

Title: An app on your phone
Text: Acts 22.22-23.11
Theme: When the Lord stands by you
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus, on our terms is not Jesus. Jesus, on his terms is the whole package.

In an effort to help our car industry, you can get some pretty favorable interest rates and terms for a new car. It sounds like companies and dealers are looking for ways to create deals that are as favorable for the consumer as possible. It is a law of supply and demand. When a new vehicle comes out that is in high demand, then dealers have an advantage and can demand a premium above the sticker price because there are people willing to pay for it. But, when there are more vehicles than consumers, then the consumers get the advantage through discounts, rebates and low interest rates. But, it doesn't work that way with Jesus, though, it seems there are many who think this way:

I've got Jesus on my playlist. I give him a nod every so often. I'll point to the big guy once in a while. But, if I'm really in a crisis, and I've tried everything else, then he better come through. But, for the most part, he really doesn't have the final word. He's more like an app on my phone that is there when needed. This is Jesus on my terms. This is how a consumer views Jesus. The consumer, gets to craft his view of God based on the world being how he imagines that it should be. When that happens, then his view of Christianity is now an influence he wants to use in order to create that sort of world.

Is that how you view the church? Is that how you view Christ? Is that how you view Christianity? Is the church here to reinforce and validate your views? In our study of the book of Acts, we are studying the forming of the church, the spread of the church, the influence of the church and of course, the persecution of the church. The church as a movement is the result of the message of the gospel, which is all about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a package deal. We do not get to redefine Jesus, any more than we get to redefine the gospel or redefine the church. But, people try to do that. People want a religion that validates and affirms views they already have. But, Jesus is not an app that you get to use when you want. He is the operating system who runs your life. That is clearly displayed in this text.

Read Text:

What is the flashpoint? The moment Paul says that the Lord was sending him on a mission to the Gentiles, they went berserk. Why? This was not the God they wanted. And while it is easy for us to think, tsk, tsk, shame, shame, the truth is, we all struggle with wanting a religion and a god that we make in our image so that he will affirm us and validate what we want to believe. But, when you define god as you want him, and fashion a religion according to your beliefs, it is not only a false god and religion, but it is woefully inferior to the real deal. Paul is exposing the wrong beliefs of the Jews, but they are not interested in truth. They want him dead, now! Let's set the stage for a minute. The northwest corner of the Temple Wall was the location of the Tower of Antonia, where the Roman soldiers were able to keep a close eye on things going on the Temple area. There were 2 flights of stairs that enabled the soldiers to get down quickly as needed to quell any disturbance and this was definitely a disturbance. Paul was apprehended and

was being taken away, when he asked permission from the Tribune to speak to his accusers. The Tribune was a Roman official who was over 1,000 soldiers (known as a cohort), while a centurion was typically over 100 or so. The Tribune had no idea who Paul was, nor what the problem was about, but he was going to find out, but before Paul was taken away, Paul asked permission to speak. There is an interesting conversation that takes place between the Tribune and Paul. The Tribune is surprised that Paul knows Greek. (21.37) I am assuming that Paul spoke to the Tribune in Greek (language of the Roman Empire) who was a bit taken back and said, "Do you know Greek?" Then the Tribune asked, "*Are you not the Egyptian, then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out in the wilderness!*" Paul assures him that he isn't and pleads for an opportunity to address the crowd.

This is rather fascinating, isn't it? If I were Paul, I would see this mob as a threat. Paul sees this mob as an opportunity for the gospel. Luke notes that Paul speaks to them in Hebrew, even though Aramaic was the common language in Israel at the time. Does the Tribune know Hebrew? And, does the mob respond in Hebrew, or in Aramaic, which the Tribune may have known? We don't know, I bring that up because the crowd goes apoplectic when Paul speaks of his mission to the Gentiles and they demand that he be killed and are going out of control. But the irony is, that they react this way and say these things in front of the Gentile soldiers. But, due to the language barriers and certainly the cultural and religious misunderstandings, the Tribune has no idea what this is all about, but he is going to find out and the easiest way is to flog Paul so that he will confess to what he has done.

I. The relationship between the Christian and civil authorities (22.22-29)

This week, the U.S. Supreme Court listened to arguments on whether or not a religious school can fire "fay workers." What seems to be the crux of the issue is, is a teacher in a religious school in the category of a religious leader or in the category of a teacher? If the person is a religious leader, then the court has historically shied away from too much control because, as the questioning of the justices revealed, a secular court is not always sure what to do with a religious situation. One Supreme Court justice asked his colleagues if the court really wants to be in the position of determining who is or isn't a minister? His point was, that this is best left up to the religion, not the court because these matters are so complicated for people who do not understand that particular religion. So, we can appreciate the dilemma and the confusion for the Tribune. Is this a civil problem? Yes. But what kind of a civil problem is it? It is a religious issue that the civil authorities are involved in because it got out of control. These sorts of things get really messy, but they happen all of the time and here is a clear example of how we are to view our relationship as Christians to our civil authorities.

A. Civil authorities should receive grace from us.

Civil authorities are not perfect people and are not going to govern perfectly. If you were a civil authority, you wouldn't govern perfectly either. I certainly wouldn't. Of all people, we should be the ones who understand that because we are people of the gospel and the gospel lays out a very thorough doctrine of sin and depravity. We are sinners. Civil authorities are sinners. Our relationship to civil authorities should be informed by the gospel, meaning we should be people of grace. This Tribune had a mob scene on his hands. Things are about to get out of control. In

the heat of the moment, decisions have to be made and they are not always going to be right. Paul really seems to give the civil authorities the opportunity to do their job without demanding his rights. In fact, Paul waits until the very last minute before he speaks up and informs the centurion of his Roman citizenship. Why does he wait so long? Maybe, this is the first chance he has to say something, or perhaps he was waiting to give them an opportunity to do their job and ask the right questions. But, even the questions that Paul asks are not done with name calling and threats. Paul does not treat civil authorities as threats but as people. He respects them. And this will be a pattern that we will see throughout the rest of the book of Acts. The respect that Paul gives provides opportunities to share the gospel which results in many people, (soldiers included) who come to faith in Christ.

Like many of you, I am not in full agreement with all of the decisions that our governor has made. But, here is what I try to keep in mind. Could she read everything that you have posted about her and be interested in hearing about the gospel from you? Do we talk about and treat government officials and civil authorities with such charity that they are surprised by our kindness? We are believers. We are followers of Christ. Our words, our tone, our goal, our attitude is different. Our rights are not pre-eminent. Our Savior is. Like Him...

B. We are at the mercy of unjust accusations.

Paul gets a double whammy here. First of all, the mob is acting like he just committed the worst crime possible. Yet, the very law, these Jews appear so zealous to protect is the very law that talks about the mission of God to the Gentiles. This is religious fanaticism. Religious fanaticism is nothing different than godless chaos. There is nothing in religious fanaticism that looks like Christ. These guys are screaming, they are throwing dirt in the air, they are taking off their coats (which may be as a sign that they are prepared to stone Paul, or that they are shaking off the defilement that his words have caused). They are out of control. The Tribune does not have the luxury of sorting things out in any ordinary way, so Paul is ordered back to barracks, saying, "*that he should be examined by flogging*" Hold the phone! Do you know what that means? They are going to use a cat of nine tails (a leather-handled whip, with nine extensions that has sharp pieces of bone and shards of metal in the ends that will shred human flesh. This is awful. But, do you know something interesting? This is what happened to Christ and he was flogged in probably the exact place where Paul is being prepared to be beaten. This is not fair. Paul did not do anything and he is about to suffer immeasurably anyway.

On the one hand, is at the mercy of unjust accusations. That is a very sad part of living in this sin-cursed world. (Georgia story?) But, on the other hand, we are at the mercy of unjust accusations, because Christianity is really misunderstood. We do not view leadership, power, money, influence or people like the world does. Simply put, we do not use people and love these other things. We love God and we love people and leadership, power, money and influence are simply means to express love for God and others. But that is not understood by our world. Therefore, they do not believe that about us. They can't because they don't understand that. They do not have a category in their thinking for how we think.

C. Our posture is to be one of love and submission

Acts 22 and 23 take place in A.D. 57. Paul is the recipient of a very faulty legal process that results in him being imprisoned for most of the rest of his life. Around 7-8 years after this, when Paul writes his first letter to Timothy he tells him, *"First of all then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercession and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way"* (1 Timothy 2.1-2)

Beloved, there is nothing supernatural about posting negative things regarding political and civil authorities. It takes no special skill to do that. But, can you love, care for, seek the best for and kindly submit to civil authorities whom you don't agree with? I don't think you can in your strength. That is why I think we are called upon to pray for them. Praying for civil authorities is an act of love and we need to pray for them. I've been reading the book of Job this week. At the end of the book, God tells Job's three "friends" to offer up a burnt offering for themselves and to have Job pray for them because they misrepresented God. God tells them, *"I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly"* This is not only a grace to these three friends, but this is a grace to Job, because you cannot pray for people consistently and remain angry and embittered against them. I think that this is one of the reasons why God has us pray for officials. It is an act of love for them and it is a grace for us, so that we do not become snarly, arrogant and smug. The government is simply people, many of whom need Jesus and we need to see them as such and look for ways to point them to Christ.

We have a task force in our church who are certified by the federal government to be able to be able to serve our members as an extension of the federal emergency management agency in the time of a national crisis. We carefully looked at this and said, here is a way that we can partner with civil authorities for good. We can help them do their job in helping us if the need arose. We will never go against our beliefs, or conscience, but if we were asked to be a food-distributing center or a health-screening venue, we would seriously look at it. We want to love God supremely and love others sacrificially. At the same time...

D. We are right and free to exercise our legal rights (22.25-29)

Paul is the target of a civil authority who wants to shoot first and ask questions later. You might be able to get away with that in some cases, but Paul is a Roman citizen, something that they did not consider to be remotely possible. Paul asks if beating a Roman citizen before he is condemned is legal. The fact is, you aren't even allowed to bind a Roman citizen without charges, much less flog him. When the Tribune hears this, he is suspicious. Paul may have been lying. Which he wasn't. Paul, most likely provided evidence of his citizenship, which most Roman citizens carried with them. In fact, he outranked the Tribune. The Tribune had bought his citizenship (very likely through a bribe) while Paul was born free. This changes things. Paul now has the force of Roman law on his side and he is willing to use it, for the sake of the gospel. Do you see the point? It is not who I am, but who I am in Christ. Therefore, my goal as always is to make much of Jesus. Your politics will not change the world, but the gospel will. Therefore, while we are free to use our legal rights, our first thought should not be, what is my right, but what will make much of Christ?

II. The relationship between the Christian and religious authorities (22.30-23.11)

The Tribune called for the chief priest and the Sanhedrin to gather together so that he could figure out what crime, if any Paul had committed. Paul is now unbound. He does not appear in this court like scene in handcuffs, but appearing as a "free man". Paul begins looking intently at the council. He has nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of. What a great place to be and he says so. *"Brothers (and he can say this as a fellow Jew and as a former Pharisee), I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day"* But, think of this. The religious authorities cannot say that.

A. Genuine Christians are a threat to most religious authorities. (22.30-23.10)

In this text we witness a head-on collision of two world views. 1) Use "God"/religion to get what you want vs. 2) Be used by God as a means to accomplish his plan. Ananias, the high priest, the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin are posturing. They are using their religious authority as a means of self-promotion and self-protection. Paul is the one who is accused, but they are the ones who panic. When Paul says that his conscience is clear, Ananias orders him to be struck, likely because Ananias is accusing Paul of lying. But, Ananias, as the high priest is supposed to be the chief example of a law-keeper. Instead he violates the law by ordering Paul to be struck, which was no different in principle than what Paul almost experienced with the Tribune. Paul reacts strongly (23.3) and curses Ananias (God is going to strike you), insults him (you whitewashed wall) and accuses Ananias of being a hypocrite (contrary to the law you order me to be struck). Then Paul is accused of breaking the law by reviling God's high priest (23.4).

Stop the movie right there. This is very instructive. In my family my kids know that sarcasm is our love language. But, I don't think that Paul is being sarcastic here. Both Ananias and Paul have broken the law and both have been confronted. But, Paul does not defend himself and play the excuse card, "but he started it" right? He confronts his own wrong and confesses it. Even though Ananias was totally wrong to order Paul hit, Paul knows that sin #1 is not an excuse or justification for sin #2. If I respond to the sin of another person with my own sin, then not only do we have more sin, but we are starting down a road that leads to war.

What happens next is both comical and frustrating. Paul sizes up the situation accurately. His "fate" appears to be in the hands of a council that is not unified. The likelihood of this being a fair trial is not very good. Paul knows about the elephant in the room. He knows that the Sadducees do not believe in angels, spirits or the resurrection of the body and he knows that the Pharisees do. So announces that he is on trial because of his belief in the resurrection of the dead. It's like a house judiciary committee hearing, where the accused says, "I'm here today because I believe that we are paying too many taxes and the Democrats and Republicans start in on each other. Well, this is the match that lights the gasoline of division in the Sanhedrin and they start in on each other with Paul in the middle. Some of the scribes of the Pharisee party even say, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And once again the crowd goes berserk. There is a lot of berserk in the book of Acts, isn't there?

Why? Why is there such a violent response? People panic when they are threatened with the truth about themselves, which is why genuine Christianity is a threat to most religious authorities. Genuine Christianity is a threat to all people who live of life pretending to be

something they really aren't. But, the very thing that people fear (exposure) is the very thing they need (not to be embarrassed) but in order to see the truth about themselves so they can humble themselves and trust in Christ.

Well, this isn't helping the Tribune out at all, is it? He was hoping to find out exactly what Paul had done that was wrong and he about got Paul killed. So, Paul is taken back to the barracks.

B. Genuine Christians are never really threatened. (23.11)

Wow, what is going to happen to Paul? There is a lot riding on this, because now the church has become much more visible to both the authorities in Jerusalem and in Rome.

"The following night the Lord stood by him." The Lord not only stood by him, but he made him a promise. It really didn't matter what Paul was threatened with now. No weapon that is formed against the people of God will ever be greater than the presence and promises of God. And God promised Paul that he would get to Rome.

Beloved, we are living with a lot of uncertainty. The truth is, we always do, but our present circumstance just makes it more apparent. But, for the believer, all circumstantial uncertainty is governed by the certainty of our good, wise and Sovereign God. He promised Paul that he would get to Rome, and he did. He promises us, that we will get to glory and we will.

Here is a big takeaway from this text:

What is hypocrisy? It is not being a sinner. It is pretending that you are not. It is pretending that you are something that you really aren't. It is hiding behind a perception that you craft in order to distract people from what you really are. It is looking for validation and affirmation, labels, titles, accolades, awards and even degrees to substantiate our carefully crafted perception. Hypocrisy, though is exhausting. You have to keep running around the house of your life, pulling the shades down so that no one will really see what is on the inside. But, in order to craft that perception, what do you have to give up? You have to give up integrity, wholeness, truth, Jesus. Is hypocrisy worth a life and eternity, without Jesus? Jesus is not an app on your phone to help you prop up the image that you want others to believe. He is your Savior to rescue you from the mess you have made of your life and give you one that you don't have to prop up.