

Acts 22:30–23:10

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[0 : 00] My name is Lucy Parrish, and I serve as Women's Ministry Coordinator. Our scripture reading for today is taken from the book of Acts, chapter 22, verse 30, through chapter 23, verse 10.

This can be found in the White Bibles on the seats on page 1032. Again, the scripture text is Acts 2230 to 2310 on page 1032 of the White Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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.

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day. And the high priest, Ananias, commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

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?

[1 : 15] Those who stood by said, Would you revile God's high priest? 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.

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council and said, 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. And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

For the Sadducees say, There is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all. 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? 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.

[2 : 25] The following, this is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

I want to add my welcome to what Ben gave you earlier, and especially if you're visiting. And I also want to add my apology. If I'm not able to greet you on the backside of the service, Lisa and I will be bolting to an airport so that by 4.30 we will have arrived in Nashville and begin to walk into a ceremony for a nephew's wedding, such is the case today.

So if you wonder why the pastor looks so rude on the backside of the service and ran out of church early, even before you, the visitor, could leave, that is the reason why.

Well, since our text today, and I hope you keep it open there before you begin in Acts 22.30, since the text today begins with a man looking for an answer to a question, I thought I would begin the sermon with a question of my own.

What is the relationship between Theophilus, the one to whom these books were written, and the Roman Tribune, who now has emerged in our story for a second week running, and yet will also be present next, and us who live today?

[4 : 16] What is the relationship between the first reader of this book, the one to whom it was written, the Roman Tribune, who's in the text, and you and I, who are reading it now, for benefit or help?

What do these three have in common? Simply this, a desire for solid answers on the stories that surround Jesus.

Theophilus wanted that. It's, in Luke chapter 1, verse 3 and 4, it's called Ashphileia. It's asphalt. It's a man saying, I wrote this so that you would have sure footing on the things you have been taught. For the Roman Tribune, it's the same factual-like word used as we saw a few weeks ago in chapter 21, verse 31, when he first runs into Paul, verse 32 and 3, he took the soldiers, they saw the Tribune, they stopped beating Paul, and the Tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound, and he inquired who he was and what he had done.

For some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another, and as he could not learn the facts about the uproar, he ordered him brought into the barracks.

[5 : 49] That same word, this factual desire about the stories that surround the rise of Christianity is where your text opens, verse 30, but on the next day, that same Roman Tribune, desiring to know the real reason why, brought Paul before the Sanhedrin.

I find this Roman Tribune just cutting, he's just cutting an immense-like figure in this moment in the narrative.

At a professional level, he was that thin line of blue. He was law enforcement. He took action when mob action was there, but while he was doing his duty to find out what was going on with Paul and his message and protecting him, it seems now that that professional interest may actually be personal.

Verse 30, but on the next day, he's desiring to know the real reason why. Perhaps that's worth pausing on for you this morning.

Do you want answers, the real reason behind the Christian message?

[7 : 21] The Roman Tribune has a question to ask. take a look at verse 1 through 10 because what he is asking, Paul will now be answering.

We're about to hear what all the noise was about. It didn't get off to a very good start. When you look at 23, 1 to 5, it was a very inauspicious beginning.

Paul is now brought before the Sanhedrin, so you can imagine him before 70, 71 religious leaders and their own temple guard.

And in the mix is this Roman Tribune and his own deployment of officers with his personal interest related to one who's in the middle of a stirring controversy on account of Jesus.

And he begins. Looking intently at the council, Paul says, Brothers, I've lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

[8 : 46] And the high priest, Ananias, commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall. Are you going to sit in judgment on me according to the law and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?

Those who stood by said, Watch it. No. Would you revile God's high priest? And Paul said, I did not know, brothers, that this was the high priest, for it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.

an inauspicious start to answering the question of what is going on in this controversial stir about Jesus.

Ananias, we have record of him beyond the scriptures, had actually been recalled by Herod and then put back into his post and was a shady kind of religious, cultural, powerful, influential, wealthy figure in the city.

Evidently, he has Paul physically accosted in the midst of this gathering and Paul, not to be deterred or shut up, having been hit in the mouth, has a few things to say of his own.

[10 : 16] There's almost this verbal backlash, this idea of a whitewashed wall, echoing the words of Ezekiel when God spoke about Jewish leaders who would be judged for they did not have on the inside what they professed on the outside.

Paul basically saying, you are like them. You are now holding me in a courtroom under the purported course of law.

law. And yet you are breaking law even before you have heard my testimony. To which those who are there say, watch it, he is the high priest, which then echoes back into Paul's mind all the way to Exodus 22 where the people are not to speak evil of a ruler and the one who has been lashed out against now stands there in this repentant mode.

Paul does almost apologizing, I didn't know, I'm sorry, I was in the wrong. What do you make of that? What do you make of that answer to the ask?

Simply this for me, you need to know that Christianity and the stories surrounding them are by nature visceral, they matter, they're important, they're divisive, they are deeply held, and they are often opposed.

[11 : 58] This notion, this contemporary idea, this American dream that the Christian faith can go forth with latitude and ease and merely be part of a conversation is throughout the centuries and in all other places in the world continually set aside.

The message of the story of Jesus is so potent in its intensity, in its convictions, in its importance, that people get riled up on it.

You need to know that, lest you be surprised along the way. I love verses 6 through 10 because now the question that was asked, what's the real reason people dislike Paul and his message is answered.

Notice how his rhetorical tactic will be wedded to his theological truth. I like the way that sounds. The rhetorical tactic is wedded to theological truth. Verse 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.

[13 : 40] It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees and the assembly was divided, for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all.

Notice the answer. What is the great reason Paul would give the road beneath your feet on why Christianity really stirred up that first century world?

Well at a rhetorical level, it might look as though he is cleverly answering in a way that will pit the jury against itself. Let me see if I can say something on the stand that will put these six against those six or these forty against those thirty.

That is the rhetorical end. Perceiving that they differed on this, he had something to say. But that is not it. That would have been too simple to simply say that Paul was trying to be clever here.

That Paul was trying to get himself off the hook here. Paul was actually trying to be clear here. Paul was actually trying to put forward the hope for which the holster had come.

[15 : 05] And so he says, I'm a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees, and it is respect with the hope and resurrection of the dead that I am on trial. This is the real issue.

This is the real issue. that the office needed to remember, that the tribune was seeking, that you and I need to consider. The issue underlying the agitation that Christianity brings in present day conversation is simply this, a belief in the resurrection.

resurrection. That's the dividing line. Not a dividing line on race or ethnicity.

Not a dividing line on political power. Not a dividing line on death. Not a dividing line on desire. A dividing line is the Christian teaching that there is a resurrection of the dead.

Now, let me lay this out in two ways. The most explicit place in all of the Hebrew scriptures that I think testifies most clearly to a belief that you and I and everyone who ever lived will be resurrected from the dead comes from Daniel chapter 12.

[16 : 35] Daniel chapter 12 verses 1 to 4, there is actually an account of a double resurrection. He has a vision which indicates that at the end there will be those who are arising from the dead into everlasting life and others into everlasting condemnation.

In other words, the Hebrew scriptures proclaimed clearly that there was a resurrection from the dead of you and me.

Think of it. Think of it because I know this is a contentious point. What's going to happen to you when you die? The room I'm sure here would be divided.

I don't know what's going to happen to me when I die. Another person would rise and say, I'll be expired when I die. When I die, everything dies. Will there be an accountability for your life after death?

Of course not. Of course there will be. And that is the dividing line. This is what I believe as well.

[17 : 48] I believe that what the Hebrew scriptures teach and what Paul here affirms is actually true. That every person born will be accountable to God the creator on a final day of judgment when the curtain falls on the world in which you and I live.

Furthermore, that on that day of judgment there will be a disastrous tearing of families, of lovers, of intimates, of friends, and acquaintances that to some it will be granted unto them an entrance into

everlasting life under the gracious provision of God secured through the substitutionary blood of his own son applied to them by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith as they held fast to that belief and to others who reject that they likewise will be dismissed from his presence into everlasting condemnation.

Now those words are worth fighting over. that's why Christianity is what it is and always has been what it will be.

Paul says the great stir under my word in this city arises from my belief belief that we are all going to be raised from the dead.

Now Paul would take it even a step further for Paul is not only that you and I are going to be raised from the dead but that he had actually come to a conviction that Jesus had already been raised from the dead and therefore was ruling and appointed as judge in the midst of the assembly which is why the Christian message in light of a resurrection of our life from the death holds out the hope in the resurrection of Christ from the death so that you and I might be spared that great day of tearing.

[21 : 04] the question then is simply what do you do with the resurrection? There's no two ways on this.

I know of a true story in this neighborhood of recent happening of a Christian couple who was having dinner with another couple in Hyde Park who at this point in their lives are not Christian and this non-Christian couple one of the spouses is internationally known world renowned a figure of immense and helpful importance on the scene today and this individual asked the Christian couple what accounts for that rapid rise of your faith tradition

Christianity in those early centuries in the Roman world what what are the possible facts that undergird reasonable faith that would actually alter the course of human history and be such a dividing line between what you believe and don't believe and this couple a member of the couple looked at this incredibly important figure and simply said the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead only the resurrection of Jesus Christ that is only if it was factual would you have any undergirding reasonable premise to see what actually happened if it wasn't factual it it wouldn't have held the the opposition was too strong the the mind of men and women are too fluid too independent unless he actually rose from the dead and enabled people to have life through his spirit there is nothing that would account for it in other words they that evening bore testimony they bore witness they answered the question that the world is asking what is the real reason verses 1 through 10 it is the resurrection now look at the response 9 and following then a great clamor arose and some of the scribes and Pharisees parties stood up and contended sharply we find nothing wrong with this man what if a spirit or an angel spoke to him

I could care less 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 them away from them by force and bring them into the barracks look at the words that are there what is the response of what Paul held forth and what I am holding forth to you today while you're all sitting listening in an attentive and engaged way the response at that moment was so visceral here are the words clamor contention violence to the point to the point where the Christian witness embodied by Paul needed protection that's the response of the gospel message clamor contention at times violence and the need for protection think of it now this Roman tribune this man in blue who stood in the midst is the only line between the

Christian's preservation and the articulation of the ongoing gospel or it's extinguishing its light in the world Christianity then and now is entirely dependent on the gracious governing of the good men and women who protect the freedom of the expression of that belief this is now the second time an officer of the law has saved Paul's life come back next week because that Roman tribune is not done yet he has saved Paul's life again this is why the rule of law is so important to the Christian this is why the rule of law is something we need to continue to talk about in our own congregation the very survival of Christianity depends in part on the fixed rule of law for its protection this is why [26 : 50] Paul will later write in first Timothy first of all then I love this line first of all like what does Paul want to know first about church life first of all then I urge that supplications prayers intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way this is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth God's desire for all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge in the truth depends upon

civil government protecting the rights of the belief in which you actually hold lest it be extinguished so you I know we have all kinds of things going on in this city today between Christians and law enforcement and we could have well we will have we will have continuing conversations on all these things the point of the text on this day on which you have come is this you better pray you better pray for people who are in power because if they don't protect your contentious belief there will be no hope for you or for any concerning the beliefs they have pray and continue to bear witness let me shut this down because

I got to get on a plane you're like yeah isn't your gate getting ready let's just shut this down by verse 11 even though we stopped short in the reading I want to bring it in there's a question asked by the Roman Tribune 2030 that question is answered by way of the resurrection in 3 1 to 10 and the validity of it the attestation of it is actually provided by the Lord in verse 11 take a look the following night the Lord stood by Paul and said take courage for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome wow the question has been asked what's the great stir about

Christianity the question has been answered it's the resurrection from the dead and that you can find protection of from that resurrection in the resurrection of Christ and what's the response it's the attestation according to this of the very Lord himself in other words the resurrected Jesus bears testimony in the trial concerning his own self now you may reject that you go wow but that's it when you're reading the acts of the apostles you're reading the continuing acts of Jesus through the life of the apostles in other words Jesus is saying what Paul has said is in accord with the facts therefore I say to you on the day when you stand before him you will not be able to say how come you didn't tell me so because he will say

I got you down as a church attender at that little ray school air conditioned joint on the south side where you heard somebody say I was alive and you give an account that's my hope I don't know how to compel you to become a Christian but by calling you to the witness of the apostles that bear the attestation of our Lord I don't know how to keep you a Christian unless you continue to hold that these things are in accordance with the truth that my faith stands upon those facts our heavenly father father

I do pray this morning that you would help us to consider the stunning awesome immense and frightening notion that we go on after this life and that we will stand before a seat of judgment and that we will give an account to our own belief on the resurrection and the cover which we can find through Jesus in it therefore I pray that in this very moment you would bring some to faith that you would keep others in the faith and Lord that you would continue to help us to pray for all of those in our world who can do great harm or offer great assistance to the faith by their protection or persecution in Jesus name amen