

THE LORD STOOD NEAR PAUL

Acts 22:30-23:35 (Key verse: 11)

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

In chapter 19 verse 21 of Acts, we read, **After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.** Paul had a deep desire to see the gospel spread throughout the world. For that reason, he had planned that he would eventually go to Rome. His trip to Jerusalem was supposed to be a pitstop, if you will, and from there he would travel to Rome, determined to bring the Gospel to that region as well. However, against this plan, we learned last week that Paul was arrested and that his stay in Jerusalem was prolonged. To make matters worse, in today’s passage Paul stands before an unfair and an unjust trial, which throws out of the window any possibility of him leaving Jerusalem as soon as possible. This unfortunate frustration in Paul’s plans leaves him discouraged, and in a state of despair, being unable to do anything to aid the situation. This is a man who has a great plan to be useful to the LORD and be used by him to spread the Gospel, and yet he finds himself so confined, so limited, so restricted, and there is nothing he can do. But glory be to God that He is rich in mercy and because of the great love with which He loved Paul, **The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”** I hope that through this message, we can all learn that Jesus Christ is the source of true encouragement and vitality for all that we do in this life, in His name. Amen!

The passage begins in chapter 22 verse 30, **The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.** After the commander learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, in the previous passage, he removed his chains and placed him under protective custody. The information about Paul’s citizenship inspired the commander to care about Paul and even ensure that he is given a fair trial. The commander is dutybound to be protective of Paul, thus he summoned the Sanhedrin to deliberate his case at once. The Sanhedrin is the Jewish ruling council. It comprised the chief priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This group of people presided over religious matters in Jerusalem. This means that they had the authority to set Paul free should they declare him innocent of any wrongdoing. Now, Paul was a Pharisee, and he may have been familiar with some of the members of this council and may have even stood in the council on some occasions. This and the fact that the governor was dutybound to be accommodating of Paul, may have helped Paul to approach the trial with ease and confidence.

Let’s now turn to the trial, let’s read verses 1 through 5 of chapter 23, **Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” 2 At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”**

4 Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!”

5 Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’ Paul appears to have a hopeful attitude when he came before the Sanhedrin. He comfortably addressed them appealing to their common association and kin, calling them, “My brothers” and pointing out the fact that everything he did, he did for God’s sake, a cause that should be common to them all. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were zealous for God, and Paul had been doing the same even as a Christian, so they should be glad to have him and would be willing to hear him out. However, when he was struck on the mouth, Paul quickly realized the nature of the high priest he’d be dealing with and his intentions for the trial. Some historians agree that Ananias was a violent and short-tempered man who was alienated from the Jews because he had policies, in his capacity as high priest, that supported the Romans more than his own people. Indeed, it is not a surprise that those who hate God would pervert justice. Ananias stood in the place of Aaron, the man who is closest to God than all people, and yet he perverted justice, a true example of a cloud without water, a hypocrite that Paul even called a whitewashed wall,

someone who has a nice façade that conceals abysmal wickedness. Now, Christians also stand in positions of those that are most close to God. We boast of our right to be called the children of God. This means that we also have a real temptation to be whitewashed walls, to be hypocrites, to wear a façade that makes us to appear righteous while we are not. May the LORD have mercy on us all, and help us to be honest before Him. Above all, may He help us to grow in our sanctification so that we may bear actual righteousness in our lives. Amen! Through this, Paul realised that he would not receive a fair trial from a man such as Ananias.

Wat did he do next? Let's look at verses 6 through 8, **Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."** **7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)** Resurrection is a core foundational principle of Christianity. Paul may have used it here to spark a division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but this was not merely a creative effort on his part. He was essentially on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead—Christianity is this hope. Without resurrection, we cannot have Christianity: the resurrection is a symbol or confirmation of victory over death by our LORD Jesus Christ. Resurrection justifies the anticipation of rewards in the next life, thereby motivating the Christian to live righteously in the current life and store up for themselves treasure in heaven. Paul writes elsewhere, Cor 15:13-19, **if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.** The Pharisees believed in resurrection and the Sadducees did not, and Paul knew this would cause an unresolvable dispute between them. Being a servant of the LORD Jesus, Paul knew how to deal with a divided house. The Pharisees are closer to Christianity than the Sadducees. For that reason, we see the Pharisees coming to Paul's defence in the council, and we also have evidence in scripture of Pharisees converting to Christianity and none whatsoever for the Sadducees.

Accordingly, in verses 9 through 10 we read, **9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" 10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.** Paul's plan worked; he had successfully found his way out of that unjust trial. As unjust as it was, that was his only opportunity for him to leave Jerusalem and go to Rome as soon as possible. Paul is taken back to the barracks for his protection. It is not safe for him to be anywhere in Jerusalem, being imprisoned was his best alternative of staying alive. Paul confined, restricted and he cannot do anything to help himself out of the situation- how can he go to Rome? How can he safely leave Jerusalem when the odds are staggered against him? Unlike when he was with Silas previously, he not recorded as singing hymns while in prison. He seems desperate and discouraged.

Let us see how God came to his rescue. Let us read today's key verse together: **11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."**

This is Jesus Christ appearing to his servant Paul in Paul's greatest time of need. Jesus first tells Paul to take courage. What does it mean to take courage? Courage means "Strength in the face of pain or grief" In the King James Version instead of courage, the verse says, **"Be of good cheer."** This refers to being cheerful, optimistic and confident in the face of hardship. Now, how can Paul be strong, cheerful, optimistic and confident? The truth is that he cannot be any of these by himself, which is why he must focus and trust in the LORD Jesus Christ. Jesus is not a friend who uses inefficacious kind words, he is not one to say "such and such will pass, hang in there." He is God incarnate, nothing is impossible to him and His word can be trust. That is why our strength, optimism and confidence must be found in Him, in fact we become idolaters if we hope to find these things in any other, we will weary out our loved ones and friends

if we hope for them to be these things for us. God alone has made promises in scripture which we can hold onto in our time of need. One such promise says: **"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** (Is. 41:10). Paul could be encouraged and strengthened when he focused and trusted upon the LORD Jesus Christ. Let us find our strength and encouragement in the LORD for He alone is able to provide the same. Just as we trust Him with the salvation of our souls, let us also trust Him even with our temporal lives. Let us read the word of God and meditate upon His promises so that we may have true courage and strength to go through life. We have now come to that part of the year which requires so much from us and yet we feel like we have expended all our strength throughout the year. Many of us may be exhausted and discouraged at the work that still lie before us. As students we may look at our year marks feel that the effort needed for us to push is too much—we may be discouraged. As employees we may also be feeling that we did not do that well over the year, and that if we will have a great performance review, we need a miracle. Also you may have been searching for a job for a long time, you may be discouraged and tired of sending out CV daily without any promising feedback. There are many other things which may cause us to be discouraged every now and then. Now, I am not promising that things will work out the way we want them to, what I am saying is that when we find ourselves discouraged in these things, let us not despair, let us focus on and trust in the LORD Jesus Christ, who alone, can give us the strength to get through the things we need to do. Amen!

Jesus further told Paul, **"As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."** Here Jesus is vindicating and approving the work that Paul has been doing in Jerusalem. Paul did not have any disciples in Jerusalem, he didn't have anyone following him and wanting to learn from him among the Jews. In fact, when we compare his time in Jerusalem to when he was in Asia, it's easy to say he failed to do what he normally does—which is to preach the word effectively. However, Jesus is here telling Paul that he did such wonderful work in Jerusalem that Jesus will even send him all the way to Rome to do the same. We can learn from this part that the work of God that we do, is not always accompanied by pom or it isn't always extravagant or even visible. Contrary to popular opinion, the effectiveness of ministry is not always measured by the number of people who show up for church or the number of converts we get when we perform an altar call. I found this part of the passage to be quite encouraging, that as God's servant, He is the One who measures my work. He knows how much I put into all of it, so that even the effectiveness of my service is not to be measured by the degree of "amens" received or even as bible teacher, I am not measure by whether my sheep do what I tell them or not, but by whether I do what I am required or not. Even those in evangelizing ministry, let us not measure our efforts by how many people are willing to listen to us, but by simply doing what the LORD says we must do. Amen! The apostle Paul must have also been encouraged by this. Especially when the LORD confirmed to him that He will ultimately send him to Rome, which was his greatest desire.

Finally, in verses 12 to 35, we see Paul taking the first of the many steps that will lead him onto his journey to Rome. The Jews plotted with the Sanhedrin to have Paul killed. However, providentially, Paul's nephew would learn about this attack and informing Paul, Paul would pass the information onto the commander through his nephew. Upon hearing this, the commander prepared to have Paul transferred to Governor Felix in Caesarea, who agreed to hear Paul's case since his town fell within the jurisdiction of the governor. Some people may read this and think, "What a coincidence!" but that's not us, we know that God is the God of providence and that all the events of history are His story. Amen! God had declared to Paul that He would send him to Rome and Paul did not know exactly how that would happen. We also don't know many particular details about our lives but let us take courage that nothing happens in our life by accident or without reason. Let us be confident that God is using all the events of our lives to achieve his great plans for His glory and for our ultimate joy.

In conclusion, Paul was discouraged because he thought he would not be able to go on to Rome and bring the Gospel to the Romans. However, when the LORD Jesus Christ stood next to him, Paul was not only encouraged and assured of his trip to Rome, Jesus also provided a way for Paul to go to Rome, in the most unexpected of ways. I hope that God will bless all of us and help us to find encouragement in no one but Jesus Christ alone, amen!