



Sermon Text: Acts 22:22-23:11

Sermon Date: October 14, 2018

In the whirlwind of our text, we discover that Paul has lost control of his life and his freedom. Yet in that scary circumstance, Christ meets Paul in his moment of need. To set up that encounter, we looked at three separate reactions to Paul that our found in our passage.

ROCK – THE MOB’S ANGER

While Paul is giving his defense to the Jewish mob, the moment he mentions his ministry to the Gentiles, the crowd explodes in anger. They shout for his death, tearing of their cloaks and throwing dust in the air—symbolic acts of disgust and judgment.

PAPER – THE TRIBUNE’S CONFUSION

Seeing that the situation is deteriorating rapidly, the Roman tribune orders Paul into the barracks to be questioned by flogging. It was the tribune’s job to keep the peace and find the cause of the riot, and he believed that torturing Paul was the quickest route to the truth. The problem, however, was that Paul was a Roman citizen and it was illegal for him to be bound or tortured without a proper trial. Once Paul shows the tribune his “papers,” the advanced interrogation is immediately stopped.

SCISSORS – THE COUNSEL’S DIVISION

Still needing to ascertain the truth, the tribune calls together the Sanhedrin for an informal pre-trial concerning Paul’s cause. From the beginning, however, when Paul is hit in the mouth, it is clear that the counsel isn’t interested in justice. Discerning that the counsel is composed of two rival religious parties—the Pharisees and the Sadducees—Paul cuts to the theological heart of the matter by declaring that “it is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” At his words, the counsel descends into party politics, with some of the Pharisees supporting Paul’s case because he was one of them. Like scissors, Paul slices the Sanhedrin into two bickering factions. When the argument gets so heated that the tribune fears Paul will be torn in two, Paul is forcibly escorted back to the barracks.

THE LORD’S REASSURANCE

It is there in the gloom of Paul’s prison cell, having lost all control of his life, that Christ mercifully ministers to Paul. We saw the Lord’s reassurance in two ways.

1. **Christ’s Presence:** The text doesn’t say the Lord appeared in a vision or dream. It says, “The Lord stood by him.” In his great mercy, Jesus personally met Paul in the misery of his prison cell. The person who fully understood the extent of Paul’s suffering, is the one who lovingly ministered to him in the midst of it.
2. **Christ’s Promise:** After telling Paul to take courage, Jesus promises that Paul will testify also in Rome. Christ isn’t through with Paul yet. This prison isn’t a dead end, but a pathway forward. Setbacks according to our human perspective are actually the next step forward from God’s perspective.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What truths about Christ bring you comfort and courage in times of need?
3. What biblical promises can you cling to when you are powerless to solve your problems and trapped in the dungeons of despair?