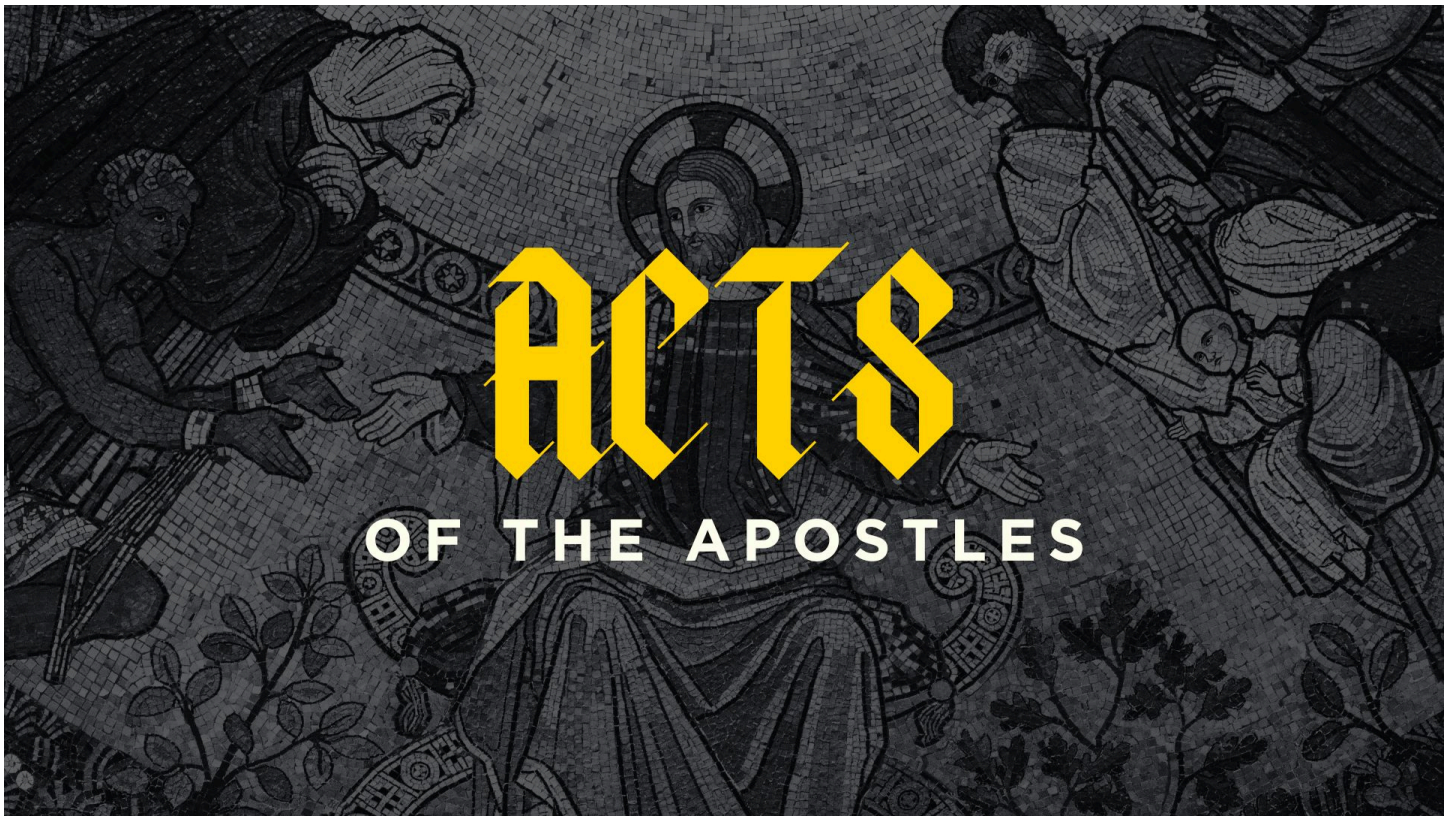




August 17, Acts Series

Take Courage

Acts 23:11 (ESV) 11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

There is courage to take in a God who controls the coincidences.

- Social pressure is a powerful force, and it takes either a special kind of person or a special kind of power to stand up to it. Where is your courage going to come from?

Last week we jumped back into the book of Acts, and we have just a few chapters left. And we were in Chapter 22. Luke writes that the angry mob had been listening to Paul right up to that word: Gentiles. And then they lost their minds.

- The Roman chief commander grabbed Paul and took him away and ordered Paul to be flogged. The flogging was a fact finding mission. Claudius hadn't gotten any coherent answers from the mob, so he thought he'd beat it out of Paul.
- As they had Paul stretched out to begin to receive blows, Paul speaks to the centurion closest to him and says, *“Is this lawful, what you're doing, flogging a Roman citizen?”*
- It was in fact illegal to flog a Roman citizen, so his chains were taken off. He spent the night in the barracks under protective custody.

Claudius has a problem. He needs to keep hold of Paul, or there's going to be a riot. On the

other hand, he still has no formal charges against Paul that he can use to hold him. He's stuck.

- So he decides to convene the Sanhedrin and bring Paul in front of them.
- Paul knows he has yet another chance to tell his Jewish brothers about Jesus.
- He addresses them informally. He calls them "My brothers." He says, "I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."
- It wasn't a disrespectful beginning, but there was great offense taken in the room. Ananias the High Priest orders Paul to be smacked on the mouth.
- Paul lashes back. "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there judging me by the law, but you ignore that same law by having me struck?"
- And his bitter words brought an immediate response. The ones standing around Paul say, "*Would you revile God's high priest?*" Paul recants and says, "*Oh sorry...I didn't know it was the high priest!*"
- It was at this point that Paul knew he'd never get a fair hearing. So he pulls the pin on a political grenade and lobs it into the room. He says, "I'm a Pharisee...and the whole reason I'm on trial today is because I believe in resurrection!" That was a divisive statement.
- Instantly there's chaos in the place as members of the Sanhedrin rush to their tried and true arguments for or against resurrection. They turn their anger toward each other, and away from Paul. So the grenade worked.
- Men get so infuriated in the room that the Claudius steps in and ends the meeting he called, and takes Paul out of danger and back to the barracks.
- Think about Paul's last two days: He has been misunderstood, falsely accused, beaten, arrested, chained, misidentified, shouted down, threatened with flogging, dragged into court, punched in the mouth, in the center of such a clamor that the Roman soldiers have to take him from the Sanhedrin by force, and then he's taken back into custody and held.
- A day like that? How do you go on another one? What fresh horrors might tomorrow hold?
- It's not difficult to imagine that Paul felt dejected and discouraged. Paul is as alone as he could be.
- And Jesus knows.

Acts 23:11 (ESV) 11 *The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."*

Jesus knew where Paul was. And he came, and stood by Paul. This was the very presence of Jesus standing by Paul in the time he needed courage the most.

Jesus says to Paul, "Take courage."

- **Tharseo.** The only person to ever speak this word in the New Testament, is Jesus. He speaks *tharseo* 5 times.
- Some people bring their bedridden, paralyzed friend to Jesus in Matthew 9, and Jesus says to him, "Take courage son, your sins are forgiven."

- A woman has bled for 12 years (Matthew 9:22), and in a packed crowd of people she gets close enough to Jesus to touch him. And Jesus says to her, “Take courage daughter, your faith has healed you.”
- His disciples are in a boat in the middle of the night, and Jesus comes walking across the water to them. They’re scared out of their minds and think he’s a ghost. And Jesus says, “Take courage! It is I. (I AM is what he really says.) Don’t be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27)
- In the upper room, at the last supper they will ever have together and on the night they will all betray him, he says, “Take courage, for I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)
- And the fifth and last time he says this word is right here, in Paul’s cell, to Paul as he stands by him.
- With Jesus standing with me...nothing this world throws at me can ever really harm me.

Jesus says to Paul: “You have a purpose.”

- Paul’s ministry is not over. God is working out his promises. Not in the way Paul probably thought or wanted, but in such a way that nothing could derail them.
- God’s servants are immortal until their work is done. No servant of God dies a premature death.
- Just like Paul, you have a job to do for God, you have a purpose, and nothing will stand in the way of it.

Jesus says to Paul: “I have a plan.”

- Jesus says, Paul, you will get to Rome and share my story there. I will guide the course of events to come so that in the end, you’re standing before people in Rome and sharing the gospel with them.
- You can see the plan already taking shape.
- 23:12-15 tell about 40 radical zealots that vow not to eat or drink a thing until they have killed Paul.
- They try to set up another meeting of the Sanhedrin so that Paul will have to show up. They think they can kill him as he’s out in the open on his way.
- But here’s the coincidence: the son of Paul’s sister hears of their plan. (16-17)
- God takes an unidentified nephew of Paul, and puts him in just the right place where he can hear just the right words, and it saves Paul’s life.
- Paul leaves Jerusalem on horseback, surrounded by 470 Romans soldiers. He left more like a king than a criminal.
- Meanwhile, his vowed enemies are left behind, apparently starving to death.

We have courage, because Christ stands over us, and plays the real melody around us. And the music is more beautiful than we can imagine.

God, there are challenges in this life that threaten to turn us back. Dangers in the world. Our own desires and choices. The negative voices of others. May we find our courage in you today, Lord. Remind us of your presence with us. I am with you always, even to the end of the

age. May it give us power to live your plans. In the name of the God who orchestrates even nephews for our good...in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.