

Refuge City Church — October 9, 2022
“What’s your conscience tell you?” [Acts 23]

Introduction

- **Last Week:** Paul answers his accusers by giving his testimony, and ultimately his commission to share the gospel with everyone!
 - In revealing his Roman citizenship, the trial is put on hold until more can be determined.
- **Today:** Paul is placed before the Sanhedrin [70 Pharisees, Sadducees, and the High Priest] to explain the controversy, commotion, and chaos that he seems to have brought to the city.
 - Remember, he’s already explained who he is, his conversion experience with Jesus, and his commission to reach all people with the gospel.
 - “Oreo Cookie” scenario: 3 distinct parts to the whole piece. Yet the good stuff sits right in the middle between two pieces of nasty cookie.
- **Acts 22:30**, “But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.”

Verses 1-10

“And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to 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 is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.”

- Three Perspectives
 - *Roman*: there’s been chaos, violence, and yet no logical conclusion to what laws were broken; they need answers immediately!
 - *Jewish*: the law broken, the temple structure defiled, and justice needs to be served immediately!
 - *Paul*: I’m just here serving the Lord, doing what Jesus told me to do.
- Paul begins by claiming a ‘good conscience’ before the Lord.

- For this statement, he's hit in the mouth; **they saw this as an overt lie against the Lord based on their claims about Paul.**
- To which Paul reacts as any of us would.
 - First, an innocent man who has not been charged with a crime is abused.
 - Second, by the command of the high priest who should be the most reasonable man in the room.
 - Paul owns his responsibility in the matter, as scripture states not to speak ill of those in authority over you [Exodus 22:28].
- There will come a time when people suspect the worst about you.
 - In a sinful, skeptical world, people assume lies, conspiracies, and the like over the truth. ["your guilty until proven innocent"]
- **QUESTION:** What does it mean to have a 'good conscience' before the Lord?
 - **1 Timothy 3:9**, "[We] must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."
 - **QUOTE:** "Conscience is a feeling of pleasure or displeasure associated with myself, that arises when I comply or don't comply with moral principles and that motivates me to act in one sense rather than the other when the feeling accompanies the contemplation of a certain course of action." [Allen Wood's interpretation of 'conscience' as defined by Immanuel Kant; 18th century philosopher]
 - Your conscience is an internal 'judge' that can either accuse or excuse your actions [dependent on the moral ground you decide to stand on]
 - Defiled conscience [polluted]: belongs to one who continues down a course of action that continues to break the rules on the moral foundation on which they stand. [slippery slope of sin]
 - **Titus 1:15-16**, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works..."
 - Seared conscience [cauterized]: a loss of sensitivity to what is right or wrong.
 - **1 Timothy 4:1-2**, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,"
 - Evil conscience: feels no remorse or guilt; your conscience will approve your actions, even when you willingly do wrong according to the law and/or God.
 - **Hebrew 10:22**, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."
 - [This is not about perfection] **1 Corinthians 4:3-4**, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself [clear conscience], but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."
 - Good conscience: As we abide in God's word, we gain a deeper understanding of God's will, and to what *He* determines as right and wrong, and we respond accordingly.
 - A good conscience before the Lord will provide you many things:
 - I. **Fortifies:** gives you the courage to stand your ground against opposition.

- **Ephesians 6:11**, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to *stand* against the schemes of the devil.”
- 2. **Removes Fear:** The world will be stacked against us, hate us, revile us, accuse us, and may even bring up our past sin against us.
 - **Psalm 118:6-7**, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.”
- 3. **Peace:** “The restlessness of an uneasy conscience divides the heart and drains the strength of a person, so that he is unable to function at his best. How can we boldly witness for the Christ if conscience is witnessing against us?” [Warren Wiersbe]
 - In a world that calls evil good and good evil, we need every ounce of strength, courage, and peace to stand on God’s principles, and be the light we are called to be in this dark world. Yet do so with love and a good, clear conscience.
- At this point, Paul speaks up and provides the real reason he is on trial.
 - **Verse 6:** “It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”
 - The Christian belief in a risen Savior, and the hope of salvation and eternal life.
 - And the council leaps into another uproar, stirring confusion and division amongst the Pharisees and Sadducees; **who don’t believe in resurrection.**
 - Getting so violent, the guards bring Paul back into the barracks to keep him from harm.

Verse 11

“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

- In the midst of uncertainty, Jesus provides encouragement and a promise.
- “Why didn’t He allow the chains to fall off? Where’s the earthquake and angelic presence to free Paul from prison? Why doesn’t God work a miracle so Paul can freely and easily go about his ministry to Rome?”
 - Because God decides what is appropriate, just, and necessary for His will to be done! He is sovereign!
 - **DON’T FORGET:** The promises and commission given to Paul by Jesus.
 - **Acts 9:15-16**, “...for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”
 - If we are consistently seeking the Lord, we don’t have to worry about our circumstances.
 - **1 Peter 5:6-7**, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”
- Here, Jesus gives Paul a promise. “...so you *must* testify also in Rome.” [necessary/inevitable].
 - **Psalm 115:9**, “You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.”
 - **Psalm 37:5**, “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”

Verses 12-35 **[read]**

- So the Lord may not use the visually miraculous to set us free, but he could use your family.
- God will use a variety of ways to get our attention, and show us how He is constantly working for those who call on His name for salvation.
 - **Romans 8:28**, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
- With the murder plot exposed to Claudius Lysias, he arranges for Paul to be sent to Governor Felix for protection and further consideration of his potential crime(s) or innocence **[under the protection of 470 Roman soldiers]**.
 - **Verse 29**: “I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.”
 - **SIDE NOTE**: We can look back in hindsight and see how the Lord had been working in the hearts and minds of all the Roman officials Paul has come in contact with through his journeys.
 - Sergius Paulus in Cyprus **[Acts 13]**: came to faith in Jesus.
 - Roman Magistrates in Philippi **[Acts 16]**: apologized for their imprisonment.
 - Gallio in Corinth **[Acts 18]**: refused to judge the Jews complaints against Paul.
 - The riot in Ephesus **[Acts 19]**: protected from danger and Roman authority.
 - Claudius Lysias in Jerusalem **[Acts 23]**: innocence presumed.
 - Governor Felix in Caesarea **[Acts 24]**: was sensitive to Christianity.
 - Governor Festus and King Agrippa **[Acts 25-26]**: found no guilt worthy of death.
- Neither did any Roman official ever find fault in Jesus! And the church has grown and prospered for the last 2,000+ years.

Conclusion

- What do we need in life when faced with trials? **[Irregardless of their intensity]**
 - The humility to cry out to God in prayer and praise **[Acts 16; Paul and Silas in prison]**.
 - Reminders of the promises of God.
 - A good conscience; stemming from, not from the immediacy of the moment, but in the consistent pursuit of God’s righteousness **[in and out of trial]**
 - The unwavering, and always outpouring of God’s grace and encouragement.