

RCC In the Word

Week of June 3

Acts 22-26

At the conclusion of last week's Scripture reading (Acts 17-21), Paul returns to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, to bring an offering collected by Christians in other cities and to report to the believers the work of God among the Gentiles. As the prophet Agabus foretold in Acts 21.11, Paul is arrested by the religious authorities who intend to kill him (21.27-31). By the providence of God, the Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, intervenes and sends Paul to the barracks (21.32-33) Before Paul is taken away from the angry mob, the tribune permits him to address the people (21.40). Bound in chains, Paul speaks to the people. *Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you* (22.1). These words begin the first of six defenses Paul gives between chapters 22 and 28— twice in Jerusalem (22.1-21; 22.30-23.10), three times in Caesarea (24.10-21; 25.1-12; 26.1-29) and once in Rome (28.17-19).

When you read Paul's defenses throughout the closing chapters of Acts, a common theme emerges: resurrection. Implicitly as in verses like 22.17-21 or explicitly, Paul expresses absolute certainty in the historical reality of Christ's resurrection and the future reality of humanity's resurrection. *It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial* (23.6). *Having a hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust* (24.15). *It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day* (24.21). *Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead* (26.8). *I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass; that the Christ, must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead...(26.22-23).*

When you read Paul's speeches throughout the concluding chapters of Acts, it is evident that his belief in the resurrection fortified his hope. Paul knew Jesus' death and resurrection unequivocally proved the carpenter from Nazareth was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. The Jews hated this message and sought to destroy Paul. Yet, Paul continued to proclaim the truth of life after death. In spite of all his suffering and tribulation for the sake of Christ, the resurrection provided Paul all the hope he needed.

Not only did the truth of resurrection provide Paul with hope, it also motivated his obedience. After declaring the coming resurrection in 24.15, he says: *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man* (vs16). Paul knew one day his life on this earth would end and that resurrection followed death. Paul believed that one day God would raise his body and reunite it with his spirit. On that glorious day of resurrection, Paul knew he would stand before the holy and just God and face final judgment. Paul, along with all of humanity, will be resurrected and judged for the deeds done in the body. This truth fueled Paul's commitment to holiness.

As Christians, we do not fear resurrection day; we will not cower before the judgment seat of God. Christ has atoned every sin. Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless we will stand before the throne. It is our belief in the sufficient, atoning work of Christ and the promise of resurrection that gives us hope AND motivates our obedience. With resurrection ahead of us, we can take big risks for Christ. With resurrection ahead of us, we can boldly proclaim salvation in Jesus' name to a lost and dying world. With resurrection ahead of us, we hold fast through every storm. With resurrection ahead of us, we can wake up each and every day resolved to do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven. *But in fact, Christ*

has been raised from the dead (1Cor15.20) and in this fact we find hope for the future and strength to obey today.

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