

09.06.17

See Unjust Treatment as an Opportunity to Testify

Acts Chapter 26

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Acts Chapter 26. We are going through the Book of Acts pretty quickly. I told you as we started to try to make a commitment because we would hit a chapter a week, I have tried to stick with that. It is a wonderful book that establishes the foundation of the church. It is the foundation that is described both in the person of Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone and also by the apostles.

In Chapter One of Acts Verse 8, Jesus pulled the disciples aside before He ascended and said, “Look, you will be My witnesses.” What you see in the Book of Acts is the way that the church is called to bear witness of Christ to the world. He is the foundation for this witness. In other words, the Book of Acts not only tells us that we should be bearing witness, but it shows us how we do that. It is one of the reasons why we see Paul dealing with the government and dealing with social issues. It is establishing how we deal with these kinds of situations in our lives. How do we respond? How do we react? As we

come to Acts Chapter 26, we see Paul before the King. He was before Governor Festus. He was before Governor Felix. In Chapter 24, Paul stood before Felix. In Chapter 25, Festus comes into the office of governor for Rome. Last week we talked about Felix being the governor of this region. Pilate had been the governor before him. Felix, not a godly man, was clearly unscrupulous as evidenced in recorded history. Obviously, it did not seem to thwart Paul in proclaiming what he felt God was wanting to have proclaimed. You would think that if you were standing before somebody whom you knew was unrighteous and unscrupulous, the topic you chose to talk about would not be righteousness. At the end of Chapter 24 of Acts Verse 25, Paul discussed righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Paul found one of the sore spots with Felix which is why he locked Paul up in prison for two years. It was as if he said, "Let's forget about him." It was as if he threw away the key. Two years later, another man took office as governor by the name of Festus. You can see the grace of God because Festus died about two years after taking the position. But God gave Paul an opportunity to proclaim Christ to him. However, Festus did not respond well to the message either. Festus tried to create a bond with King Agrippa by asking him to listen to

Paul. King Agrippa had a relationship of sorts with the Jews, though he was not a friend to the Jews. Agrippa was a Herod. He was a distant cousin to the Jews having descended through Esau's lineage. As you come to the end of Chapter 25, Paul was given an audience before the governor as well as before King Agrippa.

It is at this point that we pick up tonight's message in Acts Chapter 26 where King Agrippa motioned to Paul and said, "Okay. Your turn to talk." In a way, Paul was a form of entertainment. He was arrested in Jerusalem for not doing anything wrong, but the Jews were hostile and vehemently against him. They trumped up charges claiming that he had brought a Gentile into the temple. Of course, he had not done that. His whole desire and purpose in coming to Jerusalem was to bring the funds that he had collected from the other churches to those in need in the Jerusalem church because of the famine. He dropped off the funds and was subsequently arrested. The Roman government protected him by evacuating him to Caesarea where they held him for some time. King Agrippa was visiting the governor. I guess they needed some entertainment one night. The governor said, "Hey, King Agrippa. How would you like to hear this guy, Paul, and his whole case? It will be pretty interesting to hear."

Of course, at that time there was no television, nor were there any video games. Paul was their entertainment. Look with me in Chapter 26,

(Acts 26:1) “Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You are permitted to speak for yourself.’ Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense.”

As we go through this chapter, we will see certain principles. As I thought about a title for this chapter where we are laying the foundation for the church, I asked myself, “How do people in the church view or perceive unjust circumstances in their lives?” In other words, how should you perceive an unjust circumstance when it happens in your life? A hurricane may hit your house and wipe your house away. You might feel that it was pretty unfair. That is pretty unjust. How are you to deal with the situation? How is the church to perceive it? Paul is obviously arrested for something that he did not do. He is being accused of things that he had no part in. There were people who wanted to have him dead. As Scripture tells us when Christ warned his apostles,

(Matthew 24:9) “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.”

This is being fulfilled in the text in the Book of Acts. But the question is, how do you respond when things are not going appropriately, when you are being accused wrongly, or when something unfair or unjust happens to you. What we will look at are particular principles that we see in things that we should be doing as we go through the situation. In other words, he is laying the foundation for the church, and you are the church. He is telling us how we should respond. How we see Paul respond as an apostle is how the church should be responding or as the people of the church should be responding to those situations. Paul stood before King Agrippa, who was the King of Israel. King Agrippa was a spectator of sorts in this regard, although perceived clearly as an authority figure. If you look with me in Chapter 26 Verse 2, he begins to talk. Now as he begins to speak, there is a fundamental principle that I perceive within Verses 2 and 3. That fundamental principle would be, “If you are going to speak before an audience, you are going to be talking with those who may, I think, have something against you. The

tendency is often to find something against them, *i.e. quid pro quo*. You find something against me, then I find something against you. You do not like me, and I do not like you. We begin to find all the things that are different between us. That would be both irrelevant, erroneous and the wrong way for the church to approach the situation. Unfortunately, all too often the church takes those kinds of platforms. We are to be a light to the world. That is to say, we are to minister to others much differently than the world. Our weapons are not like the weapons of the world. The world would go into attack mode. We do not go into attack mode. What we begin to do is to ask ourselves, “Okay, what is something praiseworthy and true about our audience?” It is an interesting point. If you think about Acts Chapter 17, Paul was in Athens. There were statues of their Greek gods all around him, which meant there were idols all around him. What good could he find or what good could he say about this audience? His statement began by saying:

(Acts 17:22) “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”

Now that was an interesting beginning, wasn't it? You realize that he did not start off in an adversarial way. The same is true when he approached King Agrippa. Now once again, let me remind you, King Agrippa was in an incestuous relationship. King Agrippa was not a friend of the Jews. King Agrippa was stirring up much hatred and bitterness within the country. One thing that is known about King Agrippa even from the historical writings of Josephus was that he was a history buff. He was very much acquainted with the culture of the Jews. What do you think Paul would say? If you look at the text, it reads this way in Verse 2. Paul starts off this way.

(Acts 26:2) “In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;”

(Acts 26:3) “especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.”

The fundamental principle in his speech is to find something praiseworthy and true about your audience that you can sincerely say. “I perceive that you are a very

hard worker. I perceive that you feel very strongly about family.” There are a thousand and one things you can potentially say. Unfortunately, we often start off on the attack; it is because we already feel under attack ourselves. But remember, we defeat evil by doing good. So right off the bat, there was a different kind of platform. If you look at Verses 4 through 8, you will see another principle that comes out of the text.

(Acts 26:4) “So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem;”

(Acts 26:5) “since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.”

(Acts 26:6) “And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;”

Acts 26:7) “the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by the Jews.”

“The promise” is emphasized in the text.

(Acts 26:8) “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?”

That is an interesting argument at the very beginning of his speech. He found a common ground of pursuit, a common goal that his audience had. What had they been pursuing? Well, if you look within the text, there are two things that the Jewish sect pursued that was common with Paul. They were righteousness and hope. They were what were sought by the strictest sect. If you look within the text, they were seeking to be righteous as well as they had this hope of the Messiah whom they believed was yet to come. The fundamental principle represented here is to find something that would be a common pursuit or an honorable goal that you can use to segue to the Gospel. What would something be that could be used? For the Jews, righteousness was something that could segue to the Gospel. Hope was something that could segue to the Gospel. These are two possibilities to use even today. This may be a little bit of a stretch, but somebody may go in to get a facelift. You go, "I perceive that you would like to live forever." That to me would be a segue into the Gospel. There is a pursuit there that they are longing to go beyond. They want this life to last longer; they want to live longer, so to speak. Paul established that common goal that he would use to move into discussing the Gospel.

If you look with me in Verses 9 through 17, he will show us another fundamental principle. If you think about it, with the first two you are looking for something praiseworthy in your audience that you can talk about. Then you bring up to them a goal that they are pursuing. What is a person looking for? If you find what they are looking for, then Christ is the answer for that. I can pretty well guarantee that. For instance, if a person is looking for happiness, Christ is the answer. If they are looking to live longer, Christ is the answer. For almost anything of any value or good, Christ is the answer. That creates your opportunity. Unfortunately, when people begin to attack us, we almost instantly go into an attack rather than realize that God is giving us an opportunity here to display a character or a nature that would bring the Gospel and allow them to hear that Gospel through us. In Verses 9 through 17, he then begins to do something that probably, for many of us, would be a difficult transition. What he did was to become very transparent, very truthful about his own personal failings about the circumstances leading to his own conversion. It is a mouthful, but it is a fundamental principle. That is to say that when you are talking, you should be transparent and truthful. Think about it this way. If you are speaking in the

Spirit of the truth which Jesus Christ has breathed within us—the Holy Spirit—then you have to be truthful. You have to be transparent in that truthfulness. Strangely enough, I think it is one of the qualities that is most alluring to somebody who is seeking truth. If they see somebody who is honest, they are more likely to be transparent about their own life. Paul did not try to cover up his sins. his statement was, “I was pursuing righteousness, too; but wow, did I blow it!” He came clean with them. On top of that, he began to, in a very candid way, describe the circumstances that led him to receive Christ, the circumstances that led him to repent. Be transparently truthful about your personal failings and the circumstances leading to your conversion. Be very transparently truthful. Paul started off this way:

(Acts 26:9) “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

(Acts 26:10) “And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.”

(Acts 26:11) “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being

furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.”

(Acts 26:12) “While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,”

(Acts 26:13) “at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.”

(Acts 26:14) “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

Now what is interesting about this is how do you explain to somebody you saw a bright light without them thinking that you are crazy? But Paul did not short-change the truth. I do not know what happened to you in your conversion. But I am pretty sure most of us did not see a bright light or become blind or any of the other things that were involved in Paul’s conversion. But something happened. What happened, though it may sound strange coming out of your mouth, though you may look at that person to whom you are talking and see that they are making those funny faces that say, “Really?” Even so, you

keep saying it. The wonderful thing that I like about Paul is that he made no excuses. He says outright, “I saw a bright light. We all fell on the ground.” What happened towards the end? Let me show you this as a pre-film. In Verse 24, Paul was saying this in his defense to which Festus says: (Acts 26:24) “While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.’”

You will have that reaction from people from time to time. But look, you have the Spirit of truth within you. You cannot say what is not true. You have to say what is. With that transparency, you see Paul beginning to share his testimony. He said in Verse 15,

(Acts 26:15) “And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’”

(Acts 26:16) “But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose, I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;”

To help you comprehend what was going on, both Festus as well as Agrippa were probably around at the crucifixion of Jesus. That is the guy who was talking to Paul. Can you imagine? You are telling about this guy whom they knew had been crucified. Everything in their being said, “I do not want to talk about this.” Paul said, “But I must talk about what happened to me. You wanted me to give you my testimony. This is my testimony.” He was transparently truthful about his own personal failings and about whatever those circumstances were which led to his conversion. He was transparently truthful. This is a key point. He set the groundwork for the way the church should operate. He set the groundwork for how you and I should proclaim the message.

If you look with me in Acts Chapter 26 Verse 18, we will go to the 4th principle. He will literally begin to speak clearly and unapologetically about the Gospel. This, of all the 4 points, is the most key point. God has given you, through the venue of an unjust surrounding, an opportunity and format. Do not waste it. You now have the opportunity to proclaim clearly the Gospel. Remember, that is what the church is all about. Go back to Chapter 1 of Acts where Jesus said, “You shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.”

It is a restatement of The Great Commission: Go into all the world and make disciples. Continuing in Chapter 26:

(Acts 26:17) “rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,”

(Acts 26:18) “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

That is pretty clear. You cannot get much clearer than this.

(Acts 26:19) “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,”

Paul was doing exactly what Christ told him to do.

(Acts 26:20) “but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”

No king wants to hear you tell him to repent. Now to the Jews, that meant not only you do the righteous deeds; but according to repentance, you do the righteous deeds with a righteous heart or with the right attitude, which, of course, was what the Jews were not doing.

(Acts 26:21) “For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.”

(Acts 26:22) “So having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small the great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;”

(Acts 26:23) “that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

There! He said it. You have got the whole Gospel in here, don't you? You have forgiveness of sins, sanctified by faith, repentance, performing deeds in accordance with repentance, turning from darkness to light, the dominion of Satan to God, Jesus Christ suffered and rose again. There was nothing missing in this. That he should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the

Gentiles. Done. That was clear and unapologetic; there was no mistake. That is the Good News. Christ came to save you. All you have to do is repent. You have an opportunity. Do not waste it. Paul certainly did not. The goal of the church is not to fight the false accusations against it. The goal of the church is to use every accusation as an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. Period. God will either get you off or keep you in prison for purposes of greater testimony. Now look at Verse 24:

(Acts 26:24) “While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.’”

“You are in overload. You obviously have learned too much stuff, and it is bubbling over. You have a leak.”

(Acts 26:25) “But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.’”

Wow! What a response. “Well, you are not so bright yourself, Festus baby.” He did not say that, did he? Think about it. There are a thousand and one responses that he could have made, which brings us to our 5th and final

principle in this speech. Respond according to the nature of the message of the Gospel. Always respond according to the nature of the message of the Gospel. What is the nature of the message of the Gospel? God loves everyone and has concern for everyone. That is the nature of the Gospel. What does that mean for us? We must have love and concern for them. Paul had to care for Festus. His response was one of dignity because the Gospel is a message of dignity and honor. Paul returned good for evil rather than evil for evil. That is the nature of the Gospel. Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.” He now turned to King Agrippa.

(Acts 26:26) “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.”

These are all very complimentary phrases here. They are true. You can see him reaching out, and you sense very strongly that Paul was not being cavalier in this. Paul was concerned for the salvation of these men. You sense this within the text.

(Acts 26:27) “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”

In other words, “I know that when you researched them, you felt the tugging in your heart, King Agrippa.” Maybe he said this, I believe that it was said in part in some kind of jest. He was asking King Agrippa if he believed the prophets.

(Acts 26:28) “King Agrippa replied to Paul, ‘In a short time, you will persuade me to become a Christian.’”

This is one of only three times that the word Christian is mentioned in all of the Bible. Every time it is mentioned, it is perceived as a derogatory term. It is a Latin term, not Hebrew nor Greek. It is a Latin term said by their own soldiers. They were laughing at those who were following the crucified Christ. So, they would call them Christians. This is why Peter said,

(I Peter 4:16) “but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

It became a badge of honor. The phrase King Agrippa used was almost to call them the crazy people.

(Acts 26:29) “And Paul said, ‘I would wish to God that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.’”

Paul meant the people who arrested him, the people who might have beaten him, the people who accused him, the people who were judging him. How limited are we in the people we want saved? You know how we have a tendency to go, “Well, I sure hope they come to the Lord. What about the policeman who gave you a ticket? There are no people whom you might exclude. We want everyone to be saved. That is the nature of the Gospel.

(John 3:16) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

This expressed the Gospel—the love of God showing His concern for all. The only thing Paul did not wish for all people was that they would be in chains. He did not

complain about his chains; however, he did not wish that anyone would feel what he was going through. He did not complain that the chains hurt his arms, that they caused his arms to fall asleep, that they caused his legs to fall asleep. He did not say, “Maybe if you felt what I was going through, you would ask Jesus into your heart.” That was not the message at all. The message was, “I would not wish this on anybody. I wish that you would come to know the Lord without the chains.” It shows a very different heart. The response was:

(Acts 26:30) “The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,”

(Acts 26:31) “and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, ‘This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.’”

They began talking about the legalities. When you reject the truth, it is best just to talk logistically. It is best not to talk about spiritual matters.

(Acts 26:32) “And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’”

Did this man know what he was doing? Paul knew exactly what he was doing. These fundamental principles have been drawn all the way through Scripture. Here we have seen them acted out, if I could put it that way, in the Book of Acts. Let me show you how they permeate Scripture. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount began to declare kingdom rules. The kingdom rules that He declared start off this way.

(Matthew 5:10) “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 5:11) “Blessed are you when people insult and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”

(Matthew 5:12) “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

(Matthew 5:13) “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?”

(Matthew 5:14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

(Matthew 5:16) “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

This is the nature of the message, isn't it? If you look with me in Matthew Chapter 10, pick up with me in Verse 16. The warning that Jesus gives the disciples is this,

(Matthew 10:16) “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpent and innocent as doves.”

(Matthew 10:17) “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;”

(Matthew 10:18) “and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.”

If anybody who is walking with the Lord is doing the right thing but being accused wrongly or unjustly, why are you in that situation according to Verse 18? For your testimony.

(Matthew 10:19) “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.”

Like my mother used to tell me, God does not give you dying grace until you are dying.

(Matthew 10:20) “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

He then begins to talk about how difficult things will be.

(Matthew 10:21) “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.”

(Matthew 10:22) “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”

(Matthew 10:23) “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.”

Great text. This is a good reminder. In John Chapter 15, if you look with me, the same fundamental principles are conveyed. Jesus tells them that He chose them for the purpose that they would bear fruit.

(John 15:17) “This I command you, that you love one another.”

(John 15:18) “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.”

(John 15:19) “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

(John 15: 20) “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

Then if you drop on down to Chapter 16.

(John 16:1) “These things I have spoken to you that you may be kept from stumbling.”

(John 16:2) “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.”

Does that sound familiar at all?

(John 16:3) “These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.”

In other words, what is the nature of the Gospel? You see, this is why the Crusades were so ludicrous. It was not the nature of the Gospel.

(John 16:4) “But these things I have spoken to you, so that when the hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

It is a great comforting thought to know that Christ warned His disciples beforehand. He said that they would be locked up. They would be beaten. Had Christ not warned them, they would have been thinking they had done something wrong. But it was the grace of Christ to let them know. There is comfort in knowing that you are

on the right track, that the things that are happening to you and the ridicule are a virtue. If in fact you are living righteously, then God has called you to such a work.

1st Peter deals with these situations. Peter wrote specifically about what I would say are the fundamental principles of dealing with suffering unjustly.

(1 Peter 2:11) “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.”

(1 Peter 2:12) “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Do you sense that Paul was keeping his behavior excellent among the Gentiles?

(1 Peter 2:13) “Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,”

They may be acting in ignorance. They may be doing things that are unjust. But what does the text say?

(I Peter 2:14) “or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”

(I Peter 2:15) “For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

This gives you the opportunity for testimony.

(I Peter 2:16) “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.”

(I Peter 2:16) “Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.”

God has given us the fundamental principles. If you look with me in Chapter 3, as I have often said, we come to a summary text:

(I Peter 3:8) “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;”

(I Peter 3:9) “not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

That is an interesting way of putting it. What he was saying is that by your giving a blessing, you inherit a blessing. Who would have thought that by giving it away, you would receive it? That means that you would not want to give a curse.

(I Peter 3:10) “For, ‘The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.’”

Do not say anything injurious, hateful, or snide. As my wife says, do not be snarky. So, what are you to do? Well, refrain your tongue from evil, your lips from lying or being deceitful. You can put in there being hypocritical. It might be easy to throw out some words that could be manipulative.

(I Peter 3:11) “‘He must turn away from evil, and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.’”

(I Peter 3:12) “For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

If I will do right, whose eyes are upon me? He sees it. “But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

(I Peter 3:13) “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”

(I Peter 3:14) “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,”

(I Peter 3:15) “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being 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.”

How are you ready to make a defense? By keeping your heart right. How do you know that you will be given the words? Your heart is right. If your heart is right, you do not have to remember what you are to say. You want to know why? Because you simply say what is on your heart. If your heart is wrong, then the situation will be a mess. But if your heart is right with God and you are sanctified

in Christ as Lord of your life, He wants to elevate you. He wants to honor you. What will come out of your mouth is exactly what He wants you to say. Speak in a way that is befitting to the Gospel.

(I Peter 3:16) “and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.”

If you have a bad conscience and people begin to slander you, even if they are lying about the things that they are slandering you about, there is something in the back of your mind that says, “I deserve this; hopefully, they will not find out worse things.” It takes the wind out of your sails. Confidence comes from a clear conscience.

(I Peter 3:17) “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”

(I Peter 3:18) “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;”

That is a great phrase, isn't it? You know what that is telling us? He was unjustly murdered, but He willingly went through it. What Peter is telling us is, if you are doing what is right, you are suffering unjustly. It is the time of the greatest testimony. It is not something the church tries to get out of. It is something the church looks to as a badge of identification with Christ. The church celebrates, if I could put it this way, that kind of lifestyle.

(I Peter 4:12) “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;”

Oh, I cannot believe this is happening to me. What is happening? Well, they are treating me unfairly. Why do you think this is strange? Let's see. The prince of the power of the air—do you think he likes you?

(I Peter 4:13) “But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.”

The question is, how might you take this? Well, do not take depression medicine because you are happy. Therefore, you do not need it. Right? But keep on rejoicing so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. In other words, there seems to be a greater celebration when Christ comes if you were celebrating when you were being treated unfairly. People are always thinking in terms of rewards. Look, you need to share the Gospel. We see that all the way through the New Testament. We are giving testimony to the Gospel. But I never see a reward for you leading somebody to Christ. I want to lead people to Christ because I want them to come to Christ. It is a wonderful thing that I have that opportunity. You see the rewards in your heart. If you suffer, you rejoice as a reward.

(II Timothy 4:8) “in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

It is all about the heart. Once again, if your heart is right, you will be sharing the Gospel. I have seen people share

the Gospel with others with very strange motivations. It does not even look good. We read in

(Philippians 1:15) “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;”

We know that often, it can become a competitive thing. I have seen people wrestling for somebody with whom to share the Gospel. God is not calling us for that reason. In fact, what God looks at is the heart. He is looking for a heart that is rejoicing in the activity. Are you being mistreated? Keep on rejoicing. His award is like the Shekinah glory resting on you. Have you ever sensed the presence of God? You knew you did what He wanted you to do, and you sensed the presence of God. There is nothing that is greater than that. It is almost as though it does not matter if your house just blew away. It is the greatest day that there ever was.

(Romans 8:31) “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”

(I Peter 4:14) “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

(I Peter 4:15) “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;
(I Peter 4:16) “but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

This is the second time that the word Christian is mentioned in Scripture. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. The second time is when King Agrippa told Paul that he had almost persuaded him to become a Christian. The verse above is the third and last time the word is mentioned in Scripture. If they suffered as a Christian, they might feel ashamed. It was a derogatory declaration at that time. Great, great text. If you look with me in 1st Peter Chapter 5:

(I Peter 5:6) “Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,”

(I Peter 5:7) “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

(I Peter 5:8) “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

(I Peter 5:9) “But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”

(I Peter 5:10) “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

(I Peter 5:11) “To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

A lot of times we read the phrase, “casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you,” and then we talk about the devil who is a roaring lion trying to devour us. Do you know how he devours Christians? He devours Christians by getting you to be angry in retaliation. You allow that evil to devour you. Instead of showing kindness and responding in love to the people who are attacking you, you start attacking them back. The church has often failed in this regard. I have often failed in this regard because it is so easy to retaliate. Your desire is that Christ is glorified. When it says, “after you have suffered for a little while,” he is not saying that you are dodging the lion. He is saying that you are dodging the effects of the lion. You are not going into his realm. Scripture says in the

Lord's Prayer in Matthew Chapter 6 Verse 13, "deliver us from evil." It does not say, deliver us from the evil of the world. We will die for Christ's sake. It is saying, deliver us from the evil that can take over our lives; we can become like the evil one. That prayer is not, "Oh, God, keep the hurricane from coming to my house." That is not the prayer. The prayer is "Keep me, God, from responding in a hateful, injurious, hostile way so that I do not become like him because it is easy for him to devour me and to become just like Him." In the Book of Acts, Paul is living out these texts. You have it in doctrine, and you have it in practice in the Book of Acts. It is laying the foundation for the church. How do we respond in these circumstances?

Prayer

Father, we give You thanks for Your word that brings us back to what is true. We realize that it is our nature to react in ways that are of the flesh, in ways that the world reacts. But You have not called us to react. We are saints. We have been set apart to respond according to the nature, according to the character of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. While being reviled, He did not revile in return but gave a blessing instead. You have called us to

give blessings that we might receive the blessings of God.
Thank You for Your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.