

12. Confinement in Caesarea (3Q 2018—The Book of Acts)

Biblical material: Acts 24, Acts 25, Acts 26, 1 Cor. 1:23.

Quotes

- I believe that historians and analysts of historical events need the authority of facts supplied by living witnesses to the events, which they make their subject. *Ibrahim Babangida*
- Our religion, then, rests on the credit due to these witnesses. *Simon Greenleaf*
- For the dead and the living, we must bear witness. *Elie Wiesel*
- Even on the cross He did not hide Himself from sight; rather, He made all creation witness to the presence of its Maker. *Athanasius of Alexandria*
- The New Testament witnesses were fully aware of the background against which the resurrection took place. *Josh McDowell*
- To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist. *Cardinal Suhard*

Questions

What was the purpose of all these trials? How did Paul use these opportunities not simply to defend himself but to present the truth to these leaders? What would have happened if they had been converted by Paul's witness? What does all this say to us today about our role in society?

Bible summary

Acts 24 provides us with Paul's defense before Felix, the Roman governor. One of the more interesting points is that Felix was well acquainted with Christians, who at that time were known as "followers of the Way" (24:22). He often had Paul come and speak to him, but did not release him. Felix was hoping to receive a bribe from Paul. Acts 25: When Felix left after two years, he left Paul in prison to please the Jews. The Jews then tried to persuade the next governor, Porcius Festus, to have Paul brought to Jerusalem to be tried before him, hoping to be able to assassinate Paul on the way. But Festus had Paul brought before him in Caesarea. Paul appealed his case to Caesar. After this he appeared before Festus and king Agrippa (Acts 26). These repeated defenses gave Paul a wonderful opportunity to share his faith at the highest possible level.

Comment

Like Paul before all these earthly leaders, this is also our destiny—to be the evidence, the witnesses both now and forever, of God's love and grace, that God always works for good and truth and right. So "we are witnesses," and "a spectacle to angels and to me," forever representing our Lord as "ambassadors for Christ."

Our role is to interpret God! May we always strive to speak well of our loving Lord, both in word and action, conscious of our privileged role as part of God's answer in settling the charges against him in the great controversy.

We are ambassadors for Christ because he has given us his message of reconciliation. So how do we explain what this message is, and how do we demonstrate it

unless we become involved? This does not mean adopting the value system and practices of this world. But it does mean meeting people where they are, sharing the good news, and helping others understand the wonderful truth of God as he truly is. It is my sincere conviction that we have not so much a duty but an amazing opportunity to share with all people at all levels the wonderful good news of God as he truly is, to reveal he is not as the Enemy has described him, and that he will save and heal—not just us—but the whole universe as his character is understood and admired by all his admiring children.

So, for example, how do we share our message beyond the borders of our own faith community? What lessons can we learn here? To what degree is an insistence on creeds and formulas important?

We have a challenge to re-formulate the glorious good news about God in terms that will be understood by our contemporaries. That is why we are all called to be witnesses to angels and human beings, of what we know about God and his healing, transforming love. The creativity God has given to each of us means that we all can do this in our own unique way, and so be God's witnesses as he calls his defence since he is placed on trial. Each of us has this incredible opportunity to say in our own way what we understand about the grace of God in the universe-wide conflict that rages around us. Just like Philip, confronted with a whole new situation, we should not see the secular spirit of our times in defeatist terms, but rather as an opportunity. What a privilege to talk about God, to tell others what we have discovered for ourselves, and to convincingly speak of the God who is answering the charges in the great controversy through us!

Ellen White Comments

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls. {DA 347}

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. {AG 277}

These examples of human steadfastness bear witness to the faithfulness of God's promises—of His abiding presence and sustaining grace. They testify to the power of faith to withstand the powers of the world... They bore witness to the power of One mightier than Satan. . . . Through trial and persecution the glory—the character—of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The believers in Christ, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ. On earth they walk in narrow paths; they are purified in the furnace of affliction. {OFC 311}

Prepared February 19, 2018 © Jonathan Gallagher 2018