

Courage for a Lifetime  
Acts 22:30-23:11

In the fairy tale *Wizard of Oz* four unlikely characters wind up together on a perilous journey seeking individual rewards. Dorothy of course merely wants to return to Kansas because she has come to realize that in spite of all the things she thinks are terribly wrong at home “there is no place like home.” The Scarecrow wants a brain. The Tin man longs for a heart. Last but not least, the cowardly lion wishes he had courage. The Emerald City is their destination. While only one of the travelers seeks it, they all must in some way and at various times throughout their journey overcome their fears and display a good measure of courage. The cowardly lion sums up his pursuit for this virtue best in the song he sings before traveling with the threesome to meet the Great Oz. Listen.

(PLAY SONG)

We have been following the travels of someone else in the book of Acts. He is not on his way to meet some magical man to have his wishes granted, but has been in pursuit of obediently following the one he came to know as Lord and Savior on the Damascus road. Throughout his travels, Paul has been asked to do some remarkable things, all of which have required courage on his part. Listen to his summary of events that happened to him as he pens his second letter to the Corinthians and then tell me if he needed courage or not: “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in

danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”  
(II Corinthians 11:23b-28)

Such ill treatment would cause the weak of heart to second guess the wisdom in choosing such a path. Many would have abandoned that route for a much safer and easier road, but not Paul. He didn't go looking for trouble, but trouble often found him because of his testimony. Compelled by the Holy Spirit to go, Paul had been given a job to do by the Lord and he would not rest until that task had been completed. In his own strength or logic the urge to alter direction or quit altogether must have been ever present, but knowing that he served a higher power, a divine Master and had been given strength from the Lord led him to pursue that course without deviation. Encouraging the Philippians to follow his lead, he stated that he was pressing “on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14)

Later in the same letter he would state that his ability to continue on even in the face of danger and uncertainty was not from strength he bore in himself but because of the power of God who gave him the strength to keep going, to have heart. (4:13)

Today, I am wondering what struggles you are going through. I am wondering what path the Lord has set you on. I am wondering if you might need a dose of courage. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Acts 22:30-23:11 where Paul receives some refreshing words. Maybe, just maybe they will revive your spirit today with whatever you might be going through in life that requires courage, courage that comes from the Lord, courage to keep going.

We find in Scripture that courage is available to face life's challenges and difficulties. Courage

strengthens our resolve to know that we don't face those life events alone. Courage is what keeps us on target to complete a task even in the face of overwhelming odds. Paul had that kind of courage.

If you have faced the challenges of taking a course in school where you know your faith would be put to the test, courage was required.

If you have faced decisions after finding out from medical tests that you have cancer you know that courage is required.

If you have faced the overwhelming feeling of loneliness following a divorce, courage is required.

If you have stepped into the uniform of the armed forces to face the enemies of our nation, courage is required.

If you have chosen to leave one career for another in hopes of a brighter future for your family with all the uncertainty and apprehension that may exist from such a choice, courage is required.

To face the daily barrage of moral temptation and choose to stand against the stream, courage is required.

To follow the Lord without question, without hesitation, courage is required. Paul's story is one of courage. In it we note we are to

Take courage from the Word

Take courage in your walk

Take courage in your witness

## I. TAKE COURAGE FROM THE WORD

Let's get our bearings in the story. From Acts 20:22 we read that Paul was compelled to go to Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit. Some argue that Paul was out of God's will in going, that he had been given warnings by various people at various times

and he stubbornly resisted their pleas and continued on because it was what he wanted to do. My opinion, shared by other scholars is that that could not be further from the truth. Paul was prompted by the Spirit, urged by the Spirit, led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. God's Spirit was not only directing Paul to go to Jerusalem, but also had in some way revealed to the Apostle that when he got there, he would experience trouble. It was God's will for him to go. Would he obey or not? There would be both hardship and prison awaiting him. His compelling drive is clearly stated in 20:24 "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." That's all he wanted to do and it didn't matter what happened to him, it didn't matter the personal cost to him, his objective was clear – share the gospel – that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, that through Him and through Him alone a person is saved by faith.

Just as the Holy Spirit had revealed to him and had been confirmed by the prophet Agabus, Paul was beaten by an angry mob and then arrested on false accusations by the religious leaders. The accusations were no ordinary charges. If he was found to be innocent of them he would be released. If, on the other hand, they were in some way to find him guilty, he would face the death penalty. The Roman government gave the right to the Jewish religious leaders the ability to mete out capital punishment if a person was found guilty.

A riot had broken out and the commander had sent a couple hundred soldiers to break it up. At the bottom of the heap was a guy whom the commander assumed was the instigator, not just of this uprising but one who earlier led a revolt of some 4,000 rebels against Rome. The commander sought to get some answers for the disturbance that had to do with some of the religious observances of the Jews. At the initial arrest, the commander got nowhere while questioning those who were attacking Paul.

Everyone seemed to give conflicting reports regarding the incident. The commander grew no closer to uncovering the truth. Hoping to get some answers Paul was granted the opportunity to speak to the crowd. After giving a sound defense for his Jewish upbringing, he spoke about his call to go to the Gentiles with the message of eternal hope in the Messiah. At the mention of Gentiles the crowd broke out again in anger. Paul was taken to the barracks and kept under custody. About to be beaten Paul stated his legal rights as a Roman citizen were being violated. It was unlawful to beat a Roman citizen without first having a solid accusation and judgment handed down by the court, let alone even chaining one. No Roman was to be tortured without first having been tried and found guilty. Such an infraction was punishable by death.

We begin in verse 30. Follow along.

Seeking to get some answers he convened the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court responsible for maintaining the religious laws. They were like our Supreme Court in respect to religious law. Paul was released and brought before them. This informal hearing was probably somewhere outside the Temple near the fort of Antonia which was adjacent to the Temple. The commander hoped to finally get some answers about Paul.

Addressing the Sanhedrin, Paul looked around at these 70 plus men to see if there were any whom he recognized. Although about 20 years have passed since his association with them, some would have been familiar to him. His address to them begins with the claim that he stood before them in good conscience. In this statement he was asserting that everything he did was done with the purest of motives by strictly keeping the law. He had lived his life as a loyal Jew and had broken no religious law. It does not mean that he was always right or that he was perfect but that he felt no guilt for things he had done, he did them according to his conscience, according to his understanding and

observance of the law, which he believed, even before his Damascus road encounter, to be in obedience to God.

Because he made such a bold claim of innocence the High Priest, Ananias, ordered that Paul be silenced with a blow. This was no ordinary slap on the face. It is the same word that is used in 21:32 when it speaks of Paul being beaten. Paul was given a five knuckle sandwich to the chops for what the High priest thought was religious arrogance.

In response, Paul shot back a sarcastic remark referring to the High Priest as a white wall. Calling someone a white wall was like calling them a hypocrite. It was a picture of a wall that precariously stood with little support but which had just been freshly painted giving it the appearance of being very sturdy. As I'm sure you have at times, we'll be driving down the road and Robyn will see some barn and she'll say "That barn is about ready to fall." It's leaning so far over a good wind will knock it over so you wouldn't paint it just to make it look better. Paul was saying that Ananias looked good on the outside – very religious in appearance but on the inside he was about to take a fall. His life didn't come close to his position. Ananias was considered to be a hot-tempered, profane and greedy High Priest. He stole offerings that were supposed to go to the priests. He had people beaten often resorting to violent force to achieve his goals. Though not prophetic what Paul said would come true as Ananias was killed by his own countrymen during an uprising against Rome because Ananias had sympathies toward Rome.

What Paul said was true but he was immediately rebuked by someone informing him that he was speaking against the High Priest. While the man himself did not warrant respect because he was not adhering to the law, out of respect for the office Paul humbly apologized showing his faithfulness to the law. Because this was an informal hearing and because it had been convened quickly by order of

the commander, Ananias would not have been wearing his High priestly robes and neither would he be seated in his normal position at center of Sanhedrin. High priests changed frequently and though Paul gazed intently around at those gathered he did not recognize the High Priest.

Realizing that justice would not be done by such a biased group Paul changed tactics. He stated that the reason for his accusations were due to the hope of the resurrection. A sharp debate ensued between the Pharisees who believed in a resurrection and the Sadducees who did not. Our passage says that the dispute was so violent that the commander had to step in again to rescue Paul again.

Confusion once again kept the commander from obtaining the truth about Paul. Taken back to the barracks, Paul had yet to be formally charged with any wrong doing. Night has fallen and Paul is inside the barracks, alone, weary, wondering if any of this mattered any more. What was the point? From a purely human perspective it appeared that Paul's hope of getting to Rome were all but dashed. From his point of view and the intolerant position of the Sanhedrin it didn't appear he was going anywhere but to a hangman's noose. He was now held captive by the world's most powerful regime. So much for being innocent until proven guilty.

As Paul sat in that cold cell wondering what would happen next he was again met by an encounter with the Lord. This would be his fifth vision of the Lord, each encounter coming at pivotal time in Paul's ministry. They were always words of direction and encouragement. Notice in verse 11 these comforting words that come from the Lord: "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'" Eugene Peterson puts it this way in the Message. "That night the Master appeared to Paul: 'It's going to be all right. Everything is going to turn out for the best. You've been a good witness for me here in

Jerusalem. Now you're going to be my witness in Rome!"

Two simple words brought hope: "take courage." How many throughout history who have faced daunting odds of all kinds have been rallied by those two words: "take courage." What difficulties are you facing today for which you need to have the Lord stand by you and utter those compellingly powerful words to "take courage?" When the night seems darkest, when the day seems longest, when the mountain seems steepest, when the odds seem gravest – "take courage." Take courage not because I said so, but because the Lord said so. How refreshing those words must have been to Paul. How comforting to his spirit. It was a cup of cool water to a thirsty tongue. It was a shade tree to shelter from the scorching sun.

When faced with the uncertainties of what will come next remember from God's Word to take courage. Paul had the confirmation from the Lord Himself that he would make it to Rome. Even though the deck was stacked against him, the promise was given from the One who always keeps His word, who always tells the truth.

What is courage? It has been defined as the ability to confront fear, pain, danger and uncertainty or intimidation. There is both physical courage and moral courage. The latter is the ability to act rightly in the face of popular opposition, shame, scandal, or discouragement. Moral courage takes a stand. Physical courage keeps going. That's what Paul needed.

Winston Churchill stated that courage "is the quality that guarantees all other virtues." In the dictionary courage always comes after conviction.

Paul was given words from the Lord to take courage because everything was in His control. Because it was God's will for Paul to go to Rome, nothing would thwart that plan. Even before all this

occurred it was Paul's desire to go to Rome and meet with the believers.

(Romans 1:9-11; 15:23-24)

Courage is taking the Lord at His Word and following Him no matter where He may take you.

Proverbs 3:5-6

When Israel stood on the outskirts of the Promised Land God spoke to Joshua and told him to take courage and not be afraid.

Joshua 1:5-9, 18; 23:6

*It is not just a word from the Lord, it is also the Word of the Lord that gives us courage to keep going when we face overwhelming life events or to do what is right.* God was telling Joshua that as long as Israel took courage in facing their enemies AND obeyed the commandments given them, they would be successful.

My friend, take courage today. Take courage from the promises that God has given and stand strong because God is with you. He promised Joshua that just as He had been with Moses, so He would also be with Joshua. The promise is clear for us as well, that just as He had been with Joshua so He will be with us only "do not let this book of the law depart from you." Keep it. Meditate on it. Draw strength from it. God will be with you wherever you go.

II Chronicles 31:21-32:8 (vs.7-8)

Throughout history God has called on men and women alike to take courage. Today do you need to take courage through His Word? God has promised that no matter how dark the storm, no matter how desolate the road, no matter how daunting the task **HE WILL BE WITH YOU!** He gives His word – take courage.

Psalm 31:24 "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord." Take courage through the Word, through the promises in His Word.

Secondly, take courage in your walk.

## II. TAKE COURAGE IN YOUR WALK

What Paul said was true. He would make that claim two other times. He had a clear conscience before God. He did all he could to live a life of integrity before others and before God. There is a direct correlation between taking courage from the Word and having courage in your walk. The Word of God directly affects your walk with God.

Many of the things God asks us to do go against the cultural norms of our day. A godly walk takes courage. A godly walk says no to temptations that would otherwise seek to derail you.

Ezra 10:1-11 (Ezra's prayer and desire to obey God)

I Chronicles 22:12-13 (David to Solomon)

II Chronicles 15:1-8 (Asa's reforms)

II Chronicles 19:1-11 (Jehoshaphat appoints judges)

Courage is a word of action. It doesn't just talk about what should be, it does. A godly walk will take courage at home, at the office, at school, doing your taxes. Wherever you are, there will always be the temptation to compromise your walk a little. It takes courage to do what is right.

Paul could state that his conscience was clear before God and man because he sought to be godly in his life. His was a walk of courage. Take courage in your walk.

Finally, take courage in your witness.

## III. TAKE COURAGE IN YOUR WITNESS

Just as there is a correlation between the Word of God and your walk, so there is a direct link between your walk and your witness. What you do is a clear testimony of what you believe. That is your witness.

Paul had lived a life that revealed a godly character who was unashamed of speaking about his faith. He had been the Lord's greatest ambassador

venturing where no one else had gone with the gospel. God was now asking Paul to have courage because he would go to Rome and there he would continue to do what he had been doing all along - be a witness for Christ. It was a word of reassurance to Paul that the Lord would be with him. It was a word of reassurance that he would reach the destination he desired. It was a word of reassurance that he would witness for the Lord in Rome.

Standing with the disciples Jesus gave them the same word, words to take courage in witnessing. Matthew 28:18-20 – the promise of His presence. Acts 1:8 – the promise of His power.

This charge to have courage has been given to us. When we witness the Lord will be with us. Through Isaiah the Lord said to us “Don’t be afraid for I am with you, don’t be discouraged for I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will hold you up with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Perhaps in this vision Paul was reminded of his Old Testament training and the words found in Deuteronomy 31:6-8 “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.’”

God was calling Israel into a land He promised they would possess. He was charging Joshua to take courage because He would be with them. It was the same for Paul. Take courage to go into the land He had called him to, a land he did not know, a task he may not know, but God had given a promise. It’s a

promise for us as well that wherever He takes us to do the tasks He has asked of us He will be with us.

Just as with Paul, God has called us to take His Word as His witness to people who have yet to hear about His saving grace. He is asking us to take courage in witnessing and He reminds us throughout the Bible that He will be with us in any and every circumstance – only be bold to share the gospel. Only take courage to go where He asks you to go and to whom He asks you to speak.

Matthew 10:16-20 “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their 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.”

The Lord is telling you to take courage.

A medal like the one given to the cowardly lion won’t give you courage. All you need to remember is that the Lord is with you. If He takes you to it, He’ll take you through it. Paul understood that.

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