



9/14/26

Acts 20:17-27

Tim said something in Sunday's message that really caught my attention. What's the difference between believing IN Christ and believing THAT Christ did something? It's the difference between being saved and unsaved. The equation goes like this...

Belief THAT Christ has died and rose again + Confess Jesus as Lord = Belief IN Christ and be saved.

And of course, I loved how he used the sweet love of my dog, Toby, to illustrate what God wants us to be with each other. By the grace of God, may we be a blessing in the lives of the people around us, and may we live in such a way for Jesus that we leave a hole when we're gone. I praise God that He always knows how to fill that hole.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

I don't know if any human was a more worthy witness than Paul. Maybe equal, but not more. If I were warned by the Spirit of severe suffering I'd have to go through, would I be heavily tempted to turn back, to question God's goodness? I'm sad to say, I would. As hard as it is to be somewhat blindsided when trials come, I think I am more able to cry out to the Lord rather than spending all my time bracing myself for what will come. I don't know. My prayer is that my faith and courage in the Lord would be so strong that nothing could ever derail me... like nothing derailed Paul.

How does someone get so strong in their faith that neither being warned of impending harm nor being blindsided with harm can shake their courage of faith? I think it happens when our mindset is that we are soldiers always preparing for the battle so that when it comes, we know how to stand firm and use the armor of God that He's given us. To try to handle the battle without preparing for it is not a wise plan.

Here in Acts 20, I see in Paul's testimony a REALLY important part of the training... Paul had no agenda of his own. The Lord's agenda was his agenda. And the man who faced enormous affliction and oppression (like Jesus) was not in despair. He was filled with the joy of the Lord. It's not that he never grieved, but even when he grieved, he grieved with the comfort and joy of the Lord sustaining him.

He was giving testimony to the elders from Ephesus because he knew he would not see them again, and he would be going to Jerusalem where the Spirit had warned him that he was about to face way more opposition than he had experienced so far... and that's a lot! So... what did he describe about being a worthy witness? Am I willing to be in training so that I can stand strong in the courage of faith no matter what comes? O Lord, please make it so.

This is what Paul told the Ephesian elders, who he loved so much, about his ministry...

He said, "You yourselves KNOW how I lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility..." Paul knew that a worthy witness has to be a humble witness. Humility is NOT thinking too highly of yourself, and NOT thinking too lowly of yourself. Humility is NOT thinking of yourself. Pride and serving do not go together. The only way to truly serve is to serve in humility.

Paul was God's "doulos", His bondservant by choice. God never forces us to serve Him, because that isn't love. But Paul was so convinced of the hope of the gospel and so blown away by Jesus' sacrifice for us that he saw any suffering on earth as "light and momentary affliction" compared to "the glory that is going to be revealed to us."

He said he served the Lord "with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews." Wow. Paul was not a masochist. He didn't take pleasure in the suffering, but he did take pleasure in knowing that the Lord would work good through it, and that his suffering would never be wasted. So... a worthy witness does not shrink back from the trials AND a worthy witness doesn't pretend that the trials don't hurt. A worthy witness turns to the Lord for comfort and strength in the trials, and finds the Lord to be faithful. I think a worthy witness also keeps the gospel in mind. Anything we suffer on this earth, which will be our only suffering if we belong to Jesus, is nothing compared to the suffering He went through for us.

Even with the plots of the Jews who literally followed him from town to town to try to crush his ministry and turn everyone against him, Paul "did not shrink back", refusing to pull away from them for fear of persecution. Instead, he continued to publicly and privately declare the gospel to anyone who would listen. He continued earnestly and thoroughly calling them to "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." A worthy witness points all eyes toward the Lord Jesus and not to self... earnestly and thoroughly. That takes a very convinced, focused heart. There's no, "I know I SHOULD witness for Jesus, but I get so busy and I'm afraid of what people will think." There's such a love for Jesus that a worthy witness says, "But with me it a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). A worthy witness seeks the glory that comes from God, not the glory that comes from man.

Paul said, "And now, behold... check it out... I'm constrained, bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, and I don't know what's going to happen to me. But the Holy Spirit is earnestly and solemnly telling me that things are gonna get bad. This is not comfortable and easy I'm walking into. It's imprisonment and affliction I'm walking into."

Whoa!!! How does someone hear that and say, "Let's go"? That person is truly like a navy seal soldier who says, "I have no agenda of my own, but to carry out the agenda of the one who's sending me." That's exactly what Paul said. He said, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." Paul's agenda was God's agenda. He had an eternal perspective. He understood that he had a mission that had a beginning and an end. He wanted to finish well. To do that, he had to truly take to heart what Jesus said in Luke 9:23-25, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

Paul understood that denying himself his perceived rights and privileges, even as a Pharisee who had been so highly respected by man, was so completely worth it to be with Jesus. The grace of Jesus is greater than any treasure of earth. My flesh fights against this, but my spirit knows it's true. I pray that the Lord will help me crush my flesh that Romans and Galatians say is so hostile to God. My flesh blinds me to the truth. O Lord, please help me not to pay attention to my flesh, but to pay attention to You.

I have prayed for YEARS that You would make Acts 20:24 true for me... that I would not consider my life of any value nor as precious to myself, but that I would give up my agenda for Yours... to carry out the mission and purpose You've given me without fail. I'm thankful for Paul's words that sometimes he had tears. I praise You that serving You without apology doesn't mean it won't hurt. But as a physical therapist who treated me once told me, "It's a good, useful hurt." Any suffering I face, I face with You, Lord. You will never abandon me in it. Your comfort doesn't mean that it won't hurt, but it does mean that You will surround me with Your peace and grace and mercy and love... and with other believers who love You, too. "Shared suffering is endurable suffering" (Bob Kelleman).

Paul continued his testimony to the Ephesian elders. He told them that they would not see him again. Once he sailed for Jerusalem, he would not be coming back. He had proclaimed the kingdom of Jesus Christ to them faithfully, and he could not be held accountable for their choices from here on. As a soldier would say that he was innocent of their blood because he had done everything he could to help them, Paul said he was innocent of their eternal, spiritual blood because he never stopped declaring to them the whole counsel of God. He didn't pick and choose what he thought they'd like to hear and leave stuff out that may be hard to hear. He said it all. He prepared them well to carry out their own purpose given to them by the Lord.

And even though they never did see him again, it was after this conversation that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians... from prison, as the Holy Spirit had truthfully testified to him.

A worthy witness speaks the WHOLE truth of God's word, even the parts that are hard to hear. A worthy witness understands that even the hard parts are life giving parts. Even the hard truths are truths that set us free.

So... a worthy witness serves the LORD (not self)

- *Humbly*
- *Sometimes with tears*
- *Always preparing for whatever struggle may come*
- *Without apology*
- *With courage*
- *Willing to boldly speak repentance and faith in Christ even if it means opposition and oppression and affliction and judgment*
- *With one God focused agenda and no regard for SELF*
- *Not holding back from speaking the WHOLE counsel of God's word, even the parts that are hard to hear*

O Lord, please make me a worthy witness for You. Please remind me of why I do it... because of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus... and because Jesus has made me His own" (Philippians 3:8, 12). And I was "dead in the trespasses and sins in which I once walked... but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved me, made me alive together with Christ" Ephesians 2:1, 4-5). I wouldn't even have this purpose if Jesus hadn't made my salvation His purpose. O Lord, please make me Your worthy witness.