

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 12th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: How to Stand Strong in Tough Times (Acts 24)

Speaker: Pastor Mike Burnette

Icebreaker

- We ALL know that the true star of the Super Bowl is the food. Name your favorite Super Bowl dish!

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Share a time where your devotion and relationship with God grew closer during a difficult season.

Don't Let Others Decide Your Devotion (v. 1-9)

- Where in your life do you feel the most challenged in your devotion to God?
- Describe a time where you felt pressured to just go along with the crowd. Did you give in or stand alone? Why?
- How do the people in your circle encourage you in your devotion? How do they discourage you? Have you tried communicating that?

It's Easy to Defend When You're Living Right (v. 10-21)

- Is there a certain person or group that you find it the hardest to stand up for your faith around? Why?
- How have you set up healthy boundaries that help protect your faith? Where in your life do you need to establish them?
- In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul urges the church to "live quietly, mind your own affairs... and walk properly before outsiders." Why is it so important to God for our lives to be dependable and honorable to non-believers?

Favor Follows Faithfulness (v. 22-27)

- When we don't have a foundation of devotion, what are some of the ways that we tend to deal with challenges in life?
- Favor followed Paul's faithfulness to God in a generous prison sentence, but he was still in prison. How does this affect the way you see God's favor in your own life?
- God's favor in our lives isn't just for us. We should be sharing how God works in our lives with others. Share where you've seen God's favor in your life recently.
- Throughout the Book of Acts, we see Paul was building his life on God way before this tough season started. Right now, how are you growing your devotion and your relationship with God so that when you encounter hard times, it doesn't crush you?

In closing, how was Paul able to stay strong for God in tough times? He built a life with God before the tough times showed up! The person he was becoming before the hard season is what prepared him to endure the tough times.

1. Paul had a life-changing encounter with God!
2. Paul was filled with God's Spirit!
3. Paul had a regular prayer life!
4. Paul had a strong community of faith!
5. Paul's whole life was deeply devoted to Jesus!

Now What?

Encouragement: Paul's tough time in Acts 24 is a perfect example of how God desires us to survive and stand in touch times. God knows that standing up for Him is a challenge, and it can sometimes feel lonely, but through our faith in the Lord, we can stand tall in the storm. Things and people will try to make you doubt what you're doing, but don't ever let anyone or anything get in the way of your devotion to God and lead you away from living a life full of the Holy Spirit. And when you're living devoted to God and living a Spirit-filled life, you can stand strong against any lie or

compromise. It's easy to defend yourself when you're living the right way. And favor follows faithfulness. Stay the course and continue to the Lord your gift of faithfulness, and He will continue giving you His gift of favor. Paul didn't wait until the tough times to get serious with Christ. Build your life with God now so you'll be able to conquer the tough seasons in the future.

Ask:

- How have you been letting others decide your devotion?
- Is your life easy to defend?
- In what ways can you get better at giving God your faithfulness?

Challenge: Take some this week to reflect on your devotion life. What does it look like currently? Pray and ask God how it can be deepened. Also, be intentional about looking for signs of God's favor in your life this week and share it with someone.

Closing Prayer

God, we thank you for this message. We thank you for Paul's story and what it's teaching us about living a life dedicated to you. As your children, we know we're not exempt from difficulties, but because we are your children, we can stand strong in the face of adversity. When we face hard times, we pray to be reminded about what we've learned about standing strong in Christ. Help us strengthen our devotion lives like never before. Lord, give us the wisdom and strength to guard our devotion from things and people that will try to lead us away from our faith. Remove anything from our lives that is keeping us from living honestly and living a fully devoted life to Christ. Help us to stay faithful in the midst of trials. We want to keep our eyes on you, Lord, and on the purpose you have for our lives. We ask all of these things in your precious name, Amen.

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of February 5th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: God's Plan Will Prevail - Acts 23:12-35

Speaker: Pastor Beau Jensen

Icebreaker

- If you could give Pastor Beau a topic to “freestyle rap” about, what would it be?

Discussion Questions

INTRODUCTION

- Are you a planner? What should you be planning, and is there flexibility for God's will in your planning?

I. The Heart is Deceitful (v. 12-15)

- What is the significance of “more than 40” making this oath?
- Do you ever feel like it is acceptable to sin? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt like everyone was out to get you, yet you were in the “right” about something? How did that make you feel?
- Share a time when you went against God's will because you thought it was better to do things your way? What was the end result?
- Have you ever been passionate about something and believed it was God's will, and then found that it was not? Describe how that made you feel.
- Are you like Paul, or the priests and elders who came against him? Why?
- If you are speaking to someone with differing opinions, do you act like these 40 who came against Paul, or do you ask clarifying questions to provide a clearer picture? How do you do that?

Jeremiah 19:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately

wicked: who can know it?" NKJV

- This is why we need Jesus - because our hearts are wicked and will deceive us. How do you filter life, so that God is in control and not your heart?
- Have you ever been sucked into "religious thinking" that was not in line with God's plan? How did you work that out?

II. God Will Use Anyone & Anything (v. 16-30)

- God sometimes uses circumstances and seemingly the most unexpected person or situation to carry out his purposes and plans. How has God used an unexpected person or circumstance to make His plan clear in your life?
- What is the significance of the tribune taking Paul's nephew by the hand to privately ask what the nephew had to say? How old do you think the nephew was? If he was very young, why would God use a child to help bring His plan to fruition?
- Why did the tribune feel it necessary or important to listen to Paul's nephew?
- The soldiers were transporting someone they thought was a prisoner, but they were unaware God was using them to transport His preacher of the gospel safely. When has God used you to exercise His will, while you were totally unaware?
- Why would the tribune order 470 soldiers to guard Paul – one man -- during the transport? Does that convince you that God would do anything to make sure His plan prevails?
- Why did the tribune write to the governor, Felix? What do you think his intention was? What might have happened if the tribune didn't clarify his purpose in sending Paul to Felix?
- If God wants you somewhere, he will make sure you get there! Even now, you are sitting here reading this study because God wants you to be. How does that make you feel?
- Have you ever had to be faithful in your waiting season? Was it easy

or hard? How did you get through it?

III. God's Plan Looks Different (v. 31-35)

- Why was Paul taken to Antipatris at night?
- What's blocking YOU from following God's plan? Pride?... Ignorance?... Anger?... How can we get beyond these things that limit us and get closer to His plan?
- God's Plan for Paul was different than expected. The only directive he received was from Jesus, "Take Courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must testify also in Rome." Have you ever had a plan for your life, and then found God's plan to be different? How did it work out?
- God's Plan looks different for everyone. Sometimes God's Plan may not make sense to us (and may never make sense), but God's Plan will prevail. Look at your own life, and describe a way God's plan has surprised you. Does it make sense yet?
- God has an infinite number of options for working out His will in our lives. Why would we think we could understand His plan?

Now What?

Encouragement: We may never fully understand God's plan, but God will use any unique circumstance as an opportunity to reach those who have not heard about the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is because God's Plan will prevail.

God used Paul's life as an opportunity, he just needed to have the courage to be able to preach the gospel. In our own lives we should take advantage of the opportunities that are in front of us, take courage and share what God has done in our lives. It may seem trivial, however God will use what seemingly feels insignificant to us to do something significant in others.

God has an infinite number of options for working out his will in our lives. While our daily lives may not look spectacular, we can be assured and encouraged knowing that God is involved in our lives.

Ask:

- How can you be more aware of God's plan for your life this week?
- How have your own desires encouraged you to follow your own plan and not God's?

Challenge: Spend some time over the next seven days looking into what the Bible says about God's will. Pay particular attention to these verses each day:

Day 1: Psalm 25:4-5

Day 2: Psalm 25:8-9

Day 3: Psalm 119:105

Day 4: Proverbs 19:21

Day 5: Jeremiah 29:10-14

Day 6: Mark 3:33-35

Day 7: Matthew 6:9-10

Pray each day for God to reveal your heart to you and to make His will for you crystal clear.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we love you. God, thank you for this day and this time to come and worship you. We lift up your name, because it is a gift to love you. I pray that we would not fight back against your plan, God. Thank you, Lord, that your plan is the only plan. I pray that we would go the direction you would have us go, and we thank you for that decision. Jesus, I'm all in on your plan for my life. Because I know your plan will prevail. Thank you for giving me new life. Give me your Holy Spirit to lead me and to guide me. In Jesus' name, AMEN!

Sunday Sermon Review: Week of January 29th, 2023

Sermon Series: The Book of Acts

Sermon: This is Not What I Expected (Acts 22:30; 23:1-11)

Speaker: Pastor Jordan Smalley

Icebreaker

- If you made a movie, what would it be about?

Discussion Questions

Our Response is Our Choice (Acts 22:30; 23:1-5)

- Paul's opportunity to share the gospel to the council was like a dream come true. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. Describe a time in your life when you had a chance to say something really important. How did that go?
- Have you ever said something you thought was profound or witty, only to be smacked on the mouth for it? Put yourself in Paul's shoes. How do you think he felt after he said this and was struck on the mouth for it?
- Paul has a very human response in the heat of the moment here to being wronged. He knows he didn't deserve that! This has happened to us all. Describe a time when you let your anger get the best of you. How did that work out? How could it have been if you'd let God take control?
- You can't always control what happens to you, but you can always control your response towards what happened to you! Think of a time when you responded to a situation in a "less than Christian" way. Now, imagine how it could have gone if you'd have handled it differently. What would be different?
- Do you speak out against corruption? If so, how do you speak out against it? Is it the right way?
- Despite the reason why you're being persecuted, do you still choose to respond in a way that is pleasing to the Lord?
- Is there a time when you were faced with a hard situation and your response was revenge? How did that turn out?

Refocus Our Attention (Acts 23:6-10)

- In a painful, challenging situation, Paul refocused his attention and got back focused on his hope in the resurrection and on his hope in Jesus! How much different would our response to life's curve-balls

be if we kept our focus on our hope in the resurrection? What would that look like?

- When Paul's focus began to change and he got his focus back on his message and his hope in the resurrection, his circumstance did not get better. Still, God was able to begin working in his situation and God was able to defend Paul. Sometimes our circumstances might not change but our focus can! How could you change your focus in order to remember that God is good and he is working on the situation for you?
- When you see that you have gone down the wrong track, how do you refocus your attention back on God?
- Having a lack of faith that God can help you overcome anything, can leave you stuck where you are. Do you truly believe that you can overcome any circumstance with God's help? Why or why not?
- Are you ever tempted to turn to someone or something else, other than God in hard times? Who/what and why?
- What's a current situation you are going through where you feel like you have to defend yourself? How are you going about dealing with the situation? (i.e. scripture, prayer, solo) What is keeping you from surrendering it to God?

The Lord is With Us in Our Pain (Acts 23:11)

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. (Psalm 16:8)

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

- In one of Paul's darkest moments, THE LORD CAME AND STOOD BY PAUL! Imagine how powerful that would have been. Now, remind yourself that even in your darkest hour, God is with you. How does that change the way you see adversity in your life?
- Are you here today feeling discouraged like Paul? How do these Psalms change the way you focus your attention and give you

courage?

- Acts 23:11 reads, “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.” Even though no one in the moment in the Sanhedrin was saved, God was still proud of Paul. How does this verse change how you feel about what success looks like when preaching the gospel?
- Can you persevere with God by your side? He may call you to continue to be in the fire. What is your focus while you are in the fire?
- There are times when you may wait awhile after going through a hard situation to hear from God? In that waiting, how do you center your heart and thoughts on God? How do you keep from spiraling or feeling discouraged?

Now What?

Encouragement: Even in our darkest hour and in the pains and challenges of life, God is with us! His presence is with us!! Hebrews says he will never leave us nor forsake us! Psalm 16:8 says, “I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me!” Psalm 34 says, He is close to the broken hearted! Psalm 46:1 SAYS, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble!

Ask:

- How can you include God in your responses more this week?
- How have your feelings been encouraging you to respond contrary to God’s word?

Challenge:

In what ways do you need to change your response this week?

1. Forgive Quickly

There are some things in life that are just out of our control, but you can control how you respond. Do you forgive quickly, or do you hold onto

conflict? Why?

2. Humble Yourself

Sometimes it's not someone else's fault or God's fault that we're experiencing pain. Sometimes it's our own refusal to humble ourselves and apologize that's keeping us in the place we're in. What pain in your life is the result of your own stubbornness? What would happen if you let go of that stubbornness?

3. Watch Your Mouth

We can choose not to complain or grumble. We can choose to honor. Instead of grumbling about a situation at work this week, what would it look like to honor your coworkers or boss for their hard work?

4. Turn to God in Prayer

Instead of stewing in the moment, what if we turned to God immediately and trust that He will deal with it in His will? How much better would it be if we trusted Him instead of shouldering that responsibility ourselves?

5. Reach out for help!

There is no reason to suffer through serious hurt and pain alone. What if you gave that pain and suffering away and came to rely on a small group or pastoral counseling? How much easier would your day be?

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you that we do not have to walk through difficult times alone. Thank you for being our hope in a broken world! Thank you that you promise to always be with us! You are such a good Father. Remind us that even though we cannot control what goes on in our lives, we can control how we respond. Lord, help our responses show others you. May we love others in our responses and to remember to be gentle with our tongues. Would you show us how to encourage others with the encouragement you give us daily. Lord, guide us and lead our steps this week as we walk out what we have learned. Help us be a light to the darkness in this world. We love you, we thank you! In Jesus's name, AMEN!

