the Jews considered blasphemy and heresy. The promise, in their thinking, was only for the Jews. As they understood it, the Law declared that Gentiles were outsiders. This was an audacious statement and one that was considered politically incorrect that it was to be punished by death.

We read in verse 22, ***“and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the face of the earth, for he should not be allowed to live.’”*** The once quiet crowd broke out again in rage, pushing in. And in typical Jewish fashion, they threw off their outer cloaks, threw dirt in the air in rage, and moved in to take Paul by force so that they might put him to death according to verse 23.

Now let me show you something that might easily be overlooked. This event is actually a fulfillment of a prophecy made by the Lord Jesus. Look with me at 18 again where Luke records Jesus as saying, ***“Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.”*** Why would Paul give his apology, his defense about Jesus to a people of whom Jesus said, ***“they will not accept your testimony about Me.”*** Beloved, I have said this many times; that the reason we are to preach the gospel to everyone is to bring about one of two results. The one we long for is conversion, of seeing a person repent and come to faith in Jesus. The second reason is that it brings condemnation. For those who hear the truth and yet reject it, these face greater condemnation.

But the question we might ask is this, did Paul teach something that was not in agreement with the promises of God in the Old Testament as the Jews had claimed. Let me have you turn over to Genesis 12. Here in Genesis 12 we have the giving of what is called the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant or agreement that God made with Abraham is the root of all the subsequent covenants made in the Old Testament. In Genesis 12:1-3 we read...

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

To be sure, God chose the nation of Israel to be His special, particular people or nation. It is true that God promised that the Savior would come through the biological people of Israel. But they had forgotten this one thing, that God has also said that every people, every nation, all the families of the earth, Jews and non-Jews, yes, even the Gentiles would be blessed through Israel. Israel was set apart to be the vehicle through which God promised to bless every people, every

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tongue, every tribe with salvation. Turn over with me now to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, Revelation 5. Notice that we have the fulfilment of this Abrahamic covenant. In Revelation 5:9 we read...

And they [the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders] sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

All the nations of the earth are blessed through Abraham and through Israel just as the Old Testament promised. Thus, rather than Paul sinning against the Word of God, it was the crowd in wanting Paul dead that was sinning. When confronted with the truth, people, especially a crowd, will often react irrationally because sin is always irrational. This was the action of the crowd. But we see the action or reaction of another, the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias (we learn his name in Acts 23:26), was at an utter loss, completely unable to make sense of why this crowd was so riled up by what Paul had said. He only knew that peace had to be restored and this could only be done if Paul was taken out of the picture. But, in order to please the crowd, he informed them that he would examine Paul by means of a flogging. The thought is that the threat and or pain of the flogging would get Paul to confess to wrongdoing.

Now, you might remember that our Lord Jesus was also flogged (Matthew 27:26, Mark 15:15). If you are not familiar with what flogging is, it was kind of torture which involved being whipped with a small whip made up of many leather strips. Tied to and embedded on these leather strips were pieces of broken glass, metal, and sharp stones. As the leather hit the victims back, these sharp objects would dig into and tear off the flesh. It was the most common form of Roman torture. The only thing worse was crucifixion.

Having seen the action, or reaction of the crowd and of the commander. Let us now consider the action of Paul in verses 25-30.

II. The action of Paul (22:25-30)

According to verse 25, Paul would have been stripped of his clothing and have his hands strapped to a whipping post (the meaning of ***“stretch him out with thongs”***) by the centurions. Paul silently endured all of this. Then, just as the Romans were prepared to flog him, to exact some kind of confession out of him, for they did not even know what he had done, Paul asked the question, ***“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”*** Can you imagine the faces of the centurions. They must have been frozen for a moment. You see, it was considered a high crime to flog a Roman citizen. The Roman philosopher and politician Cicero noted around 100 BC, “To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder: to crucify him is – what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed.”

It was so ingrained in Roman thinking that only non-Romans and slaves were to be flogged. These soldiers froze because they knew that they had already violated Paul’s civil rights by binding him to the flogging post. Immediately the centurion went to the commander and informed him of what was happening. In verse 27 we see that Lysias the commander came and asked Paul if he was in fact a Roman. Of course Paul answered, ***“Yes.”***

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But the account goes on in verse 28 to record a statement made by the commander who said, **“I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.”** Notice Paul’s response there, **“But I was actually born a citizen.”**

The commander was well aware that Paul was actually of a higher social class than of himself. For the commander, either himself or one of his family members in the past bought citizenship but Paul was born a citizen. Thus Paul had all the rights of any other Roman citizen. And at this moment, in order to keep from being killed, Paul called for his governmentally sanctioned rights to be protected.

As noted earlier, we live in some fast changing times and it is becoming increasingly unpopular and even potentially detrimental to be a Christian. And at times, the Christian community, while squawking a bit, does little to be an influence for the gospel in the secular arena. As noted last Sunday evening, only about 3.5 million people claim to be atheists in the United States, just about 1% of the population. Meanwhile, some 25% of the population claims to be evangelical Christians, yet it is the 1% that has the most influence, who are making the most noise. And in this climate of political correctness in accepting homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle, a Gallup poll conducted in 2013 revealed that only 3.5% of people identify themselves as gay, lesbian or transgender. Yet again, this small but vocal population is changing opinions, laws and culture. Meanwhile, the 25% evangelical community sits on the sidelines.

Beloved, there is absolutely nothing wrong with a Christian asking that his constitutional and civil rights be upheld. Paul used the laws of the land to afford the gospel every opportunity to advance. While Paul did not depend upon the government, when needed and available, he made use of the laws to further the gospel. What a reminder for us, that is okay, biblical and expected that God’s people would be involved at city, state and federal governmental levels. Where is our representation on school board, city councils and the like? In order to maintain a positive testimony when things were so negative around him, Paul uses politics to keep advancing the gospel.

Just what did Paul think about government? He actually has thoughts on the matter and the Holy Spirit directed him to write the words of Romans 13:1-7. There we read these words:

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

From these verses, let us take note of three things Paul understood about government. And, by the way, Paul had already written these words prior to this encounter with Lysias, the Roman commander.

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First of all, let me remind you that everyone who holds authority in government has been put in that position by God Himself. Now, this does not mean that every person in power is good, godly, and seeking the glory of God, but it does call us to remember that God has given that person authority for a purpose and for a time. Sometimes God gives people exactly what they want as a form of punishment. Sometimes God gives those how bring about reforms. But rest assured, God is in control.

The next two things to make note of is that government exists to protect her citizens and that it exists to punish evil. Paul understood this. He knew that Lysias was put in power by God. The crowd made claim that Paul was to be punished, and so Lysias took him away for trial. But when Paul informed the Roman commander that he was a citizen, Lysias protected his civil rights. Exactly these two principles as learned from Romans 13.

Let me say again, there is nothing wrong with a Christian asking that his constitutional and civil rights be upheld. Beloved, it is not a sin for us to use politics and the government as they are intended to be used. So long as there is a first amendment, we ought to be the most vocal in demanding that right be honored. The first amendment of the Constitution says:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances

This is our right as American citizens. And when we need to claim it, we ought. However, it does us well to also note that Paul did not always announce that he was a Roman citizen; that he did not always ask that his civil rights be upheld. For example, when Paul and Silas were in Philippi, and the people accused them of teaching the worship of gods which were not approved by the state, Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, thrown in prison, and fasten in the stocks (Acts 16:19-24). It was Paul's right to tell them he was a Roman citizen in order to avoid being beaten and to receive better treatment, but he did not. Why not?

Listen carefully, beloved. At times it may be more important to be faithful to Jesus and the Gospel rather than seeking to avoid suffering through the use of politics, even if used rightly, as Paul chose to do in our text this morning. In other words, there will be times when we are to demand our right be upheld and there will be times when we ought not to speak.

In the case of Paul at Philippi, if he had called for his civil rights to be upheld, he probably would not have been throw in prison, and thus he would not have had the opportunity to witness to the other prisoners and the jailer, the jailer who, along with most of his family came to trust in Jesus alone for salvation through the preaching of Paul. How did Paul know to just go to jail in this instance? I can only suppose that he did not feel his life was threatened and so he kept this right as a trump card of sorts.

While in Jerusalem however, if Paul had not called for his civil rights to be upheld, either the Jewish crowd itself, or the flogging by the Romans might well have killed him. This would have prohibited him from the opportunity to go to Rome and preach the Gospel before the Emperor, Nero. In other words, Paul was always looking for ways to advance the gospel, to share the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead according to the Scriptures as the once for all sacrifice and atonement for sin; and that all who would trust in this work of Christ on the cross as being done for him, would receive the blessing of eternal life, a life that changes them now to become followers of Jesus.

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As we close, let me make a few comments about Paul’s actions. We are blessed with passage like Romans 13 and others that reveal Paul’s thinking about government. We live in times when our governmental authorities are often making decisions we must disagree with biblically. But just because we disagree with them biblically does not mean we can cease to think biblically for them.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we read, **“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties, and prayers and petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who have authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”** Beloved, we must be praying for those in authority.

Let us remember that God has given those in authority important work to do and they carry a great responsibility. Regardless of whether we care for a leader or not, we must be in prayer for him or her for the sake of the office and for the sake that God has given us the leaders that we have. We must pray that God would give them wisdom and understanding, that they would act for the good of the people they serve, and punish evil, and not become involved in the sins that tempt them in their positions. We must pray for wisdom to know how we ought to use politics and not use politics, and how we ought to respond to our leaders. While our knowledge is limited, we must pray for wisdom and understanding from God for ourselves as we seek to react to what occurs around us.

Beloved, as Christian, we must know something of what is happening in our community and our world. We cannot hide from the world and then expect to influence it for the gospel. To that end, I urge you again, be in prayer both for our leaders and to know how to take action if and when we are convicted to do so. It is not a sin to be involved in politics or to use politics. Paul balanced it and so must we, but always with the wisdom of God, to the glory of God. For Paul, everything was a sacred opportunity to advance the gospel, whether preaching as a missionary or by standing before a secular judge giving an account of what he believes. As we learn to act as Paul did, we allow ourselves to maintain a positive testimony regardless of the things around us.

Soli Deo Gloria

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