

Heaven Over Earth

Introduction

If you have your Bibles...

Acts 22:22-23:11

Up to this word they listened to him. 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 shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. 25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." 27 So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." 28 The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." 29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

1 and looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "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?" 4 Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" 5 And Paul said, "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.'"

6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" 10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

Context/Story

The Second of 5 defenses Paul will give in the final chapters of Acts.

You Are Not The Judge (vs 22-24)

- Paul is in Jerusalem.. He's just shared his testimony—how Jesus transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to a missionary for the Gentiles. But when he mentions God's call to the Gentiles in vs. 21, the Jewish crowd erupts in fury. As soon as he says the G word, They are after him. Oh he said it, "oh no you didn't!", There he goes! Gentiles he said. AWAY WITH HIM! Such a man doesn't even deserve to live. And they shout and they throw off their cloaks, they kick dust in the air, and there is wailing in great grief. The only solution for committing such a heinous evil is death. (the great evil of sharing salvation with the lost, broken, and altogether hopeless). They refuse to even hear the rest of the story.
 - Proverbs 18:12-13 - Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. 13 If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.
 - The Roman tribune, (in charge of roughly a thousand men) tasked with keeping order, arrests Paul and takes him away to be flogged in hopes that it would uncover the truth.
 - Their rage stems from Paul's claim that God sent him to the Gentiles, which they see as betrayal. They assume the role of judge, jury, and executioner, rejecting Paul's message, and without realizing, they reject the God who sent Paul. Their actions reflect a heart hardened by prejudice, unwilling to hear God's broader plan for salvation.

Apply:

- Interesting how we can so often get upset with God's will. God would never offer salvation to the gentiles! God would never sacrifice himself for such wicked people!
 - Be very careful in telling God what He can and Cannot do. You need to remember that God does not behave exactly like you. He is God, you are not. He is the master, you are the servant. He is holy, you (in your flesh) are wicked. His thoughts are higher, his ways are higher. He does not bend the knee to your desires. No, He does whatever He desires. He is the righteous Judge. And if the Judge decides to shorten or remove altogether the punishment of the guilty, that is His right. He does not need your counsel.
 - This is what theologians call the aseity of God. He is the Creator, the one who gives life and breath to all, and is not dependent on human beings for anything.
 - Ephesians 1:11b - Who works all things according to the counsel of his will
 - He does not work all things according to the counsel of your will.
 - How are we to view Judgement biblically?
 - **Do not Judge Hypocritically**
 - Judge not! "I don't want to Judge", I'm not judging you...
 - Log, speck argument.
 - **Romans 2:1–3**: Paul later writes that those who judge others while ignoring their own sin stand condemned.
 - **Do not judge Arrogantly**
 - John 7:24 - Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

- **Do not Judge Non-Christians**

- Judge Believers Or those who claim to be believers

- 1st Corinthians 5:12 - For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church[b] whom you are to judge? 13 God judges[c] those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

- If they are not christians and you are judging them for their actions, you are judging them when they have no real way to stop sinning. They are still trapped in their sins. Imprisoned by their sins, Dead in their sins. They don't have Jesus Christ, who is the only one with the power to change the human heart. What did you expect from the world? Stop judging them. If not for Christ you would be in the exact same spot. Perhaps worse. So instead of judging them, give them Jesus.

- **Do not Judge God**

- This is perhaps the most common of them all. We get on our little thrones and look at the circumstances of our lives and begin to make some judgement calls about God. "God I would have done things differently. God why did you give me this spouse? Why didn't you give me a better job? Why didn't you make my life easier? Why did you take this person from me? Why did you allow me to experience this trauma? I would have done better."

- Be very careful when your judging turns upon the only righteous judge himself. Your judgements are completely irrelevant, and one day you will stand before his great white throne. And he will hold you to account for the way you have lived. Why? Because He is the creator, you are the creation. He is the potter, you are the clay. You are dust, and it is only the fact that he has breathed life into you that you are here today. He sets the rules of the universe, and if you decide that you would rather judge God than submit to him, you will reap nothing but destruction.

- Are you quick to condemn, or do you seek to see things from God's perspective? Let's surrender our gavel to the true Judge. And trust that the Lord of all will do right.

Citizens of Another Kingdom (Vs 25-29)

- As Paul is stretched out for flogging, he calmly asks, "Is it lawful to flog a Roman citizen and uncondemned?". His Roman citizenship was a very big deal. It may be hard for those of us in America to understand this because almost all of us have it. In the roman empire, there was a very large population of slaves, and vassal states like Israel, it was quite rare for a Jew to be a citizen.
 - Cicero the Order said, "To bind a citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to slay him almost an act of murder"
 - How did that happen? The Tribune asks "I paid a lot for this citizenship! How did you afford it?" Paul one-ups the Tribune when he says, "I am a citizen by Birth."

- Oh.... That changes things. To make a false claim of citizenship was a crime. But to arrest a citizen, to torture, without due process. The Tribune immediately halts the punishment, because now the Tribune is suddenly in great danger. He has arrested him, there has been no official trial, and has him strapped up to be tortured, and he is a Roman Citizen!
- This moment shows Paul's Tri identity
 - He is a Jew by heritage, He is a Roman by birth, but ultimately he is a citizen of God's kingdom through Christ. His earthly citizenship serves God's greater purpose, protecting him to fulfill his mission.

Prove

- **Philippians 3:20** - But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- **Ephesians 2:19** - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

Apply

- Our greater Citizenship is in heaven.
 - As Christians, we live in two worlds—citizens of earthly nations but primarily of God's kingdom. Our rights and privileges as Americans, like Paul's, are tools to serve God's mission.
 - We must not get so caught up into our American patriotism that it overshadows, or supersedes our heavenly citizenship. Here is a litmus test to see if you are in proper balance.
 - Do you talk more about Trump or Jesus?
 - Do you read more of the news, or your Bible?
 - Do you serve your nation, but not your God?
 - Are you living as a citizen of heaven first, or are earthly loyalties holding you back?
 - Seek First the Kingdom of God and His righteousness! Then do all the rest. Do not subvert Christ with America,
 - and don't make the mistake of thinking they are the same thing. One day this kingdom will end. There is no mention of America in the new heaven and new earth. But God's kingdom will never end. Never be defeated, never fade.
 - WE MUST CHOOSE HEAVEN OVER EARTH!

Do You Seek To Know The Truth? (22:30-23:11)

- (Tell the Story) The Romans bring him back, trying to figure out how to make peace. Before he can even speak, they strike him. Clearly disobeys the old testament about harming those who have not been charged as guilty.
 - Remember that this exact thing happened to Jesus **John 18:22-23**

- Remember the charges of the Jews against Paul? Disregarding the Torah. What did they just do? Disregard the Torah. They are hypocrites! "It's fine when I do it, but when you do it, that must be punished!"
 - Paul bursts out in frustration - The Lord will Strike you... You white washed tomb! (worthless husk, shell of holiness, empty vessel)
- We are going to use the rest of our time this morning to compare the Romans and the Jews in this passage.
 - I don't know if you notice this, but at every single turn, The Jews are the evil ones, the Romans are the good guys!
 - In this section, the Roman tribune seeks the truth about Paul's case by bringing him before the Sanhedrin (22:30). The Sanhedrin refuse to even hear the truth, but instead Go against old testament scripture and hit Paul unprovoked.
 - The Jews demand death, The Romans refuse to murder without just cause.
 - The Jews beat Paul, the Romans seek to let him free. The worst people in the story are God's supposed people. And the best are the lost and Godless Gentiles!
 - The Jews, particularly the Sadducees and Ananias, are corrupt, violent, and closed to truth. Ananias's illegal order to strike Paul and the council's division show their spiritual blindness.
 - The Romans, while not believers, act more justly. The tribune seeks truth and protects Paul from both flogging and mob violence, reflecting a commitment to order and fairness.
 - But, neither group is the ultimate hero...God is. The Romans' justice is imperfect, and the Jews' zeal is misdirected. God uses both to preserve Paul for His purpose.

Apply:

- Seek the Truth above everything else
 - Apologetics class at youth camp - The professor comes out and starts with one of the most memorable quotes ever. He said, "If Christianity were not true, I would not follow it. And neither should you."
 - You could hear a pin drop. He then spent the next hour talking about the overwhelming evidences for the existence of God, and how all of science and history point to Him.
 - The Romans sought truth, however imperfectly, while the Jews clung to tradition over truth. We face a similar choice: Do we seek God's truth with open hearts, or do we cling to pride, tradition, or comfort? Paul's courage came from knowing the truth of Christ's resurrection and God's call. We need to seek God's truth, even when it's uncomfortable, and to trust His guidance in conflict.
- Paul then cleverly divides the Sanhedrin by proclaiming his Pharisaic belief in the resurrection.
 - Thanksgiving Dinner - Politics
 - Throw a metaphorical grenade into the middle of the dining table.

- Paul gives them all a new enemy! Themselves.
- He is basically revealing how dark and worldly the Jews had become by revealing their own disunity. They could not even get along with themselves.

The Footsteps of Jesus (Conclusion)

- Luke is taking great care for us to show us a connection we have not yet made in this passage. Paul is quite literally walking in the footstep of Jesus. We walked in Paul's footsteps on our trip to Greece, but Luke is showing us here that it was Paul who walked in Jesus' footsteps.
 - Paul stood on the same steps that Jesus did, to be judged by the Sanhedrin, Paul was condemned to die by the Jews just like Jesus. They shouted "Away with Him" just like they did with Jesus. Romans imprisoned Paul just as they did Jesus. Where they brought Paul for his scourging was the same place they brought Jesus. Even the illegal strike by the Jewish high priests!
 - John 18:22-23 - When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"
 - Paul is not greater than his master. But Jesus spares him an identical death.
 - The reason why is found in vs 11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."
 - God is not done with Paul yet.
 - This passage isn't just about Paul's courage—it's about the One who gave him strength. Jesus, the risen Lord, stood by Paul (23:11) and stands by us. On the cross, Jesus faced the ultimate mob, unjust trial, and death, yet He rose, securing our citizenship in God's kingdom. Because of His sacrifice, we can face opposition with courage, knowing our true home is with Him.

Pray/Invitation

If you've never trusted Christ as your Savior, know that He offers you citizenship in His kingdom through His death and resurrection. Come to Him today. For believers, let's commit to living courageously for Christ. If God's calling you to take a step of faith, come forward as we pray.

Let's pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who faced rejection yet rose victorious. Help us to trust Your truth, live as citizens of Your kingdom, and testify boldly for You. Give us courage in conflict and hearts that seek You above all. In Jesus' name, Amen.