

ACTS

ACTS PART FIFTEEN: ACTS 24-26

ACTS

God's Mission

God's People

God's Power

"CALLED AND CARRIED THROUGH CHAOS FOR CHRIST BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"

Acts 26: 15-29

Then Agrippa said to Paul,
**"Do you think that in such a short time you can
 persuade me to be a Christian?"**

Paul replied,
**"Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you
 but all who are listening to me today may become
 what I am, except for these chains."**

**Paul was Called and Carried Through Chaos for Christ
 by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

I. Called

Paul was called to this kind of ministry: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Jesus to Ananias in Acts 9:15-16

Paul: "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13)

God's promise for the Christian life is not one devoid of hardship or of pain. We are called to carry our cross, daily, and follow Him. God will call us to trials. There will be hardship, and trouble, and some of it certainly may be divinely appointed.

We are all called somewhere. To a family, a workplace, a group of people we rub shoulders with who don't know Jesus. Where has God called you? Wherever you are called, there will be trials.

Reflection:

Have you ever considered that the places you spend your time, and even where things are hard, you might be called by God to respond like Paul "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to

die in _____ for the name of the Lord Jesus." I am ready to live and give my life for Jesus, and to see others come to know Him as their Lord and Saviour?

II. Carried by God

Carried by God's Spirit:

Shrewd and Innocent

Paul had learned to be as shrewd as a serpent and as innocent as a dove, as Jesus had called Him. Shrewd is an interesting word. Shrewd means, "Knowing where the traps are." Satan, the accuser, and "serpent" is known as shrewd in Genesis - He knows where the traps are, and he pushes people into them. Followers of Jesus are to be shrewd - know where the traps are, and wisely avoid them.

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

- Matthew 10:16-20

Reflection:

What does it mean to be shrewd and wise in our world? To have a winsome witness in our workplace or in public? This calls for following the Holy Spirit's guiding rather than simply our "rights." *Paul uses his rights with shrewdness, but he witnesses with boldness.*

Carried by God's Word:

In **Acts 23:1-6**, Paul is called back to faithful witness by remembering what God's Word says Paul had retaliated, but He repented. Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'

Jesus example: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats."

-1 Peter 2:23

We are to be carried along by God's Word.

Paul needed to humble himself so that the Holy Spirit could be let loose in His trial, not His pride.

"The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself."

- Charles Spurgeon

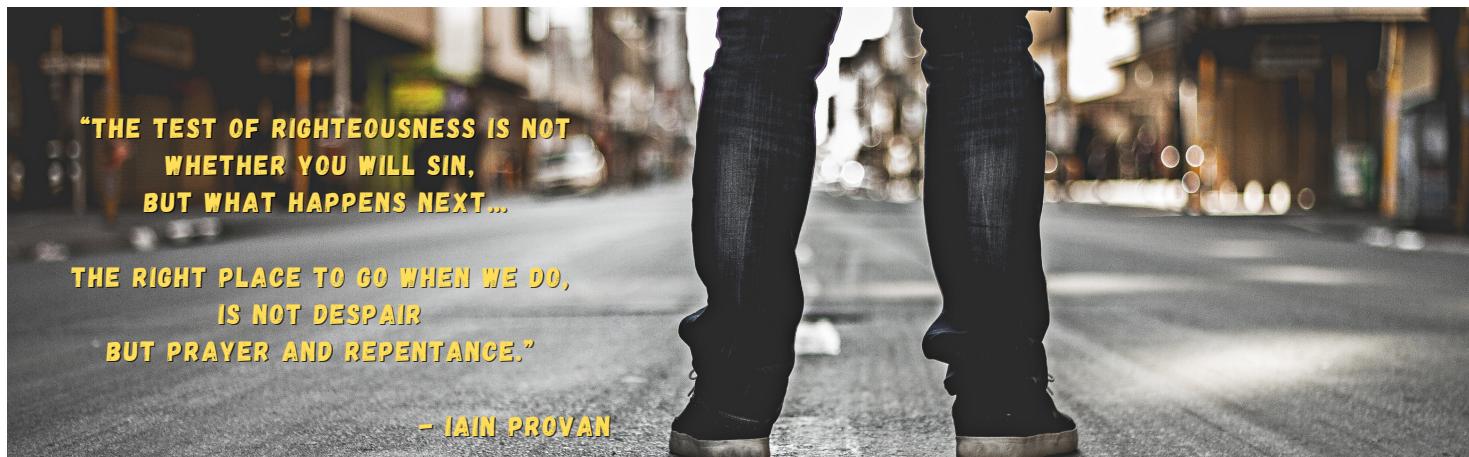
Paul had let the lion loose here, but first, he was letting it loose on himself. Was he living and responding in accordance with God's Word?

Not, "Am I correct in what I said, but did what I say honor God?" Paul was not called to be a thermometer to his circumstance, rising in temperature when *his* "tribe gets heated" or when *his* opponents fought dirty with lies and ridicule, but to be a thermostat of the Holy Spirit, to follow Christ Jesus in *his* sufferings, and to act in a manner worthy of the gospel.

"The test of righteousness is not whether you will sin, but what happens next...the right place to go when we do is not despair but prayer and repentance." -Iain Provan

Reflection:

- How could you, rather than picking up the temperature of where you are; change it?
- What would this look like for you? Is there a situation you need to practice this?



Carried by God's Presence:

God "stood at Paul's side" and said "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

- Acts 23:11

When we are in these kinds of situations, we are tempted to think: "God has abandoned me!" or "God is not pleased with me!" or "God does not care!" **But** that is not the case; God does care. Jesus refers to His followers as "little ones" and God as our Father, who stands next to us as He does here with Paul, carrying us through the trials of life.

III. Through Chaos

Paul has been called and carried by God, through chaos. And it really is a *chaotic mess*. After a plot to kill Paul is uncovered (Acts 23:12-22), Paul gets transferred to Caesarea. Paul is going through a 'trial'. It's a sham trial. In Acts 24, Paul is brought before Felix.

Why so much ink on Acts 24-26?

The majority of the time he is witnessing to the Risen Jesus, not really defending Himself!

Paul, being a witness to the Risen Jesus, "must shrewdly and courageously seize every opportunity to avoid situations that would prevent him from achieving his divinely ordained goal."

- William Larkin

Paul has served as a wonderful example of shrewd courage. He did not revile, but maintained his innocence and his audience with those whom God had called *him* to, and spread the hope of the gospel!

IV. For Christ

"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me...I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

- Acts 26:16-18

Paul has "seamlessly transitioned from defense to witness."

- William Larkin



Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

- Acts 26:28-29

'Jesus Christ died, became low, and gave His life, so that all who believe in Him might be raised up – having a relationship with Him. He came to His trial not with a pointed finger ridiculing me or you for our unrighteousness, but open arms of love, spread out on a cross. And those arms are still open to all who will call on the name of Jesus, even wicked murderers like Paul.'

V. Implications for our lives:**Embrace the trial as an opportunity to witness Jesus Christ:**

What might seem evil to us, might be used by God to bring about the saving of many people (Genesis 50:20)

Paul, with wisdom and humility is reaching out into the world, bearing faithful witness to Jesus Christ. All too often, when we face trials, those 'huddles' can become an "unholy huddle" of hatred rather than love for the lost.

- Is there a trial, or a situation that you've been shying away from?
- What is it that you need to press into rather than away from, and be an open witness to God?

Conduct yourself in manner worthy of the call of Christ:

Be the thermostat of the Holy Spirit, regulated by the love of Christ and set aflame by the Holy Spirit's call to bear witness in the world. And, when you mess up, bring out God's word, like Paul did in front of his accusers, and bring your life back into accord with it!



Tell of God's Faithfulness:

- Does Jesus' love for you, grip you so tightly that He is constantly pulling you out from your own troubles to His love?
- Will you tell the story of your salvation?

He will change your life as He did the murderous Paul, and if you trust in Him you will know His calling and carrying of you for all of eternity, and there is no greater comfort!

When the trials of life come, He is always with His people! And He calls us to be shrewd and innocent, without fault in a crooked world, and to tell of what Jesus has done!

"When Trials Come"

**When trials come no longer fear
For in the pain our God draws near
To fire a faith worth more than gold
And there His faithfulness is told
And there His faithfulness is told**

- Keith and Kristyn Getty

Reflection and Life Group Discussion:

SUMMARY

Read Acts 26:15-29 again.

- Write down all the things Paul says that constitute him "defending himself".
 - What is the tone of His defense?
 - What does it focus on?
- Write down the things Paul says that directly tell of what Jesus has done for Him. What stands out to you there?
- Paul's final appeal in **Acts 26:28-29** discuss about his love and concern for the salvation of those listening.

Reflection and Life Group Discussion:

- Talk about how Paul is able to love like that in midst of an emotionally turbulent, physically exhausting, and spiritual straining time.

Considering Paul's trial and the challenges he faced, reflect on these questions together:

- Have you ever considered that the places you spend your time, and even where things are hard, you might be called by God to respond like Paul "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in _____ for the name of the Lord Jesus"?
- How do you typically approach a situation in which you are suffering?
- Have you ever seen how God was using suffering to make you more like Jesus or as an appointed way to share the good news of Jesus with someone?
- What does it mean to be shrewd and wise in our world?
- What does it mean to have a winsome witness in our workplace or in public?

Paul was not called to be a *thermometer* to His circumstance, rising in temperature when his "tribe gets heated" or when His opponents fought dirty with lies and ridicule, but to be a *thermostat* of the Holy Spirit, to follow Christ Jesus in His sufferings, and to act in a manner worthy of the gospel.

- How could you, rather than picking up the temperature of where you are, change it?
- What would this look like for you? Is there a situation you need to practice this?
- Is there a trial, or a situation that you have been shying away from? What is it that you need to press into rather than away from and been an open witness to God?

Prayer: Take a few moments to pray for those who are suffering for Jesus' name around the world. Pray that their conduct would be worthy of the gospel and that many would be saved through their experience of suffering. Pray also that they would be comforted by God's Presence and Word!

Pray for one another, that you would be keenly aware when God is leading you into situations where you can share the hope you have in Jesus Christ by your words and conduct.

Pastor Colton