

54—Acts 22.30-23.35—On Trial (Part 1)

I. Introduction

- a. I've entitled this sermon, "On Trial." I want us, like a jury, to look at this scene and ask ourselves, "Who are the people of God?" and by that, I mean, "Who does the will of God?"
- b. I want us to learn from this. Imagine the rolls were reversed. Imagine we are reading a story written about us and those who wrote it were the jury and the jury are the visitors who come here. Which group would we be in this story?
- c. Now I will never advocate for a seeker sensitive gathering. However, if Luke wrote this book of Acts to you like he did Theophilus, which group do you think does the will of God and which group would you give your life for?
- d. We are on trial every week. Visitors come and they watch to see if we love the Lord and love our neighbors. Do they worship by singing praises to the Lord? Are they repentant? Are they joyful? Will they accept this outsider? Are they genuine or fake? Is this just another clique, club, or tribe like we read about in our story today?

II. Main Point

- a. What's the main point?
 - i. Luke makes clear that Paul is innocent from the Pharisees and the commander and more to come. Christians really are good citizens. We do not seek insurrection because our King already reigns. But we seek to make disciples for God's Kingdom by sharing the gospel. Is Paul's innocence the main point?
 - ii. Is the main point showing us that tribalism seems to require the tribe to do evil and break the law they want to uphold for the sake of saving their tribe?
 - iii. The Book of Acts has a lot of legal trials in it. Essentially, the rest of the book is an ongoing trial. I would argue that Paul is not the only one on trial. We all are.
 - iv. Or maybe since this book is largely about the advancement of the God's word and Kingdom especially in the midst of suffering for the name that's the main point as we see the word proclaimed in Jerusalem and to high officials.
- b. I think all of those are weighty points that we need to see but the diamond in the rough is verse 11 which seems to bring aspects of all of these together and yet say, Jesus stood by Paul and gives him courage to continue witnessing to the truth in the midst of danger. Among the people of God, Paul stands out as the one who does the will of God no matter what and even when he messes up.

III. Outline

- a. Attempting to find the truth
- b. The Divisive Truth of the Resurrection (Next Week)
- c. The Sovereign Lord Provides, Protects and Leads (Next Week)

IV. Exposition

- a. As we break into this next scene, there have been two attempts at finding the truth. First, the commander asked the crowd why they were beating Paul. As before, some said one thing and some another. Like we've seen before, there's a lot of confusion. It raises the question, "Is this God's way? Are his people showing us who their God is by beating Paul for assumptions?" The second attempt was foiled when Paul revealed his Roman citizenship. Obviously, the method of flogging was off the table. And now we arrive at attempt number 3—trial before the Sanhedrin.
 - i. Let's set the stage first with this: Jesus told his disciples this would happen.
 1. In (Lk. 21:12-19) we read: ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear

witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

2. This has been happening since the beginning of Acts. The suffering of Christ's disciples is strangely similar to Jesus' sufferings. We've noted that the suffering of God's people from the beginning made a strong case for the certainty of the resurrection of Christ. These people are not suffering for a dead Jesus.
3. Indeed, throughout these encounters with mobs, councils, kings, and governors we see the risen Lord Jesus give wisdom to those who trust him. Their counterparts are those who look foolish and evil in the end.
 - a. From Peter and John's first trials to Stephen and Paul declaring the truth before an angry crowd, no one has been able to withstand or contradict them. Since they cannot respond with reason, they respond with violence.
 - b. I think a watching world ought to read the Bible for themselves and see how Christians live their lives in a hostile world like our scene today. But the world is going to first read Christians—they want to know what their lives say about the God they serve.
 - i. When you read this story, do you not see some serious problems with this tribe in Jerusalem? Do we have tendencies towards diverting to evil means when we cannot refute the truth? We may not do violence but do we snub people and put our noses in the air?
 - ii. I want to ask is that God's will? Does it matter that they break their own law to maintain their tribe?
 - iii. Are you okay with them being "good" on the outside and "evil" on the inside?
 - iv. Does it matter how one come to the truth?
- ii. As we venture into these trials, I'd like to have you think that there's more on trial than Paul.
 1. It's obvious that Paul is on trial. Is his faith genuine or fake? Will he deny Christ to avoid suffering? Will he continue to bear witness to the resurrection? Does he pass the test?
 2. Additionally, Christianity is on trial. There were many people who heard the gospel as Paul spoke from the steps of the barracks. They also saw a man in chains bearing witness in a way that displays the humility and sufferings of Christ while not breaking the law. I wonder how many believed the gospel after Paul's defense? So, as you see that play out in real life, does the gospel still seem valid and true to you?
 3. From a different perspective, the Jews are on trial before God. How they handle this situation and how they respond to the gospel is on record. Are God's people really God's people? Do they seek the truth according to God's law?
 - a. As Jesus said, "My family are those who do the will of God" meaning it doesn't matter if you can trace your bloodline to one of the tribes of Israel. You are only in the family of God through repentance and faith in Christ.
 4. And finally, everyone else in this scene is on trial. The Roman military and government. Yes, they will all have to give an account for their actions and responses. And we too are on trial. We must give an account for how we respond to this word.

- iii. As we move through this scene, the Roman commander seems to act more righteous than the people of God.
 1. He seeks to know the real reason Paul was being accused by the Jews.
 - a. He sought answers by asking the people beating him.
 - b. According to his own law, flogging though barbaric was a legal means of finding out the truth. At least he was following procedure.
 - c. The Jews began beating him with no formal charges. No process. No order. Immediate guilt with no attempt to prove his innocence or even hear from him.
 2. Now, the commander orders a formal trial, not a lynching from the mob.
 3. I am not saying this commander is a Christian. Far from it. But his actions are very different than those of the Jews. He's seeking the truth.
- iv. Paul takes the stand looking straight at the council to make his defense.
 1. He has nothing to hide. He is not ashamed to look them in the eye. There's no hanging his head in defeat. He is not intimidated by the moment. This is a work of divine grace.
 2. His opening statement is amazing. He doesn't give an inch on how he has lived his life.
 - a. Nor does this statement claim perfection.
 - b. However, Paul is not here to be anti-Jew or anti-temple or anti-law. He's there to say that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every promise God made to them.
 - c. And in doing so, he believes that he has lived his life before God in all good conscience UP TO THIS DAY.
 - i. They would have probably agreed with this opening statement had he not said—up to this day.
 - ii. Why do I think this didn't sit well with the council?
 1. Because I think it's illegal to say what Paul said? Not hardly. Is it or should it be illegal among the nations to believe in the resurrection of Christ?
 2. Because he spoke out of order? This was no point of order matter.
 3. No. Because orders were given by the high priest, Ananias, to strike him on the mouth.
 4. Why did this happen? It seems clear that Paul is saying his all of his life even trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins and taking that good news to the Gentiles is compatible and right before God. To which the tribe responds with evil.
 5. Is this how God expected them to handle a formal trial? Is this how God instructed them to get to the truth? Is he already guilty? They were to operate under the instruction of God to verify everything by two or three witnesses.
 - a. They are not God. They do not know everything. Therefore, they are to follow God's prescribed ways of dealing with this and they don't.
 6. We haven't even heard what the charges are and they are already smacking Paul in the mouth.
 7. If this is how God's people are to act, I do not want any part of it.
 8. This is the tribe doing evil to preserve the tribe. God help us to never be this way.

- v. How would you respond to this? Paul minces no words with his rebuttal.
 - 1. In verse 3 Paul says, (Acts 23:3) "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?"
 - a. The "God is going to strike you" ended up being prophetic. Ananias was later assassinated for being too friendly with Rome. Historically, Ananias is described as a very evil man. Sometimes we think these outbursts like this were just a result of a bad day. But this action pretty much defined what was normal for God's high priest. This was just the tip of the iceberg into seeing how vicious he was.
 - b. The whitewashed wall image is so fitting. The white paint only covers the rot underneath.
 - i. This image can be seen in the houses that had leprous disease in them. They would try to cover it up but it would always bleed through.
 - ii. Additionally, Jesus used this image too. He said in (Matt. 23:27) ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."
 - iii. Do you present yourself as outwardly righteous but within your heart you are totally different? Are you one way here at church and another way at home? We are all guilty. None of us are exempt.
 - c. Well, Paul had no problem pointing out their inconsistencies.
 - i. Contrary to the law, Ananias ordered Paul to be struck. They had NO evidence and NO witnesses.
 - ii. The tribe doing evil to maintain the tribe.
 - 2. We might ask, did Paul respond as he ought here?
 - a. What about this: (Matt. 5:39) ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
 - i. I ask this because you might be wondering if Paul returned evil for evil.
 - ii. Actually, the context helps us. (Matt. 5:38) ³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
 - 1. This is prescribed in Exodus 21:24, Lev. 24:19-20, and Deut. 19:21. "It's not to foster vengeance but rather to provide Israel's judicial system with a formula of punishment." (Carson 155).
 - 2. Did Paul slap someone and that's what he received a slap for a slap? No.
 - 3. It seems probable that there are times to point out the injustice as Paul did. They were wrong. They are the evil ones here.
 - 4. I don't think Paul would have said that to any of the Roman officials nor do we ever see them doing that to Paul. But God's people are held responsible. Judgment begins at the household of God.
- vi. We must keep going to see the full context of the scene to understand it because the council responds to the Paul's statement.
 - 1. (Acts 23:4) ⁴ Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?"
 - a. In other words, Paul challenged the council's decision to have him struck contrary to the law but instead of the council saying, "You are right." "We

jumped to conclusions and disobeyed God's law." "We had no witnesses." No. They didn't do that.

- b. As is the case so often, they challenge Paul's response as being against God's law and it was. They are right. Except their own confession is missing. They expect him to keep the law but it doesn't matter if the high priest doesn't keep the law.
 - i. This is a really bad look. God's high priest is to represent the people of God. He stands before God to offer sacrifices. What a sad representative.
 - ii. Can we see ourselves in the mirror of the word here? We all act as though we are above the law but others must obey it or we will make sure they know every letter.
2. Paul's response is what a Christian ought to do.
 - a. (Acts 23:5) "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.'"
 - i. Again, Paul is seen as the righteous one here. He is not lawless like the Jerusalem council.
 - ii. He confesses his wrong and he quotes the vary law from Exodus 22:28.
3. Allow me to encourage us to imitate Paul here in our hostile political climate.
 - a. We are called to respect authority. That means those in government offices ought to be honored even though they may be evil.
 - b. It says in (Rom. 13:1-2) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.
 - i. "This means, no authority exists apart from God's will and determination."
 - ii. "God is sovereign over all governing authorities."
 - iii. "Therefore, if God has ordained and appointed the ruling authorities, then the conclusion drawn from verse 2 follows naturally. Those who resist such an authority will receive judgment."
 1. (Tom Schreiner, Romans)
 - c. When the world hears us talk about government officials, do they hear respect for the authority God has ordained? Do they hear honor for the office even when we disagree with their policies which are unashamedly evil?
4. We are on trial as the world watches us talk about political leaders. We need to keep our arguments to the ethics behind the policies. Voting is our legal protest and we should seek to the best of our abilities to vote according the ethics of God's word.

V. Response

- a. How should we respond to this?
 - i. There are specific things we could talk about but it's to no avail if we do not want to do the will of God.
 - ii. Has the Holy Spirit convicted you?
 - iii. Are you a loving servant or just a consumer?
 - iv. Are you selfish or self-less?
 - v. Do you love only those people you know? How do outsiders and visitors see you when they come?

- b. It seems common that there's often a desire to grow in attendance but we don't want to do anything to help that happen.
- c. We were on trial today. Are we the people of God? Are we a people who does the will of God?
 - i. We've all failed. Let us not tell the world God is not just and holy or gracious and merciful.
 - ii. Let us confess our wrongs and gladly receive the Lord steadfast love in Christ.
 - iii. May we be a witness in deed and in word.

Benediction: (Rom. 15:5-6) ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.