

Keep UP Your Courage - God has a Plan

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Acts, Acts chapter 22, if you're visiting with us, if you pull out that black Bible and go towards the back and find page 112, page 112, you'll find Acts 22, starting in verse 30, and then we'll go into chapter 23.

So chapter 22, verse 30, into chapter 23, through verse 11. Excuse me. Acts 22, 30, through chapter 23, verse 11.

Just, yeah, by way of reminder, Travis mentioned that this week him and I are going to be gone. We're going to the Shepherds Conference. We're leaving Tuesday. We'll be back Saturday.

So it'll be neat to have Travis there with me for the Shepherds Conference. Hopefully just pray for him. He can put up with me. Okay, that went over everybody's heads.

Okay. Verse 30, but on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, the commander released Paul and ordered the chief priests and all the council to assemble and brought Paul down and set him before them.

[1:36] And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

And Paul said to him, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. And do you sit to try me according to the law and in violation of the law? Order me to be struck? But the bystander said, do you revile God's high priest?

And Paul said, I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest, for it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. Perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul cried out in the council, brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.

I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead. And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there arose a great uproar. And some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and argued heatedly, saying, we find nothing wrong with this man, suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him.

[2:53] And a great dissension was developing. And as the great dissension was developing, excuse me, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them, and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

But, verse 11, on the night following, the Lord stood at his side and said, take courage. For as you have solemnly witnessed to my cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.

The article is titled, From Carson to Trump, all candidates lack courage, but can't hide from tough questions. Ouch.

This will probably come as a shock. The article begins, But none of the major candidates for president have courage. That's according to Vote Smart, a national organization started by Presidents Carter and Ford and 40 other national leaders.

Vote Smart voted that none of the major candidates for president have courage. You can agree or disagree with that. I just like to stir the pot. Courage.

[4:14] Webster's definition is, the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous. Should politicians be courageous?

Probably. Should Christians be courageous? Most likely. How much more should Christians be courageous?

Interesting how in this passage, the last verse within the text that we've chosen for today, that's how, that's how the Lord encouraged Paul.

Take courage. Which brings us to the title of our message. Just do it. Be who you are. Let God use you to fulfill His mission. And here in our text, it's keep up your courage. God has a plan. Keep up your courage. God has a plan. God has a plan. That's the idea in the command.

[5 : 29] It says, take courage. And the command and idea is, keep up your courage. Keep it up. Don't lose heart. Or let me put it in a statement for you.

And whenever circumstances we find ourselves, we must keep up our courage and remember that God has a purpose in what He's bringing into our lives.

Even in circumstances that we think are fruitless, pointless, meaningless, don't be discouraged. What circumstances do you find yourself in this morning?

God has a purpose. Keep up your courage. You might think these circumstances are pointless, fruitless, meaningless.

Don't be discouraged. Listen, God will fulfill His promise to us to use us for His glory. To show His grace, love, and compassion for us in the midst of our circumstances.

[6 : 44] And then, giving us grace to have courage in those hard times. That's why we read from 1 Peter, because in 1 Peter, Jesus was put in difficult circumstances and what did He do?

He entrusted Himself to the Father. And the Father gave Him grace so He would be able to be a sacrifice for sinners. So not only, we've said this before, not only does Jesus save us from our horrible wretchedness, as Travis mentioned in his prayer, but Jesus is also the example for us. But Jesus is also the example for us. God will fulfill His promise to use us for His glory. Keep up your courage. Don't lose heart.

God has a plan. Paul, he gives another speech, a shorter one. His defense from here till the end of Acts is going to remain the same.

The hope of resurrection. Resurrection from the dead. And this resurrection is nothing short but the natural fulfillment of Old Testament Judaism.

[7 : 58] That's what he's going to prove. He's going to show. Paul desired to make certain to the commander and the tribune that this dispute is a religious dispute.

And he was no threat to the Roman Empire or to any government whatsoever. So Rome should stay out of it. Needless to say, though, this was not easy for Paul to do.

as the text will show. But what usually happens for us? It's in those hard times where we want to stop obeying God and His Word, isn't it?

We see no point in proclaiming the Gospel. We get nowhere. We feel like God has bailed on us. And so what do we do?

We stop trusting. And yet, here, not only do we see an example of our Lord, which we could see that in other places, but actually here in our text we see the example of Paul himself.

[9 : 13] And we could, if we want to, go to a different passage where Paul says, imitate me as I imitate Christ. Remember that passage? That's what Paul does. In these hard times, this is where we follow Paul's example.

Because Paul's example, it's keep up your courage. God has a plan, so follow obediently Jesus and His Word. And that's what Paul does. He obediently followed Jesus and His Word.

And that's point number one. Keep up your courage. God has a plan, so follow Jesus or follow obediently Jesus and His Word.

We'll look at that verse 30 of 22 into verse 5 of chapter 23. Let's dive in.

on the next day after Paul gave his long speech and they didn't like that to the Jews, they were going to kill him. The Roman commander was going to scourge him, found out he's a Roman citizen.

[10 : 23] The next day, he wanted to know for certain why he had been accused. This whole commotion was going on, this whole fiasco, and the commander still wanted to get to the bottom of things.

You want to know why there was so much reaction against this man, Paul? He released Paul and ordered the chief priest and all the council to assemble.

His goal was to obtain real facts in the matter. The problem was the Jews couldn't stand Paul and so he wanted to figure out why. Now there's a little principle here I want to point out.

Take a moment. follow obediently Jesus and his word. When people hate us just because we're Christians in most cases, they will be completely and totally irrational, not wanting to listen to facts.

They won't care. They're intolerant of us. Just because you're a Christian. That's what we see with the Jews.

[11:28] all that to say the commander took the chains off Paul. He was a Roman. He brought him before the chief priest, the whole council. This was kind of like an informal meeting because the commander didn't have the power or the authority to call them together.

So then he sits Paul down before them all. Paul looks intently at the council. Obviously Luke condenses everything for us here, but he began by openly declaring, Brethren, I've lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.

Or, I've lived as a good citizen before God. Why would he say this? After giving the appearance of Jesus and his conversion, Paul says, I've done everything that the Lord had called me to do.

Paul will mention this later in another speech. In chapter 24 verse 16, he will claim that he took great pains to have a blameless conscience before God and his people.

He will also mention this whole thing about having a good conscience. He will also mention this to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 5. He mentions this to Timothy because this was vital.

[12:54] He says, the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Why? Why is he bringing this up?

What's the point? What's the idea he's trying to get across? The idea is this. We do what God wants us to do. That is living life in obedience to him.

There's no blame upon our conduct. No blame to the unsaved can point out upon your conduct. We follow Jesus.

We follow obediently. This is similar to what Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 15 to 16. Peter picks up the same idea.

He says always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence keeping a good conscience.

[13:57] We should make sure that the unsaved cannot make any accusation against us whereby we are blamed in regards to the conduct of our lives. I'm not saying that we're trying to be perfect. That's not what we're talking about here.

We're talking about in circumstances that it seems pointless and meaningless. Follow the example of Paul. He followed Jesus Christ.

He followed him no matter what. And it's when you're faced with different circumstances where you're tempted to just bail and I don't want to do this anymore.

I'm done. I'm thrown in the towel. Notice the response that Paul gets from the high priest.

He wasn't too happy with Paul. He commanded Ananias to strike him on the mouth. Well, you can't represent yourself like this. You're guilty of blasphemy.

[15:01] Interesting, Ananias chose to be the high priest. He had a reputation for being insolent and quick tempered. Also interesting, Ananias would be murdered by his own people for his pro-Roman views.

Look at Paul's response in verse 3. God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Do you sit to try me according to the law and in violation of the law order me to be struck?

It's kind of similar to Jesus' remark to the Pharisees. Remember when Jesus called the Pharisees you whitewashed tombs? In other words, you're clean on the outside but on the inside you're blah. You're dirty. You're unclean. This was an insult. But Paul called the high priest a hypocrite for violating the very law he claimed to defend.

He warned the high priest, God's going to strike you because you ordered me to be struck. That's violating the law. I'm innocent until proven guilty. He was warning him of God's judgment upon him.

[16:19] Why would Paul respond this way? Some think he lost his temper. Was Luke just showing that he was human too?

Well, we're all human. Remember, if somebody says that to you, graciously point out to him, that's not necessarily true. Just because you're human doesn't mean you do things wrong. I don't think this is why Luke has this written here.

I don't think that's why Paul says this. And now, I'm not saying Paul's sinless, because he wasn't. But it's hard to believe he just lost his cool.

one writer puts it like this. Luke wanted readers to see in Paul, quote, the courage with which he faced official opposition, injustice, and violence.

When many a man would cringe, Paul answers back, and points out that the Jewish judge is himself not observing the law that he is appointed to minister. In other words, Paul had the courage to tell Ananias that he should practice what he preaches.

[17 : 30] And yet what's interesting here, is notice what happens in verse 4. The Bible center said, do you revile God's high priest?

Don't you know this is the high priest? And Paul said, I was not aware that he was high priest. Wait a second, what's going on here?

Come on. So he's reviling the high priest. He's violating Exodus 22, verse 28. So now Paul's breaking the law.

And Paul says, I wasn't aware, brethren. Brethren meaning physically, you're my physical brethren, you're Jews. He was the high priest. How is that possible? How did he not know that? Paul a couple reasons.

Paul was gone from Jerusalem for a very long time. 20 years almost. So he didn't know who the high priest was. That's the first thing. Second, remember this is an informal meeting.

[18 : 32] So he might not have been, the high priest might not have been in his garb and all this stuff. Just dressed like all of them, so he didn't know he was a high priest. I really think this. Seems to be the best option for us. But notice what Paul does.

He retracts his words and then he says this. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. He quotes scripture. And he puts himself in line with scripture.

Paul pulled back to make sure he gave the high priest the respect he deserved. It's hard to respect others when you know they're flat out wrong, especially when you're doing evangelism.

But it shows God's grace. How do you like taking correctional rebuke from someone who wronged you? Once again, Paul was setting the example for us.

He was committed to being obedient to the word of God, no matter what. Paul was committed to follow the Lord Jesus and his word, and so we should be committed to follow the Lord Jesus and his word.

[19 : 47] Did not the Lord display this to? I mentioned this earlier. He was wronged, but he entrusted himself to the Father. And what did he know was the plan?

He kept up his courage, he continued to follow the Father because he knew there was the plan, the plan was for him to die for sinners. God had a plan.

It's in those times where we want to bail, it's in those times where we want to say, I'm done with this, it's in those times where you just say, what's going on? You want to throw in the towel? No, follow Paul's example.

He kept right on going. He kept right on following Jesus. Setting the example for us. Keep up your courage.

God has a plan. Follow obediently Jesus and his word. Number two, speak courageously Jesus and his word. Don't stop proclaiming the gospel.

[20 : 57] Continue to give others the gospel. You might think it's pointless, it's meaningless, there's no point to this. Why? Why?

Keep giving the gospel. Speak courageously Jesus and his word. 23, 6-10. Notice how Paul does this.

He does this himself in the circumstances he finds himself in. He perceived one part of the Sadducees, the other was Pharisees. He cried out in the council, brethren, I am a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees.

I'm on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead. So what's going on? He sees the Sanhedrin and makes up Sadducees and Pharisees. Now, I do not believe that he did this just to stir the pot. I swear I would do. Yes, I know some of you would do that too, in confession. I do not believe that's why Paul did this. He does not say this as a way to cynically win support from the Pharisees.

[22 : 06] Some commentators think that. I don't think that. He says, I'm a Pharisee and a son of the Pharisees. In other words, this is my upbringing, this is my education, Pharisee tradition. What's the dispute?

What is the argument? Why do they have this problem with Paul? It surrounds the possibility of resurrection and some supernatural appeared to Paul. That's what this is all about.

The hope which is rooted in the resurrection of the dead. See, if Paul was trying to do this to be cynical and just to, I mean, if he was doing it on purpose, he wouldn't keep bringing this up.

But from this point to the end of Acts, he continues to say, the reason why I'm on trial is because of the hope of resurrection. This is the best way to sum up his ministry.

He proclaimed the hope rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Israel's true future hope is in Jesus Christ. These are the true charges against Paul.

[23:17] not the silly, crazy thing. 21, 28, when the Asian Jews are, this is the guy who speaks against our people and the law on this place.

That's God, come on. That's nothing, that's not what he's doing. The true charge is that there's the hope of resurrection and the proof of that is Jesus himself resurrected and called him to speak that. Is that not your commission, church? Jesus has resurrected and he's called us to go speak about resurrection and not simply the physical resurrection and the time there will be judgment but the resurrection that can take place in your life, you can be revived, you are dead, you can be made alive, that's the gospel.

Paul was on trial for holding to a Jewish teaching which was completely fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is nothing more than the fulfillment of Old Testament Judaism.

Israel's hope is Jesus and Israel's hope is still Jesus. Jesus. And see this is very profound with Paul because what he does is those who are opposed to Jesus and the good news, i.e.

[24:59] the Pharisees, they may possibly be more persuaded towards the truth. Why? Because of their belief in things already. Like what?

resurrection, angels. That was a belief that many Jews had. I mean everything in the Old Testament, they believed in the Old Testament.

They spoke about resurrection. Remember when the Sadducees came to Jesus and Jesus says, did you ever read what it says in Exodus? Where God appeared to Moses and he says, I am the God.

He didn't say I was the God, I am right now. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is a resurrection. There is life. But see, the Sadducees, they shunned this.

Notice what happens. Seven, and as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The assembly was divided. Why? The Sadducees say there is no resurrection. No angels or spirit.

[26:02] The Pharisees acknowledged them all. The Sadducees, they shunned eschatology. And they denied resurrection. They believed death brought a complete end to life.

Some thought there was some shadowy existence of Sheol, the word you see in the Old Testament, but didn't have God or angels. They almost had like a deistic approach.

God made everything and then, okay, just go do whatever you're going to do. They had no positive afterlife. But Paul's point would be that, quote, as one writer says, being a believing Jew means having hope, including hope and resurrection.

End quote. Notice what happens, though. Verse 9, there rose a great uproar and some of the scribes of the Pharisee party stood up and argued to him. We find nothing wrong with this man as opposed to spirit or angel spoken to him.

Yeah, exactly. It wasn't an angel, it wasn't a spirit, but somebody has spoken to him. But as things progressed, strife and discord, conflict erupted and some of the scribes of the Pharisees found nothing wrong with Paul.

[27:24] Maybe he did have a divine calling, well, duh! Maybe he did have a divine commissioning, well, yeah!

There's no doubt, friends, that some of those Pharisees and the informal meaning, they were probably there when Paul gave his testimony of his conversion. They were probably there.

So, Paul brings this in, he says, look, I'm talking about the hope of resurrection, and some Pharisees are like, yeah! You wouldn't believe that! And the Pharisees are like, no, no, no, no, no, no, we're not having any songs or music here, it's not positive!

No, no, no, quiet! That's right! But, that's what they, what?

That's right, I like that, that was good. Stealing my thunder. Then it started to get volatile, notice, a rioting mob, a great decision was their helping, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them, in order the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and they brought him into the barracks.

[28:37] They got Paul out real fast. Okay, so what's the point here? Friends, when it can seem pointless, keep up your courage, keep speaking the gospel, and speak it courageously.

Don't lose heart, proclaim the truth, proclaim the truth to that neighbor, keep praying for that son or daughter, keep praying for that niece, keep praying for your uncle, keep praying for your cousin, keep praying for your co-worker, keep praying for that good friend down the street that you know, don't lose heart, and keep giving them the gospel, the fact that God took on flesh, in Jesus Christ, God should condemn us, he is righteous and true in everything that he does, we are so sinful, we're law breakers, he should condemn us, but God, the son, took on flesh, lived a perfect life, was crucified for sinners on the cross, resurrected from the dead, that's the gospel, repent, turn away from your sins, and put your trust in Jesus alone, God, and if you're here today, you don't know the gospel, you don't know the

Lord Jesus Christ, that gospel truth is for you, that you would repent, that you would trust in Christ, don't lose heart, keep up your courage, God has a plan, you never know, what 20 years can do, I just thought of something I won't mention, there was a story about some guy who gave the gospel, and then this guy got saved, and then like 50 years later, he's at a function, and then the same guy said, did anybody respond to the gospel, and so this guy doesn't respond to the gospel, and God used him to proclaim the gospel to all these different people, you never know what's going to happen, so, we follow obediently, we speak courageously, follow Paul's example, this is what we're doing, number three, we trust steadfastly Jesus and his word, which is where we come to verse 11, keep up your courage, the night following the

Lord stood at his side, the most important verse that we have here, from which we derive our message, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul, confirming his claim about the resurrection, interesting, keep up your courage, as you've solemnly declared me in Jerusalem, so you must, you see that word, you must, guess what word, Jesus used here, day, D-E-I, delta, epsilon, Yoda, this must happen, God has a plan, God has a purpose, God has a purpose in the circumstances, God has a plan, the things that you find yourself in today, today, that's why he says, keep up your courage, Paul, don't lose heart, you will be a witness for me in Rome, and then we'll see next week, how it looks like that's not going to happen, but it will,

God will keep his promise to us, to use this for his purposes, it won't be a bed of roses, I mean, do you not see that in our text?

[32 : 30] I understand, okay, Paul's not necessarily in chains, but he's held in custody, half free, half prisoner, it won't be a bed of roses, but he will encourage us, giving us the power to carry out what he's called us to do, he will give you the power to carry out what he's called you to do, we just need to remember, it won't be easy, but that's when we trust, that's when he calls us to trust him, as I mentioned, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we must keep up our courage, and remember that God has a purpose in what he's bringing into our lives, even in circumstances, that we think are fruitless, pointless, meaningless, don't be discouraged, it's in those hard times, painful times, uncertain times, times of persecution, times of opposition, that's, that's, where we follow Jesus, that's, where you speak Jesus, that's, where, we trust

Jesus, it's in those times, follow Paul's example, most of you maybe, not be a fan of Toby Mack, but I am, I'll share with you a portion of one of his songs, he gives lyrics as a closing, one of the songs he says, hold on, hold on, the Lord ain't finished yet, hold on, hold on, he'll get you through this, hold on, hold on, these are promises, I will never forget, I will never forget, gracious God, we thank you for the example of

Paul, we thank you that when he faced such great opposition, and these circumstances that he found himself in, he just kept following you, he just kept speaking the gospel, taking the opportunity, and then he trusted you, and then he was encouraged by you to keep up his courage, and to keep trusting, and keep following, and keep speaking, because you have a plan, encourage us, encourage us to know, that you have a plan, help us to keep up our courage, take a few moments, and just sit and ponder what we've seen in God's word, and after we do that, we'll have our time where we can worship and our giving, and we'll sing one song to prepare our hearts for the Lord's supper together, let's sit, let's ponder, let's think, what God has shown us in his word today, to tonight.

Bye. Bye. Bye.