

- SERIES: ACTS – Saved by Grace

- PASSAGE: Acts 21-24 – perhaps reading Acts 22 – 23:11

- LOCATION: Diocese of Bathurst

- BIG IDEA: The truth of the gospel gives Paul the courage and confidence to have all kinds of trials. He is neither a bully, nor a pushover, but stands confidently in the truth.

- APPLICATION: We too can give this confidence, because we know that the good news is a sure thing. Our hope isn't just up in the air and truth up for grabs, but is solid ground,

- STRUCTURE:

o Gospel Courage (21:1-40)

o Gospel Truth (22:1-23:11)

- History is littered with really incredible stories of courageous people.

- Right from a courageous tackle in the footy, to an act of courage in going into a building on fire in order to rescue people.

- I however, wasn't a courageous child growing up. In fact I remember in school being

o quite terrified of jumping off a 3m diving board in front of my school mates;

o BUT rather comfortable picking up a guitar and singing in front of the school.

o Why? Because I knew the truth that I had practised well and that I knew the truth that I was going to be relatively okay!

- Knowing the truth can give people courage! Courage to do remarkable things.

- Knowing the truth about a situation can give you confidence going into it!

- And this is what we see Paul doing in these 3 chapters this morning.

- The truth of the Gospel gives Paul the courage and confidence to walk even into the most hostile places.

- It gives him the courage to speak plainly in front of raging crowds, corrupt councils, and pompous governors.

- It gives him the courage to act in a way that is neither being a pushover, nor a bully, but resting simply in the truth of the Gospel.

- He knows that the Gospel is the truth, that Jesus has come, died for our sin, and risen to new life. He knows that Jesus is Lord...

- This then gives him the courage to walk even into a place of open hostility in order to win people over for Jesus.

Gospel Courage

- So we enter into Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles when Paul is leaving Ephesus through tears since he has developed deep roots and friendships with them.
- And these chapters form another turning point in Acts. Paul is not only set on going to Jerusalem but eventually Rome by the end of the book
 - But, he first needs to go to Jerusalem and there's a problem. People really didn't want Paul to go! Paul is on his way to Jerusalem from Ephesus when...
 - 21:3 "We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem."
 - And then V10 after arriving in Caesarea, Luke writes this "After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, 'The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles'"
 - People had been given revelations that Paul was going to be walking headlong into hardship and persecution!
 - Ridicule, discomfort, being tied up - all in Paul's future if he goes to Jerusalem.
 - And so his mates urge him not to go there!
 - This reaction of his companions to these predictions is quite natural isn't it?
 - You can almost imagine their arguments "Paul, don't go, we need you here. Paul don't go, you're too much of a resource for the kingdom to be locked away. Paul don't go, you're better off alive – not dead! Paul don't go, you've got to look after yourself first!"
 - But nothing works. Paul is set on what God has called him to do.
 - o And it's not because he's being blissfully unaware, and it's not because he's being stubborn and just really wants to prove them all wrong,...
 - No, Paul is going to Jerusalem and willing to face the persecution simply because he has the courage that comes from knowing the truth of the Gospel.
 - o He knows that suffering and hardships are a normal part of the Christian life;
 - o He ALSO knows that his eternal future is secure because of the resurrection of Jesus and that nothing can take that away; and lastly
 - o He knows that Jesus is the sovereign Lord. And that the command is to follow him and to serve him even if it means difficulty.
 - o So all of these fruits of the gospel and commands of the gospel gives him the courage to go.

- 21:13 “Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.””
- I find it all too easy to settle for a comfortable Christianity. Wanting all the comforts of the Gospel, but reserving parts of my life just for myself, instead of giving my all for Jesus. Not willing to risk people not liking me if I share too much of my faith!
- And I haven’t done any research on this - but I’m fairly certain that I probably have some friends in this area.
 - Treating the Gospel as an added extra in our lives; OR
 - Only get to sharing our faith when we think it’s extremely low personal risk
- But Paul didn’t procrastinate. Paul didn’t cordon off sections of his life and put up “NO ACCESS” signs in front of some of them for God - no the Gospel gave him the courage to give all of himself for Jesus.
 - God’s glory above his own;
 - God’s purposes above his own comfort;
 - God’s mission above his own ways.
- And Paul’s courage isn’t just unique to him; that same Gospel courage has flooded through generations of courageous Christians who have been put to the sword for proclaiming Christ!
- And that same Gospel courage can be ours today!!
 - And we don’t need to read another book to have it;
 - or to read an article about it;
 - Or to be a superhuman
 - but we just simply need to plumb the depths of God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ and rest in the assurance that he is the sovereign Lord of all.
- And then...
 - How can we not serve Jesus like Paul, as we realise just how wonderfully – vastly – Jesus has served us?
 - How can we not have courage, as we realise more and more how much courage Jesus had facing his own death for us.
 - How can we not give our whole lives over to our Lord and saviour and say “your will be done” over every minute; every creature comfort; every possession - when he has given us completely of himself.
 - We can do this, we can have courage because we know that the Gospel is true.

- Now when Paul got to Jerusalem, he eventually went to the temple, was recognised by the Jewish leaders there from Asia, and they weren't happy.

- V30 "The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul."

- The prophesies of the people and Agabus proved correct.

- So Paul is now in the hands of the commander in order to protect him from the crowds.

- And so summoning his Gospel Courage, he asks the commander to let him speak to the people who almost tried to lynch him!

- And he speaks Gospel Truth to them.

Gospel Truth

o *Knowing how things are going to end really changes your perspective on those events doesn't it? I like to know how things end much to the frustration of my wife. I like it because it gives me peace - it gets rid of the tension!*

- But ramp that up and knowing that your eternity is secure, and knowing that our identity is secure - well that should give us the ultimate peace in all situations!

- And we can know this truth and we can know that our future is secure, because Christ rose from the dead...//

- Paul knew this.

- He knew the truth of the Gospel, the truth of the resurrection, and this is what he proclaims in Ch 22.

- He doesn't use the truth to save his own bacon, nor does he manipulate the facts, but before the crowds that tried to kill him, he tells them plainly about his encounter with the risen Lord.

o He tells them about his experience on the road to Damascus.

o That he had met the risen Jesus and went from the persecutor to the greatest evangelist.

- Paul knew that the Gospel was true.

o He knew that the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus was the big fat YES to all of God's promises.

- And knowing that truth gave Paul amazing and phenomenal boldness from which to preach the Gospel.

- He is saying to the crowds that -

- This Jesus is really alive; that he is who he said he is;
- that my life of going from prosecuting Christians to being a leader, is proof of that! Nothing could change that apart from a divine intervention.

- Yes, knowing the truth changes everything. It changes lives, and it should change our life.

- Knowing the truth that Jesus is Lord of all should give us comfort - that he is the one who is in control of all, that he has defeated the powers of sin and death.

- Knowing the truth that Jesus is Lord of all should give us peace - that he is the one who knows us intimately and personally, our inmost thoughts; our deepest desires, and cares for us and loves us all the same.

- Knowing the truth should give us hope - that even if the worst were to happen to us and even if we die, that we will never actually die because our resurrection and eternal life has been secured in his eternal life.

- Knowing the truth should give us courage to share Jesus for life, even into the most hostile of situations - that this news isn't just for us but is for the whole world. And even if we were ridiculed and harmed - we can know and have the confidence that we are standing in the truth of the crucified and risen Lord.

- This isn't a truth among others; a truth that's up for grabs, this isn't just Michael Calder's reality - this is the reality for all believers, for everyone here today and for anyone who turns to Jesus as Lord.

- Once again, the crowds didn't like Paul's message Acts 22:22 "The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!""

- The commander wants answers and so he turns to rough tactics. He has Paul interrogated and flogged.

○ These floggings not only would have really hurt, but could often leave people paralysed and dead!

- But Paul doesn't panic, but he stands up for his legal rights as a Roman citizen.

- Then the next day, Paul gets put in front of the ruling members of the Sanhedrin...the ruling Jewish bigwigs of the day.

- And he does the same thing as he did before, he confidently declares the truth of the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus - Acts 23:6 "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."

- Once again, this doesn't go down well, and for the third time in the space of 2 days, Paul was almost torn to pieces by the crowds.
 - And he gets put into witness protection by the commander.
 - Now just imagine being Paul at this time. Since visiting Jerusalem, he's been almost killed on three different occasions, he has been telling people about the truth of the resurrection, as far as he could tell, there has been no fruit, and what's more - he is now being held captive!
 - It doesn't seem like a really fruitful season does it? It doesn't seem like maybe this was the best path for Paul...maybe his companions were right?
 - But no - God has Paul right where he wants him... The Lord is still with Paul.
- o Acts 23:11 "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."
- And the amazing news is that that same Lord who was with Paul, is with us by his Holy Spirit.

CONC

- Yes, History is littered with stories of courageous people - including Paul
 - But also we can have this same courage!
 - The courage to live for Jesus in our everyday lives; the courage to be different on in our town; the courage to share about Jesus in words.
 - And you may be thinking - Michael I'm not that type of person, I'm not that amazing, I'm not a super-human like Paul, I'm feeling quite ordinary actually!
 - Well guess what - we don't have to be super human. Paul wasn't a super human!
 - This courage doesn't come from just trying to be better, or from just trying really hard. No, not at all.
 - This type of courage simply comes from knowing the truth that Jesus is Lord. And that he has rescued us from the grips of our own sin; and has destroyed the power of death in his resurrection.
 - This good news then gives us strength to share Jesus, knowing that if we ever are ridiculed, that the world ridiculed Jesus first;
 - This good news gives us the hope, that even if the worst was to happen, nothing can take us away from God's powerful hand.
 - This good news gives us the courage to dedicate our whole lives to live him, knowing that he is already the Lord of all - and yet gave his life for us – and so we are called, to do the same for him.
 - As Isaac Watts wrote in the brilliant hymn:
- o "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died,
o my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

- Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.
- Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."