



“Open Church – Open Bible”

Clabon Bogan Jr. – Interim Pastor



Sunday Church School

August 29, 2021

“Paul Faces His Accusers”-- Acts 22:17-29

Golden Text: Acts 22:21

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Acts 22:17-29

¹⁷ Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance

¹⁸ and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

¹⁹ So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.

²⁰ And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹ Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'“

²² And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

²³ Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air,

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²⁴ the commander ordered him 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.

²⁵ And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

²⁶ When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

²⁷ Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."

²⁸ The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen*."

²⁹ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

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TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to warn that hostile attitudes will exist toward Christians until Christ returns.

Principle: to assure that Jesus promises to direct us if we are willing to follow Him.

Application: to not allow fear to control us but to be willing to serve Christ at all costs.

While Paul was in the temple in Jerusalem, some Jews falsely accused him of preaching against the law and the temple and bringing a Gentile into the temple’s inner courts.

This caused a near riot as the crowd seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, intending to kill him.

At Paul’s request, the soldiers who were taking him away allowed him to address the hostile crowd from a relatively secure spot (Acts 21:27-40).

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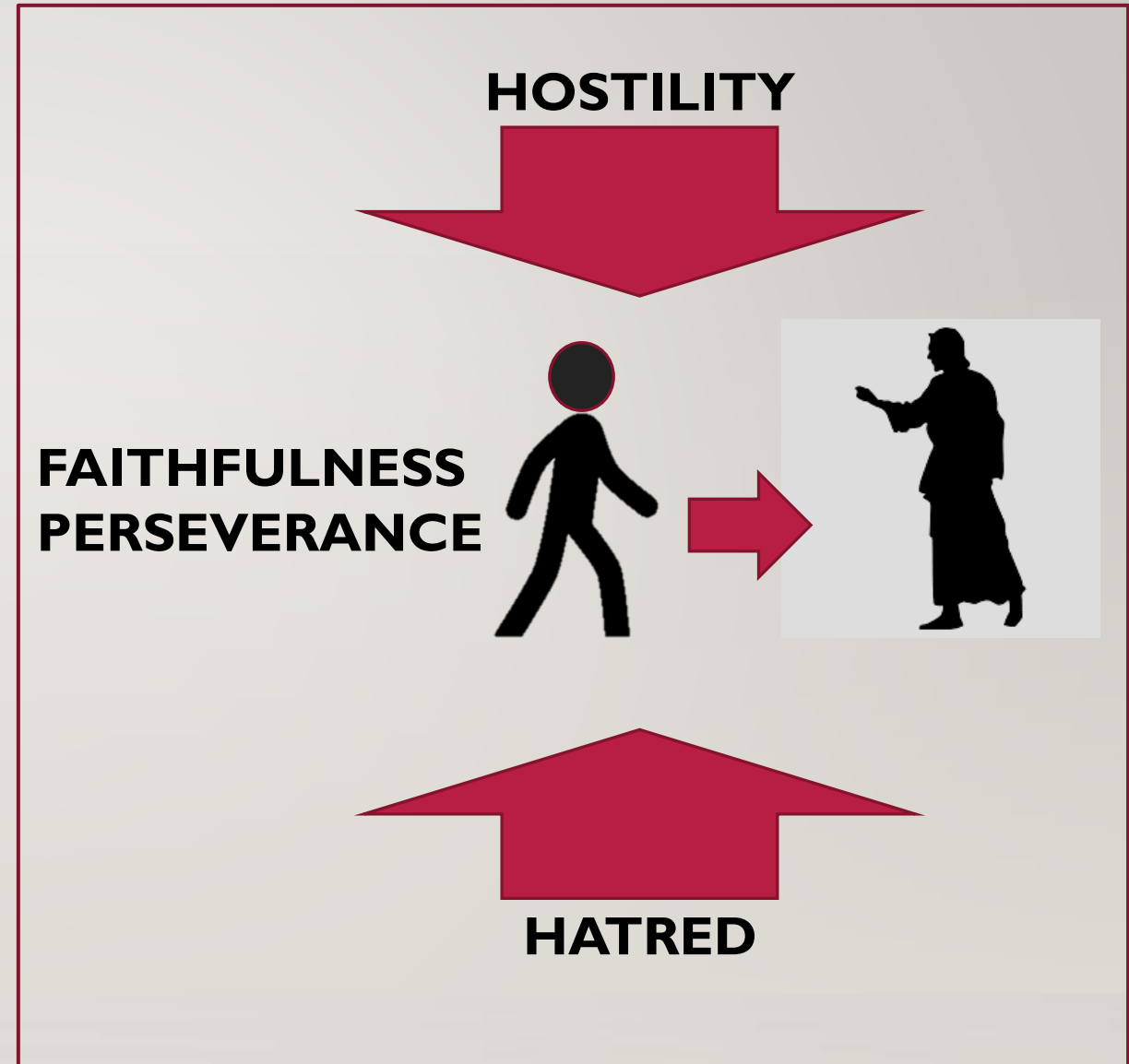
We should always faithfully follow Jesus persevering through hatred and hostility from every direction

As we have learned throughout this quarter, God’s people can expect to be persecuted by the world.

We can also expect that God will come to our defense and help us in times of distress.

God calls us to be people who are brave and willing to trust Him at all times.

- **He will never let us down.**



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The LESSON OUTLINE:

I. PAUL’S APPEAL TO HIS COUNTRYMEN—Acts 22:17-21

II. PAUL’S APPEAL TO THE AUTHORITIES —Acts 22:22-29

I. PAUL’S APPEAL TO HIS COUNTRYMEN —Acts 22:17-21

- In an online survey listing common phobias, fear of public speaking ranked third (after heights and flying).
- It is also true that Christians are affected by this fear as much as anyone—perhaps more so because the stakes in speaking for Christ are higher.
- A Christian speaker might worry not only about how he or she comes across but also about whether the audience is effectively reached and benefited for eternity.
- But even the most reluctant of speakers rarely worries that something he or she says in a speech might set off a riot.
- In our lesson this week, we see that Paul managed to do exactly that with just a single word.

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- Paul had recently returned to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15); a trip he had been warned by a prophet and urged by his companions not to go, but his mind was made up (V 10-13).
- Even though he knew imprisonment and suffering awaited him there, yet he felt compelled by the Spirit to go there and complete the work he had been given by the Lord Jesus (20:22-24).
- Upon arrival, Paul had been greeted warmly by the believers in Jerusalem but also cautioned that hostility against him were running high in the city (Acts 21:17-21).
- To allay this, he agreed to join four men taking a purification vow while paying their expenses (V 23-24).
- Things went smoothly for several days until he was spotted in the temple and falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the inner court – which was forbidden (V 27-28).
- The angry mob would have killed Paul, but Roman troops intervened, putting him in chains and protective custody (V 30-33).
- As the soldiers attempted to hustle him out of danger, Paul asked the “chief captain” (V 37 -- ***chiliarchos***), for permission to speak to the crowd (V 39).

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- He agreed and set Paul at the top of the steps leading to the Roman fortress—out of the reach of the angry throng; and a deep silence ensued as he addressed the people (V 40).
- Paul began his defense by reminding the crowd of his credentials as a zealous student of Gamaliel and a persecutor of Christians (22:3-4).
- He outlined his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus; highlighting the main points (a) **the light** from heaven, (b) **Jesus’ question** and command, and (c) **Paul’s blindness** and baptism (all listed in Acts 9 with added details)
 - A. The first new detail reveals that during Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian (9:26-28), while in the Temple praying, he fell into a trance
 - B. At which time Jesus appeared to him again and told him to leave Jerusalem right away, for the people were not going to accept his testimony about Him (V 18).
 - C. Paul tried to argue against the directive; it appears the Lord was overlooking a few key points and proceeded to fill Him in on them.
- Paul reminded Christ that the people in Jerusalem knew his reputation.

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- They knew he had been zealous to imprison believers in Jesus and to beat them violently in synagogues wherever he found them.
- Surely that degree of dedication had earned him the right to a fair hearing!
- And if that was not enough, Paul added the clincher: he had stood in solidarity with the men who had put Stephen to death (7:58; 8:1)
- This was an episode that Paul might have been uncomfortable reminding the Lord about, but he knew he had already been forgiven for it, and it bolstered his argument.
- As strong an argument as he presented, Paul’s Lord knew that persuasive arguments carries little force against a volatile, emotion-driven mob.
- At the time of the original exchange, the Lord did not bother to argue the point but simply reiterated His command: “Depart.”
- Even if what Paul had claimed about his credibility with the people were true, Christ had something different in mind for him.
- The Lord had plenty of witnesses in Jerusalem; He was going to send Paul into distant regions -- he was to minister to the Gentiles.

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- This was not exactly a new concept; for Jesus had told His original disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).
- The church had proved slow in obeying this directive, although some forays had been made prior to Paul’s missionary work (Acts 8:26-38; 10:1—11:18).
- Paul seems to have been commissioned specifically to jump-start and propel this vital component of the Lord’s work.
- Paul outreach to the Gentile world had never been a secret, so he apparently saw little reason why referencing it now would be an issue.
- Yet it turned out to be the spark that set off the powder keg.

II. PAUL’S APPEAL TO THE AUTHORITIES —Acts 22:22-29

- The crowd had tempered its anger and had been listening quietly up to this point.
- But when Paul spoke the word “Gentiles,” the fury they had demonstrated earlier erupted in a violent surge, more intense and dangerous than before.
- With one voice they shouted, “Away with such a [reprobate] from the earth” (V 22).
- The KJV inserts the word “fellow,” but the Greek has no noun at all—as if the crowd could not think of a term strong enough to convey their horror.

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- Considering Paul unfit to live, the mob threw off their outer cloaks, and tossed handfuls of dirt into the air.
- The situation was getting ugly, and the Roman commander anxiously had Paul brought inside the security of the fortress (V 24).
- But he was not concerned with his prisoner’s safety as much as with finding out why he had incited such an uproar. So, he ordered that Paul be “examined by scourging.”
- Whether this intended scourging would have been as extreme as the one Jesus endured is not certain, but it nevertheless it brought Paul intense pain
- Paul had escaped the violence of the crowd only to face the violence of Roman law and order.
- While he was being tied down in preparation for the whipping, Paul directed a question to the attending centurion: Was it lawful for them to scourge a Roman citizen, especially one who had not yet been tried and found guilty of a crime?
- The question was a challenge, and the centurion immediately reported this new development to the commander, urging him to reconsider what he was about to have done.

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- The commander immediately returned to where Paul was being held; for the apostle’s question had been enough to divert the centurion from his planned course of action.
- The commander’s next comment was somewhat odd, as he told Paul that he too was a Roman citizen but that it had cost him a great sum of money to obtain it (V 28).
- His use of the term “freedom” (*politeia*) is interesting, since it is related to our terms “politics” and “policy.”
- It could refer both to a state or commonwealth and to citizenship in that body. When applied to an individual, it emphasized his rights as a citizen.
- Was there doubt in the commander’s voice as he made his comment? It no doubt surprised him to hear Paul make such a bold claim.
- Roman citizenship was a coveted status that conferred a wide range of privileges and protections not enjoyed by most subjects of the empire.
 - Among these were the right to trial and the right to appeal verdicts.
- Citizens guilty of high crimes and sentenced to death were shielded from the worst forms of execution, often being allowed to choose the method themselves.

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- And they were exempt from scourging and other forms of torture.
- Since it was rare for Jews to be Roman citizens, the commander’s comment may well have betrayed a hint of suspicion, perhaps implying doubt that someone like Paul would have sufficient means to purchase citizenship.
- Paul simply answered that he was born a citizen. This must have astounded the commander, but he did not dispute it or raise further objections
- It may well raise questions in our minds, however. How could Paul have been born into such a status?
- As noted above, it was rare for a Jew to hold Roman citizenship, but it was not unheard of.
- Two primary theories are held among scholars regarding Paul’s citizenship.
 - a)The first links the privilege to his birth in Tarsus, a free city in the extreme southeast of what is now Turkey, arguing that the free status of Tarsus conferred citizenship on all who were born there.
 - b)Others note that Tarsus was a free city, not a Roman colony. So, it is thought Paul’s father or even grandfather was granted citizenship for service to Rome.

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- Some question whether Paul was right to avoid persecution by claiming his citizenship in a pagan empire. Was it an unfair advantage denied to most believers?
- It is certainly true that most Christians at this time, whether Jews or Gentiles, enjoyed no such recourse when facing the power of the Roman state.
- And it is true as well that Jesus forthrightly told His followers to expect persecution and not try at all costs to evade it.
- He certainly did not make use of His own status as the Son of God to avoid brutal treatment and the cross.
- Why did Paul not follow His example here? The first thing we must note is that practically no one in history has displayed as much willingness to endure persecution as the Apostle Paul.
- A quick reading of II Corinthians 11:23-29 will put to rest any notion that he shied away from danger and mistreatment.
- And Roman citizenship provided no sure protection from mob violence that arose spontaneously.

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- On the other hand, Paul’s citizenship, with the official protection it conferred, afforded him a foot in the door to take the gospel to places that otherwise were inaccessible.
- The appeal to Caesar reported in Acts 25:11-12 brought Paul and his message into the heart of Roman officialdom, and that would not have been possible without Roman citizenship.
- So, we should see it as a tool that both God and Paul used to advance the cause of Christ, not as a means to evade hardship.
- Paul’s affirmation of citizenship nevertheless brought an immediate change in his relationship to his captors.
- The soldiers who had been about to administer the examination by scourging promptly backed away when they heard that Paul was a citizen.
- The next day he started the legal machinery that he hoped would bring a quick resolution to Paul’s case (V 30).
- That resolution would not be quick, but under God’s superintendence, the process Paul would endure for the next two years would mightily advance God’s work.



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“ADVANCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE”



1. Why did Jesus appear to Paul upon his return to Jerusalem as a new convert? What objection did Paul raise to the Lord's command?
2. How did Paul make the same argument to the crowd before him? What set off the crowd into another violent rage?
3. Why did Paul ask the centurion about the legality of scourging a Roman citizen?
4. How did the Roman commander react to this development?
5. What made Roman citizenship a coveted status in the empire? What might the commander have been implying with his comment about his own citizenship?
6. How did Paul respond? What was the immediate result of Paul's citizenship affirmation?



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“DEVELOPING THE LESSON”



1. The first part of Paul’s defense (V 1-16) is memorable to those who are familiar with his conversion, as he repeated the details of Acts 9:1-18. Pay attention to the details in the retelling and how important those facts are to complete the portrait of his conversion.
2. The people listened to Paul until he mentioned his Gentile ministry. They vehemently rejected the idea that there was any equality of Gentiles and Jews regarding salvation. Research origins of this attitude among the Jews.
3. When Paul was stretched out on the whipping post, he asked the centurion who was going to oversee or administer the flogging if this was how they normally treated a Roman citizen. Delve into the nature of Paul’s treatment as compared to that of His Savior as He stood before Pilate.

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PROVERBS 27:17

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