

A Courageous Witness

Acts 22:30-23:22

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Why are you here this morning? Have you ever stopped to consider why you come to church every Sunday? Perhaps you are here because it is a habit. Perhaps you are here because you have a drug problem, and your friends or family “*drug*” you with them. Perhaps your parents made you come. Perhaps you are here this morning because it is Easter Sunday and your family insisted that you come with them. Have you ever wondered: *Why would anyone go to church every Sunday at all?*

If you are a Christian and attend church here at Grand every Sunday or some other church, then the Apostle Paul tells you and me why we are here. Look in Acts 23:6b:

It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am [here].

You see, it is the fact of the resurrection that Christians all over the world gather every Sunday. We gather to worship a risen and reigning Savior. We do not gather to worship a dead savior. Jesus has risen from the dead, and he is alive. *He ascended into heaven and is seated at God’s right hand, and one day soon, He will return to get His people and take them to be with Him in Heaven.*

Think about it this way. When we talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are not only talking about His resurrection, but we are talking about a worldview that penetrates and impacts every facet of our lives. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the lens through which we see the world because if Jesus’ resurrection is true, and it is, then that means if you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will be resurrected from the dead. If you will be resurrected from the dead, then that means you are free from death. You are free to live a radical life for Christ because to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ means we believe in a reality beyond what we see physically.

Here is one difference between our worldview as Christians and the contemporary worldview. For the most part, contemporary culture only focuses on the visible. It only believes in what it can observe with its eyes or with science. However, I will grant there is a growing part of our culture that claims to be spiritual and believes in spiritual things, but they do not hold to a physical resurrection of our bodies, much less of the Lord Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of those who believe in Jesus is a radical idea that separates us from all other religions. While it may seem like this is a contemporary issue, it is not.

Believe it or not, our current culture is not much different than the Apostle Paul’s was. There was a great division in Paul’s day. There were those who held to a resurrection and those who didn’t—however, even those who didn’t still held to some form of spirituality.

Here is what I mean. There are those in our day, as there were in Paul’s day, who are/were ONLY willing to believe in what they can see, measure, touch, and feel. For them, it seems just too much to believe that there is something intangible that is beyond what they can observe.

These people may even hold to some form of spirituality but to believe in a spirituality that includes the resurrection of the dead goes too far. It actually implies that they must begin to believe in some form of a god, and while they want to be spiritual, they do not want to be accountable to any kind of god that has the power to raise the dead to life. If they admit this, they have to say: *I know there is a God, and I am not Him.*

Since we live in Ames, a university town, we live in a unique kind of culture in our city. Many in the academic and university settings tell us that if we cannot observe God, then He must not exist, and therefore we

must not consider him. These academics tell us that God only exists as a crutch for those who hold to religious fantasies or imagination. They say God is a primitive idea, and we must evolve beyond this concept.

Obviously, Christians do not agree with this proposition. We believe in the unseen world. We believe that the world is linked metaphysically and rationally to the truth of the resurrection. Therefore, as Christians, we must be willing and able to stand with the Apostle Paul and say:

It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am [here].

This really is our main point this morning: *The fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope and courage in this life.* The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the reason we joyfully gather here every Sunday. Actually, we celebrate the resurrection every Sunday. That is the reason we gather on Sundays because that was the day Jesus was raised from the dead.

Let's walk through the text. Our narrative breaks down into two sections. I want to walk through them and then point you to three application principles in this story.

The first section of our narrative is Acts 22:30-23:11. We're picking up right where we left off last Sunday. Acts 22:30 tells us that the centurion wanted to know the real reason the Jews were targeting Paul for arrest and a beating. After all, he had almost beaten Paul, a Roman citizen, who had not been condemned. This would have been a major miscarriage of justice under Roman law, and he would have been held responsible for this miscarriage of justice.

So, in Acts 23:1-5, we see that he brought Paul before the Sanhedrin council. The Sanhedrin council was made up of the Sadducees, Pharisees, and the elders. Paul began the meeting without ever being asked a question. Look in v. 1 and see what he said:

Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

This statement seemed harmless enough but what happened was that Ananias told those who were standing by Paul to hit him in the mouth. Now, this was not some "*Will Smith*" open-handed, lightweight slap but a punch in the mouth. It was a punch given in order to beat someone. It was a punch that carried malice.

Also, if you notice, the text said Ananias told "*those who stood by him*" to hit him, which means he got hit more than once. Several men punched him in the mouth while, most likely, two other men held him up.

I don't know if you have ever been hit like that before, but I have. When I was young and dumb, a "*so-called friend*" of mine started a fight in a bar, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I made the mistake of getting involved. Two bouncers grabbed me, one on each arm, and another bouncer began to work on my nose and mouth until they threw me out the front door. I bled like a stuck hog all over my clothes and even my boots. Paul most likely got more blows than I did, and he certainly had blood all over his face and clothes. My point is that he would have been a bloody mess and in lots of pain.

Then Paul told Ananias that God was going to strike him, and then he called him a "*whitewashed wall*." This statement might seem harmless enough because in Matthew 23 Jesus called the Pharisees a *whitewashed wall*, and since Jesus did it, you might think Paul could do it. Also, John, the Baptist, called them "*a brood of vipers*."

Being called a *whitewashed wall* was not a good thing. The Jews washed the entrances of their tombs white in order to identify them. It signaled those who were there that they were not to touch the tomb because the remains of the dead were inside. To touch something that contained remains of the dead meant that you were ritually unclean. So, to call someone, a *whitewashed wall* was to call them unclean. To make matters worse, you certainly didn't call the High Priest a *whitewashed wall*. That was a major offense.

Here is the difference between Paul and Jesus calling the Pharisees *whitewashed walls*. Jesus was addressing them when He taught. He was not on trial. When Jesus was on trial, He didn't attempt to defend Himself. Paul, like Jesus, was on trial, but he responded with an offensive statement.

What he did was in direct contradiction with what he taught. Remember in Roman 12:14 to *“bless those who persecute you”* and concluded in v. 21 to *“overcome evil with good.”*

Paul pulled a Romans 7 kind of thing, didn't he? He did the opposite of what he knew he was supposed to do. Then the council said: *“Would you revile God's high priest?”*

When Paul realized he had addressed the High Priest, he corrected himself and basically apologized. He knew it was wrong for him to address the High Priest this way, so he 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.’”

There's lots of speculation by scholars whether Paul had sinned and lost his temper and spoke evil of the High Priest. I think the simplest explanation is the best one.

First, Paul didn't know Ananias was the current High Priest. Paul hadn't been in Jerusalem for eight years, and a lot had changed. He didn't know Ananias was serving as the High Priest. Second, even if he didn't know, Paul did lose his temper and, in his anger, called the High Priest an offensive name. That was the reason he apologized for what he said.

Remember, although Paul was an apostle, he was still a sinner. He said as much in Romans 7. He may have been miraculously saved by Jesus, commissioned as an Apostle to the Gentiles, but he was still a sinner.

Now, after this event, Luke moved on to the next thing in v. 6. He offered no explanation of what Paul did or an interpretation of what transpired. I know I just did, but Luke simply moves on to what Paul did next. The next thing he did was to say that he was before them because, ultimately, he believed in the resurrection of the dead. This statement divided the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Verses 7-8 explain that the reason this divided the assembly was that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees did not.

The Pharisees actually were the conservatives of the group. They not only believed in the resurrection, but they also believed in angels, demons, and the spiritual realm. The Sadducees did not believe in those things, and also, they only held to the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, or the books of Moses.

At this point, the discussion by the assembly turned into a dumpster fire. Some of the Pharisees wanted to affirm Paul and let him go, but others did not. Then the assembly turned into a free-for-all.

When this happened, once again, it was the Roman soldiers to the rescue. They grabbed Paul and got him out of the assembly before they could tear him limb from limb. They took him to their own barracks for protection.

It might be easy to conclude that Paul played the resurrection card in order to divide the assembly, but that was not the case. Paul was not trying to avoid trouble or even get out of trouble. His goal was to be a witness. Remember, everything he did was to advance the gospel, so talking about the resurrection would eventually open the door for him to talk about Jesus.

The Pharisees needed not only to believe in the resurrection but specifically in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They needed to know that it was Jesus who died and rose from the dead.

Likewise, the Sadducees needed to believe in more than just the Torah. They needed to see how all of Scripture testified to the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of Jesus, their Messiah from the dead.

These Jewish leaders needed to know that Jesus was indeed alive. They needed to know that they needed to trust in Him alone. They needed to know the hope that Paul had. That was the reason he interjected hope in his statement about the resurrection.

Verse 11 concludes our first section with the amazing hope that Paul had coming to him and standing by him in the night. You see, it is not just any hope in the resurrection that Paul had but specific hope that Jesus was alive. It is only the Savior who has passed through suffering and death for us, and the rose from the dead that can give us hope and courage in the darkest nights of our lives. Look in v. 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."

The final section of our narrative concludes when Paul's nephew heard of the plot by 40 Jewish men to ambush the Roman guards and kill Paul when they brought him back for more questioning. His nephew told Paul about the plot, and so he sent his nephew to the tribune to tell them about the plot. They listened to the young man and then told him not to tell anyone.

The heart of our text this morning is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything hangs on Jesus being alive. So, let me give you three takeaways about the resurrection that we must apply to our lives.

I. The resurrection is THE truth that must be proclaimed (Acts 22:30-23:10).

The basis for everything Paul was about was built on the foundation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul had written in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14,

Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.

Everything about Paul's proclamation of the gospel concluded with the fact that *Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended to heaven*. Without the resurrection in our gospel presentation, then our gospel presentation is incomplete.

So, Paul was not trying to derail the assembly but move it to the point that he lived to make—Jesus is the Messiah who died on the cross to atone for the sins of His people, and then He rose from the dead on the third day, and with your faith and repentance in Him, you are raised to new life in Him.

Paul needed to get not only to Jesus' life and death but also needed to convince them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They needed to hear and believe the whole gospel, not simply that He had died. They knew Jesus died, but they did not believe He was raised from the dead.

Remember when Jesus met two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were sad because they didn't believe he had been raised from the dead. They knew He was dead but thought His body was missing. Sure, they thought Jesus died to redeem His people, but He was dead. These disciples were stuck on Jesus' death on the cross. They didn't realize that, really, there is no gospel without the resurrection.

Then Jesus met them on the Emmaus road. He engaged them with what they understood and pushed them in God's word in order to show them that the Messiah's life did not end with His death on the cross. They needed to believe in His resurrection. Listen to Luke 23:25-27, 32-34:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed!"

Then before Jesus ascended into Heaven, Luke records in Luke 24:44-48:

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the

Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

The resurrection is the truth that must be proclaimed. It is what separates Christianity from all other religions. It is what must be proclaimed by His witnesses. We are witnesses of these things, and as witnesses, we are sent out.

2. The resurrection is THE truth that gives us courage (Acts 23:11)

Have you ever been where Paul has been? I don’t mean you are standing before the Sanhedrin Court accused but that the Lord has called you to do something, you know it will be hard, and sure enough, it is hard and perhaps even harder than you anticipated. It is in the darkness of these moments that you can feel alone and even abandoned. Perhaps you didn’t do anything, but something was done to you by someone else or others, and now life is a mess. In these kinds of moments, you can feel all alone. It is not a good experience.

The Lord Jesus visited Paul in the night to remind him that he was not alone. He visited him to remind him and us of a very important truth: *The Lord stands by us in the darkest of nights.*

He stands by us when the fight is hard, and we are weak. Think about it. The Apostle Paul had been beaten twice in two days. He was a bloody mess. Now he was in the barracks of the Roman centurion; his head was shaved, he was covered in blood, he was most likely nursing a broken nose and two black eyes. The physical pain and weakness were real, and that was why he needed the presence of the Lord Jesus in the darkness of the night.

The Lord Jesus came to him to remind and reassure him he was not alone. Paul was right where Jesus wanted him to be. His hope in the resurrection was real. His faith became sight when Jesus showed up to remind him he was not alone.

I don’t know about you, but it seems that it is always at night that I feel most anxious and alone. I may know lots of biblical truth, but somewhere in the night, my mind seems to want to play tricks on me, and my faith grows weak. My heart tempts me to believe a lie instead of the truth. Are you like me?

It is in those moments that I need the truth of the risen Savior to come to me and remind me to “*take courage.*” Luke does not tell us how the Lord Jesus showed Himself to Paul. Perhaps it was a vision or a dream. *The point is that the Risen Lord did not abandon Paul.*

Likewise, He does not abandon us. Jesus shows up to us by His Holy Spirit, in His word, in our prayers, in our worship, and through our brothers and sisters in Christ who support us. Sometimes it is like Jesus shows up in the unlikeliest of places. We experience His comforting presence through the hugs and prayers of those He sends to us. In those moments, we are reminded that we are not alone and that He never leaves us or forsakes us.

In the gospels, Jesus often called people to “*take heart.*” He told the paralytic in Matthew 9:2, “*Take heart, your sins are forgiven.*” He told the woman with the issue of blood in Matthew 9:22, “*Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.*” In Matthew 14:27, He told His frightened disciples when they were on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee, “*Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.*” In John 16:33, He told His disciples in the Upper Room just before His crucifixion, “*Take heart; I have overcome the world.*”

Isaiah 43:13a is one of my favorite passages to remind myself of Jesus’ presence when I feel overwhelmed by life. It says:

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you,
O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.*

² *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.*

³ *For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

The only way this text can give you hope and courage is because Jesus has been raised from the dead. Because Jesus was raised from the dead we know and believe that God does not abandon us. He gives courage and hope where there is no hope.

Where do you need hope and courage right now? Is it in your marriage? Is it in your parenting? Is it caring for your aging or perhaps sick parents? Is it in your family? Is it in your finances? Is it in your job? Is it at Iowa State or DMACC, or some other school? Is it in junior high or high school?

Take courage and testify about your faith in the resurrected Jesus. Wherever He sends you, hold fast to the truth that He will never leave you or forsake you, so *take courage*.

3. The resurrection is THE truth that gives us protection (Acts 23:12-22)

In vv. 12-22, we learn that Paul had a sister and he had a nephew. Prior to this, we did not know much about the Apostle's family. By divine providence, his family was in Jerusalem, and his nephew must have overheard what the zealots had planned to do to his uncle. So, when he heard about the plot, he went and told Paul, who then sent him to the Roman Tribune.

This part of the story reminds me of Esther's story. In the book of Esther, we never hear the Lord speak or how He orchestrated the circumstances for her to be queen and protect her people from destruction. However, what we know is that He did. The fingerprints of God's providential care are all over the book of Esther.

Likewise, we do not hear what the Lord said to protect Paul. All we know is what we heard in v. 11:

"Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

Paul was going to eventually go to Rome. So, the fact is that Jesus' divine protection and plan for Paul came for him at the right time in order to get him to Rome.

Next, we see in v. 23 how the Roman government did the Lord's work to protect Paul. The Lord Jesus, through the Roman military power, ordered two hundred foot soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred soldiers with spears to guard Paul against the plot of the zealots.

Paul was protected until his mission was fulfilled. Paul believed what he wrote in Romans 8:31-39 because he believed it and had lived it:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³² *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* ³³ *Who shall bring any charge*

against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness,

or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything*

*else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ
Jesus our Lord.*

Brothers and sisters, this does not mean we will never die. The Apostle Paul eventually died, but it was not until he had completed his course.

You see, no servant of the Lord Jesus dies a premature death.¹ The 19th-century Scottish missionary David Livingstone wrote:

"I am immortal till my work is accomplished,"²

It is the Resurrected Savior who guards and protects His people. Take courage; you will finish your course because no servant of the Lord Jesus dies a premature death. So, stay the course and finish the race He has marked out for you because there is nothing that separates you from the Resurrected Savior.

I want to come back to my opening question: *Why are you here this morning?* I will tell you why you are here. Luke writes in Luke 24:1-9:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?

⁶ He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third-day rise." ⁸ And they remembered his words,

⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

You are here because Jesus is alive. He has divinely ordered events to get you here. Oh, there may be people in your life who seem to have made decisions for you, but God sovereignly ordered these events so you can be here because He is not through with you. He is holding out hope to you in Jesus Christ. Will you be courageous enough to trust in Christ? Will you turn from your sin and turn to Jesus? Trust in Jesus while you still have time. Do not wait. Find someone to help you understand the gospel.

Brother and sister in Christ, because Jesus is alive, we can be courageous witnesses wherever the Lord has placed us. Take courage and testify of the risen Savior. He always stands by us.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Acts*, 305.

² <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/msquotes.html>.