

Stepping Forward

Acts 22:30-23:11, Sunday AM, January 1, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Acts 22:21-23:11 “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”²² They listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!”²³ And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,²⁴ the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.²⁵ But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”²⁶ When the centurion heard *this*, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.”²⁷ The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.”²⁸ The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen.”²⁹ Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.³⁰ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.³¹ Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”³² The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.³³ Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?”³⁴ But the bystanders said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”³⁵ And Paul said, “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.’”³⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”³⁷ As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.³⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.³⁹ And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”⁴⁰ And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.⁴¹ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”

We’re back to Acts again, but what a special interruption as we celebrated Christ’s first advent looking first at Getting things ready—Zecharias told about the special role of his own miracle baby, all wrapped in the preparation for another baby—Christ the Messiah! And last week, we heard the message of Christmas from Luke 2. HOW ARE YOU changed because of this Christmas season? Were you able to contemplate what we studied/sang together, what you pondered on your own as you celebrated Christmas? But now, we return to our study in Acts—did it come back to you as Pastor Jahn read the passage? Paul came to Jerusalem, had good fellowship with the believers there, but then some spread “news” that Paul teaches against the law, the Jewish people, and the temple. Furthermore, Paul dishonored the temple by bringing Greeks into the temple. Because this is “TRUTH,” their holy indignation led to dragging Paul from the temple to kill him, stopped in the middle of beating him only because of a Roman commander and a couple of centurions and their soldiers. But he still is placed in chains though they can’t get an answer concerning his “crime” because of the mob, so out of control that Paul is carried to the safety of the barracks. And what does Paul do? He asks the commander for permission to defend himself before the angry, violent mob! **What drives Paul? Where is he looking?** Start with mission—He was commissioned to proclaim the gospel, to bear Christ’s name “before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” (Acts 9:15) And what does believing the gospel give Paul and all the rest of us who believe? A living Savior, One not only preparing a home for us and interceding before the Father on our behalf, but One who is coming again for us, creating expectation which His children joyfully proclaim. Proclaim the salvation and reign of Jesus as we move from the first advent to the second.

*Hymn #125: Joy to the World

Good idea, Paul. Speak to the Jews. It all went well until you mentioned the “Gentile” word—saying they could receive the gospel in an equal way with the Jews. The crowd once again out of control, the commander orders Paul taken to the barracks to be scourged to make sure his story is honest. Paul waits until stretched out for a beating, then asks, “Are you sure you want to beat a Roman citizen?” NO ONE wants to be beaten, but to have such a clear head under such pressure to first give the gospel to a mob and then cross a Roman commander is admirable. Yet his troubles weren’t over as the commander now puts him in front of the religious leaders—perhaps Paul’s former peers, many of whom felt betrayed by him. Paul, watch your words or you’ll get in trouble.

“Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” He brings God near—VERY important, because Paul needs fear of God, NOT MAN in this situation. This fear must be cultivated before in order for it to guide DURING this tough time for Paul. Are you cultivating fear of God?

*Hymn (Powerpoint): When Trials Come *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: To the Praise of His Glorious Grace

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1–14 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **To** the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Offering: *Doxology: What a conversation—Paul slapped at the high priest’s command. Paul apologizes for what he said but moves on, skillfully pitting the leaders against one another. But Paul is not merely saving his own skin, he is conscious of his commission to testify to the grace of God. He represents not merely a heavenly country, but the God of that country—His Savior, His Redeemer. Don’t seek to manipulate or move people without holding tightly to His hand. People are His creation, made in His image. You answer to HIM for how you care for them, EVEN when they are instruments of the devil to do His will.

*Hymn #388: I Would Be Like Jesus

Paul makes it through once again delivered by the commander and his soldiers, and that night, he has a vision of the Lord standing next to him encouraging him. But he was not merely told he was on the right track testifying the gospel in tough situations, but that he must do the same in Rome. God, isn’t it enough? Can’t I retire? It seems like too much! But remember our Scripture reading? Paul of all people speaks of overflowing grace. He sees it in his salvation, in the presence and power of the Spirit, but also in God’s provision for these seemingly impossible situations he was placed in again and again. And this grace directed his attention not merely toward his accomplishments, but to God Himself—ALL of it was to the praise of HIS glorious grace as the choir sang. How could Paul NOT testify and use EVERY means possible to not merely stay alive, but to seek to reach even his antagonizers—knowing true life was with Christ! we sang it to begin our Christmas season, let’s sing it as we close it. Remember who He is—not just the facts, but He came to be WITH YOU!

*Hymn (Powerpoint): Who is This

Message: Stepping Forward Acts 22:30-23:11

*Hymn #567: Another Year is Dawning

Prayer