

Series: Acts

Title: Three Lessons to Learn

Scripture: Acts 23: 1-5

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Place: SGBC, Princeton, NJ

Tonight we look at three lessons: 1) a lesson on following the Lord, 2) a lesson on hypocrisy, 3) a lesson on true humility. Paul had been put in bands by his fellow kinsmen after the flesh. We pick up with the day following.

Acts 22: 30: On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from *his* bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

The chief captain is determined to find out what crime Paul has committed to make the Jews want to kill him. This council is the Sanhedrin--the chief priests and all their council. Some twenty years before, this council chose Paul to lead the charge against Christ and his church: from which Paul received letters to go to Damascus and bring the believers bound to Jerusalem. Now, here Paul stands before the chief priests and all the council. They have given Paul opportunity to speak.

Acts 23:1: And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Paul preached that Christ Jesus is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes. He taught the Jews in every place that it is not necessary for them to circumcise their children or walk after the customs of the law any longer. The self-righteous men, whose hope was in the law, did what self-righteous religion does today and has always done, they accused Paul of being lawless--of teaching men to apostatize from Moses, to live as rebels against the law given of God through Moses. Their accusation when they nabbed him tells us what they thought Paul was teaching:

Acts 21:28: Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

So now, in answer to those charges: to the high priest, to all the council and to the chief captain, Paul says, "**I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.**" Paul says much the same later:

Acts 24: 11: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12: And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. [that is that he brought Gentiles into the temple]

Paul's declaration of innocence filled the high priest with anger.

Acts 23: 2: And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

I. A LESSON IN FOLLOWING AFTER THE LORD.

So much of Paul's trip to Jerusalem shadows, to a lesser degree, the work of our Lord.

Paul went up to Jerusalem to provide money for the poor saints--Christ came down, and he who was rich, for the sake of his people, became poor that we might be made rich.

Paul was accused of being against the law, yet Paul denied himself his freedom, separated himself and went in to redeem his brethren who were bound under the law--Christ Jesus was accused of being against the law and the prophets, yet this holy one who was free from the law was willingly made under the law that he might redeem them that were under the curse of the law.

The angry mob raged upon Paul--Christ Jesus was beaten, spit upon.

John 18: 19: The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. 20: Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21: Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. 22: And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23: Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

It was prophesied that the Lord would be smitten this way.

Micah 5: 1:...they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew all that would befall him when he came to where we are, yet he willingly came. He said,

Isaiah 50:6: I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

Likewise, the Lord told Paul through the Spirit that he would be bound. But Paul was willing not only to be bound, but to die. Paul said,

Romans 1:16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;

The Lord tells his disciples--you and I--to expect the same rejection he encountered. The more closely you follow Christ the more you can expect this same rejection.

Matthew 10: 25: It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? 26: Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27: What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. 28: And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell....32: Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. 33: But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. 34: Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35: For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36: And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37: He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38: And he that taketh not his cross, and

followeth after me, is not worthy of me. 39: He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Application: Have we forsaken all and followed Christ?

Following the Lord is giving OURSELVES. Paul gave himself to the Lord.

The rich young ruler had a head for religion but a heart for this world. The Lord proved his vanity one way: the Lord told him to stop arranging his religion around his life in the world and to arrange his life around the worship of Christ--but he could not follow Christ because he had too many irons in this world's fires. The Lord proved his religion was vain.

Following the Lord is giving OURSELVES. Man by nature does not mind giving--his money, his time, even his body to be burned--just as long as he does not have to give HIMSELF. We are talking about being made willing to give up this world and to give ourselves to Christ Jesus--willing bond servants to him.

Example of giving ourselves to the Lord.

The church at Jerusalem was the established church. The church at Macedonia was brand new and had every obstacle we have here, even more. Yet, when Jerusalem was in need that fledgling congregation gave to Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8: 1: Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; 2: How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy AND their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3: For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 4: Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5: And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Gill--"When it is considered that these persons had given their whole selves, their all to Christ, had committed all into his hands, and devoted themselves entirely to his service; and had declared their subjection to his ministers as servants under him, and to his word and ordinances as ministered by them; it need not be so much wondered at, that they should be so liberal in giving away their worldly substance for the relief of Christ's poor members, when they had given their precious souls, their immortal all, and had committed the salvation of them entirely to him."

All Paul had to do to get out from under this burden was to agree with these men.

That is the way the flesh would rather go, but Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Are we willing to lay aside the weight that so easily besets us so we can run the race set before us looking to Christ OR would we rather take the path of least resistance? Can you hear Christ say,

Isaiah 50:6: I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb 12: 1-4.)

II. A LESSON IN HYPOCRISY

Acts 23: Acts 23: 2: And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3: Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

As long as we deem ourselves righteous we will prove it by expecting others to bow to us.

As soon as Paul declared he had lived in all good conscious before God, Ananias revealed his own heart, his neck stiffened up, his chest poked out, and he demanded, "Slap his mouth shut!" Paul said because you

stand to judge me by the law, yet command me smitten contrary to the law, you prove that you are a dirty, dilapidated wall that has been painted over to make it look new. Our Lord said that:

Matthew 23: 25: Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess...

Extortion is oppression. It is seeking fault in others so a man can: excuse his own rebellion OR bribe others to let him off the hook OR to get others to pay him in some way. Excess is the unrestrained heart: a heart set on our way, on ease and pleasures of this world.

Matthew 23: 26: *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which* is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27: Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. 28: Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Illustration: The sepulchers in New Orleans.

No matter how obviously a man is a hypocrite in his religion, others like him will always support him.

Acts 23: 4: And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

Their hearts were as full of extortion and excess as Ananias'. He bribed them and they liked what he had to offer. The law stated it was unlawful to smite a man who was not condemned and the law stated it was unlawful to revile one who held the office of ruler of the people. They picked the law that served their belly and ignored the other.

Illustration: A serial killer will commit murder then stop at the first stop sign he comes to.

Application: Until we are made to behold our nothingness and the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, we will use the law--even the whole word of God--unlawfully--to excuse or accuse:

Romans 2: 1: Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

David cried for God to cleanse him within.

Psalm 51: 7: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8: Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. 9: Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 10: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

With the blood of Christ, purge my conscious from dead works to serve the living God, that my soul might be purified "in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren,"

III. A LESSON IN TRUE HUMILITY

When Paul rebuked them for playing the hypocrite they defended themselves. But by the power of the Spirit of grace when they rebuked Paul, Paul did not. Paul is the accused, yet he is the only one who seeks to honor God's word, he does so because it is his Master's word. He did not want to dishonor his Lord before these self-righteous hypocrites.

Acts 23: 5: Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Here we see the difference in sinners who have a mere form of godliness and those to whom Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God.

Paul knew fully that this man was not a high priest before God but that Christ Jesus is the High Priest and Lamb of God.

- Christ has come and fulfilled the shadows and types given in the law of Moses.
- He is the righteousness of his people and has faithfully obeyed every jot and tittle of the law as the representative of those given him.
- He has laid down his life as the spotless Lamb of God
- As the great High Priest of his people, he entered into the holiest of holies, having obtained eternal redemption for us.
- He purchased each of his elect sheep from the curse of the law and he shall call each one by name and they shall follow him.

Moreover, Paul knew Christ Jesus is the Head of the church, both Lord and Christ, the Monarch; the King of heaven and earth, the government is on his shoulder. Here the apostle Paul stands, an ambassador for Christ. Paul truly has authority, *from* THE Authority!

Here is a chief captain of the Roman guard who in his own ignorance thinks he is calling the shots. Here is a man, appointed by men, to preside as high priest (an office that does not even exist anymore.) Here is a ruling council of elders ignorant of the righteousness of God. And all of them have set Paul in their midst...

Yet, Paul knows who is really in charge: CHRIST JESUS THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And Paul knows that his Father and his Lord, the true Ruler of the people, had placed these men where they are and has placed him where he is. This is the substance of humility.

Example: that night they came to arrest our Lord, Peter drew the sword and cut off one of the soldier's ears:

Matthew 26: 52: Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. 53: Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? 54: But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?...John 18: 11:...the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

True, God-given humility puts up the sword of the flesh and says in the heart, "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Example: Pilate tried to push his authority on the Lord of glory:

John 19: 10: Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? 11: Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above:

You are only able to do what the "determinate council and foreknowledge of God' determined before to be done.

Example: Paul said,

Ro 13:1: Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2: Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

What if they charge me falsely?

I Peter 2: 19: For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. 20: For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. 21: For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 24: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 25: For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

APPLICATION: I am sent here to watch for your souls as one that must give account.

Hebrews 13: 17: Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

I want to serve you with joy not grief. Truthfully, I never knew this grief until I became a pastor. My earnest pray to God is:

1. Teach us to forsake all and follow Christ--to first give ourselves so that we truly give of ourselves.
2. Teach us that there is no good in us so that we stop defending ourselves and cast ourselves on God's mercy--beg him to create in us a clean heart, a right spirit within--cleanse us from the deceitful heart of hypocrisy.
3. Teach us to submit ourselves in humility, first trusting our way to the King of kings and Lord of lords, that we might truly submit ourselves with a teachable spirit with ears to hear and heart to obey.

Proverbs 14:16: A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

AMEN!