

Place: Lurgan Baptist 14:2:2012

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

Reading: Acts 22:1-29

33. IN DEFENCE OF THE FAITH

In 1555 Queen Mary came to the throne of England. Over three hundred Christians were executed under the orders of “*Bloody Mary*.” Among them were High Latimer and Nicolas Ridley. The two preachers were bound to a post and wood was piled around them and then set on fire. Latimer looked at Ridley and said, “*Be of good comfort, Master Ridley and play the man. We shall this day by God’s grace light such a candle in England, as I trust shall never be put out.*” Here were men who stood up and paid the ultimate price. But what about us? What have we suffered for Christ? We would have to confess very little. My has society become more tolerant? Or has the church become indifferent? Is it not that present day Christianity is “*pussy footed*,” it is so inoffensive that the world finds it soothing. Inaugurate an aggressive programme for the gospel, get out and out for the Lord and see what happens. The world will *either “drop us cold,” or “knock us out.*” Now we have entitled our study this evening “**In Defence of the Faith.**” I mean is this not what Paul was about?

Do you recall that when Paul got to Rome he wrote four prison epistles one of which was the Book of Philippians.

In that book he says this, “*knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.*” (Phil 1:17) Indeed the opening chapter of that prison epistle is all about the gospel.

In (1:3-11) Paul talks about the *Fellowship of the Gospel* and this relates to God’s people.

In (1:12-26) Paul talks about the *Furtherance of the Gospel* and this relates to the lost.

In (1:27-30) Paul talks about the *Faith of the Gospel* and this relates to our adversaries.

My we are Sons in the Family enjoying the Fellowship of the Gospel, we are Servants in the Vineyard sharing the Furtherance of the Gospel, but we are Soldiers on the Battlefield defending the Faith of the Gospel. Now the “*faith of the gospel*,” is the Christian faith as revealed by God and recorded in the Scripture. Jude calls it “*the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*” (Jude 3) Paul warns in (1 Tim 4:1) that “*in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.*” Now we are moving into that section of the Book of Acts in which we see Paul “*In Defence of the Faith.*” Now this passage marks a major transition in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. Since his conversion he had ministered freely. But from this point on in Acts Paul will be a prisoner. This turn of events did not end the apostle’s ministry however. (28:30-31 Phil 1:12-13) No longer free to travel he became an “*ambassador in bonds*,” (Eph 6:20)

As a free man he preached the gospel throughout the Roman world as a prisoner he preached the gospel to the Roman world possibly including the emperor himself.

Like John Bunyan who wrote Pilgrim's Progress while in Bedford jail, Paul wrote four New Testament books, (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) during his imprisonment at Rome. Indeed these closing chapters in the book of Acts are all about Paul's four year journey into the heart of the Roman empire. *You see, from Jerusalem he was taken to Caesarea, the seat of the Judean Roman government.* There Paul languished in detention for two years. Eventually he appealed his case to Caesar. A journey by ship that would normally take a couple of weeks lasted four months due to a storm, shipwreck and being stuck on an island in the Mediterranean. After making it to Rome Paul lived under house arrest for two more years where he held forth on a daily basis about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. My Paul's epic journey from Jerusalem to Rome is a living example of being ready "*in season and out of season,*" to preach the Word. Now do you recall where we left Paul last week ? Submitting to the Jerusalem elders and going to the temple to demonstrate publicly his reverence for the Jewish law. My it was all going so well but it did not work. Instead of bringing peace it caused uproar and Paul ended up a prisoner. Thus we notice,

(1) THE ATTACK ON THE APOSTLE PAUL

Edward Everett, an outstanding orator and statesman of the 19th century was approached by a man who complained that he had been libeled in a newspaper. He asked the great American for advice. Everett replied, "*Do nothing.*" Then he explained "*Half the people who*

bought the paper never saw the article. Half of those who saw it did not read it,. Half of those who read it did not understand it. Half of those understood it did not believe it. Half of those who believed it are of no account anyway." That's good advice most of the time. However, on some occasion criticism cannot be ignored. It has to be faced. This was true for the apostle Paul. He had committed himself to the spread of the gospel, trying to ignore the critics. But the critics could not be silenced. They hounded him from one place to another. Finally, with his back to the wall, Paul stood his ground in defence of the faith. Instead of commending Paul for following the Jewish custom, his enemies found a supposed reason to condemn him. For example notice here,

(a) There was INSTIGATION:

I mean everywhere Paul went there was either a riot or a revival. Here a riot was instigated. For notice,

1. What they Saw:

Look at (22:27) You see, since Paul had recently returned from Gentile lands he needed to undergo ritual purification. Only then would he be ceremonially clean to participate with the four in the ceremony marking the end of their Nazirite vows. Those who saw Paul were most likely from Ephesus since they recognized Trophimus who was a resident of that city. (21:29) Since Paul had served the Lord in Ephesus for three years (20:31) they had no trouble recognizing him. 1.

2. What they Supposed:

Look at (21:29) With their emotions running at full speed and their brains in neutral, these Jews argued. Whatever Paul went his Gentile friends went. And as Paul was sent in the temple, therefore his Gentile friends must have been in the temple too. Such is the logic of prejudice. Now do you remember that the temple was divided into different courts ? Gentiles were allowed to enter the Court of the Gentiles but they must go no further upon pain of death. At the steps leading from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women were the Nazarite ceremonies were performed was a barrier and a warning. On the wall was this solemn inscription. “ *No foreigner may enter the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.* ” Now the Romans granted the Jewish leaders the authority to deal with anyone who broke this law and this included the right of execution. Now can you believe for one moment that Paul would have endangered his friend’s life ? And if the Asian Jews had really seen Trophimus, there, why did they not seize him then and kill him ? The charge was absurd. 1, 2,

3. What they Said:

Look if you will at (21:28) Do you see the first charge ?

Paul was DENOUNCING THE JEWISH PEOPLE:
Did you notice the repetition of the words “ *the people,* ” ? Look at (21:27, 28, 30)

Do you see the second charge ?

Paul was DISCREDITING THE JEWISH LAW:
“ *And the law,* ” (21:28) But Paul was not against the law. He taught that one could not be saved by keeping the law but that the law itself was “ *holy and just.* ” (Rom 7:12)
Do you see the third charge ?

Paul was DEFILING THE JEWISH TEMPLE:
“ *And this place,* ” (21:28) The Lord Jesus (Mk: 14:57-58) and Stephen (6:13) were also falsely accused of speaking against the temple accusations that helped lead to their deaths. Paul’s accusers no doubt hoped for a similar outcome. Instigation. They stirred up the people and started beating Paul. My I am not talking about Common Suffering I am speaking about Christian Suffering. There are some people who they think if they have a headache they are suffering for Christ. Have you ever taken a “ *beating,* ” because you were a believer ? Is persecution foreign to our way of thinking ? Are you under pressure because you are a believer ? Is there pressure at home, pressure with your spouse, pressure at work, at university when you mention the name of Christ ?

(b) There was INTERVENTION:

I mean had it not been for the intervention of Roman soldiers these Jews would have killed Paul on the spot. You see, the headquarters of the Roman occupation forces was the Fort of Antonia, which was located on a precipice overlooking the temple grounds. From the towers there

sentries had a clear view of the temple area, where civil unrest in Jerusalem was most likely to break out. At least one thousand soldiers were stationed in the Antonia Fortress at the north west corner of the temple area. And it required the chief captain Claudius Lysias (23:26) two centurions and perhaps two hundred soldiers to get the mob under control and rescue Paul. *I wonder what did James and the others think of themselves now ?* No doubt they heard the uproar, they suspected and learned that Paul was being mobbed thanks to their advice but where were they ? I mean they did nothing to secure Paul's release, nothing to speak on his behalf, nothing to appeal to the Jews in Jerusalem to give Paul fair play. But God providentially intervened to protect His servant. (a) (b)

(c) *There was INTERROGATION:*

Look if you will at (21:33) They could not explain to Claudius Lysias what caused the riot for they did not know so he decided to interrogate Paul in the safety of the fort. Can you picture the scene ? Can you hear the shouts ? *“ Away with him, away with him, away with him.”* Twenty seven years previous another frenzied mob had howled the same thing in the ears of Pilate. (Lk 23:18) I wonder what James and the elders felt now as they heard crowd screaming for Paul's blood ? Now look at Paul now. (21:33) He's bound in fulfillment of Agabus's prophecy. My his ministry as a prisoner had begun. Little did Paul know that it would last for years and fulfill his fondest dream to see Rome. (19:21) Little did he know that it would enable to confront Nero with the gospel, that it would produce some of the most

impressive letters ever to come from his pen. Little did he know that as a result of his testimony in Rome many would be saved including *“ they that are of Caesar's household,”* (Phil 4:22) I mean isn't the providence of God amazing ? That God can take *“ bonds,”* and turn them into *“ blessings,”* that God can take *“ trials,”* and turn them into *“ letters,”* that God can take *“ difficulties,”* and turn them into *“ deliverances.”* (1) Someone has said *“ the problem with Christians these days is no-one wants to kill them anymore.”* I mean what do you think would happen if the church raised its standards and rebuked sin ? We would suffer. There would be an outcry. I am not saying that we should court opposition. I am saying if we compromised less we would suffer more. (1)

(2) THE APOLOGY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

You see, at this Paul decided that it was time to speak up. Here he is in a very difficult situation, in a tight spot and he uses his adverse circumstances as an opportunity to witness. I heard about a lieutenant in an army who gathered his soldiers together and he said, *“ Men, I want you to know that we are in a tight spot. In fact, it looks to me as if we are totally surrounded by the enemy. Men we are surrounded by the enemy, don't let one of them escape.”* Do you see what Paul does when is in a tight spot ? He goes on the offensive. Peter instructed believers in general to *“ be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”* (1 Pet 3:15) Sadly, many Christians are unable to do that, having little or no understanding of why they believe. Lacking a solid

foundation for their faith, they are easily, “ *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*”

(Eph 4:14) Now apologetics is the study of the defence of the faith. The English word derives from the Greek word *apologia* which means “ *a speech of defence of something.*” Look at (22:1) The English translation of the Greek *apologia* “ *defence or vindication.*” Do you recall that to the Philippian believers Paul wrote, about “ *the defence and confirmation of the gospel.*”

(Phil 1:7) And that statement underscores the two sides of apologetics, defending the faith against attack, and presenting the true claims of Christianity to unbelievers. My is that not exactly what Paul does here ? He gives them his testimony. Now Paul’s testimony appears three times in the book of Acts. (Ch 9, 22, 26) Notice,

(a) There was IDENTIFICATION with them:

Paul realised that in order to communicate a truth to the crowd, he would have to have their attention. So he began to build some bridges over which his message could be communicated. Do you recall when he spoke to the Athenians he began by identifying with their belief in God ? He said, “ *For as I passed by and beheld your devotions I found an altar with this inscription to the unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare, I unto you.*” (17:23) Do you see what Paul was doing ? Building bridges. Watch how he does it here. Notice that he identifies with the people,

1. Linguistically:

Look at (22:2) This was probably the Aramaic spoken by the common people of the day. It was a kindred language of Hebrew.

2. Personally:

For he called them “ *brethren,*” He did not harangue. He was not an enemy opposed to them but a brother related to them,

3. Nationally:

For he revealed that he too was “ *a Jew born in Tarsus,*” (22:3) Paul was not an outside he was one of them.

4. Educationally:

For he was taught by one of their most respected teachers, Gamaliel. Now do you what Paul was doing ? He was identifying himself with the people thus gaining their attention. Is that what you do ? In our witness, and in our testimony do we see to build bridges with people ? (a)

(b) There was COMMUNICATION to them:

Let me ask you, do you ever feel intimidated by the testimony of others ? I think sometimes that we who were reared in Christian homes and in church environments and don’t have such dramatic stories to tell as others think that our testimonies are less important. My nothing could be further from the truth. Every lost sheep that is found by the good shepherd is a story that results in praise to His

grace. My are you allowing the enemy to persuade that your story is unimportant ? Is Satan whispering in your ear, “ *You’re not a famous person, you weren’t a bad person before meeting Christ, you’re a terrible public speaker,*” and on and on and on. Is this why you have not given your testimony ? Well, here’s something to remember. Satan is not trying to prevent people from hearing you, he’s trying to keep people from hearing about the Lord. And if you are the channel for the message of God’s grace and pardon, then Satan wants to shut that channel down by trying to convince you to remain silent. Listen, if you yield to the pressure not to speak about God’s saving grace in your life there are some people who may never hear. My don’t let the enemy persuade you that your story is unimportant. Now do you know how to give a testimony ? Well, any testimony consists of three parts.

1. What life was like before I became a Christian:

2. How I became a Christian:

3. What has happened to me since I became a Christian:

Now look at Paul, while he was not able to finish his testimony, he did get to explain three important aspects of his life and ministry. Now Paul could have talked about the Christ of many things. He could have talked for instance about the *Christ of doctrine*. He could have talked about the doctrine of Christ and the fact that Christ died on the cross for our sins. He could have talked about the *Christ of Scripture*; Oh, how Paul could reach into the Old Testament Scriptures and exalt the Lord Jesus and show us Jesus Christ in all of the types and the promises

and the shadows of the Old Testament. He could have talked about the *Christ, of someone else’s experience*. He could have stood there that day and said, “ *Let me tell you what the Lord Jesus Christ did for the jailer over in the city of Philippi,*” or he could have said, “ *Let me tell you what Jesus Christ did for Lydia the career woman.*” He could have told the experience of what Jesus Christ had done in the lives of other people. But instead, what Paul does on this occasion is just share from a personal viewpoint what Jesus Christ had done in his own life. Do you have a personal testimony tonight ? I mean do you have something that’s personal to you that you can tell folk about ? Look at what Paul does here. He touches on

1. HIS PAST CONDUCT:

Paul’s background before meeting Christ was “ *normal.*” for his day. He was a dedicated Jew, a Pharisee, who was wholly committed to the faith of his fathers. I mean do you see how Paul piles up his Jewish credentials ? He was a Jew, a native of Tarsus, brought to Jerusalem, trained by Gamaliel, a follower of the law, a zealous persecutor of the church, and a representative of the Sanhedrin. I mean how could his countrymen not listen to a man with this kind of record ? Paul had background, education, culture, religion. If you had said to Paul, “ *Paul are you going to heaven when you die ?*” He would have said, “ *Why of course I am going to heaven when I die.*” “ *Well, why Paul why do you think you are going to heaven ?*” “ *Well I was circumcised the eight day, I am from the tribe of Benjamin, I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews, I keep the law.*” And he would have rattled on. Do you see what he

was relying on to get him to heaven ? Works. My what are you relying on to get to heaven ? If it's anything but Christ you're damned. (a) Then there was,

(b) HIS POWERFUL CONVERSION:

Three times it's recorded in the book of Acts, then a more doctrinal version in (Phil Ch 3) and finally in (1 Tim Ch 1) My the Lord took the most unlikely men ever to become a Christian and made him the most important person in the history of the church outside of the Lord Jesus Himself. You see, if you had talked to Paul before he began that journey to Damascus and had asked him about the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul would probably have told you that Jesus Christ was an impostor. Paul knew what the Scriptures said, he knew exactly what the Messiah was supposed to know, how He was supposed to conduct Himself.

He was convinced that Jesus Christ was a deceiver, an impostor, and a fraud that the Lord Jesus was none of the things that He claimed to be and he was absolutely convinced that when they put Christ on the cross that is exactly where He belonged and he never would have believed that He'd been raised again from the dead. He thought probably the disciples had spirited the body of Jesus away. That's what they told everybody to say. But on that Damascus road Paul became convinced of two things. He was convinced of

1. The REALITY of the Lord Jesus:

Do you see what he says ? (22:7-8) I mean Paul saw His glory and heard His voice. He thought Jesus Christ was dead, he discovers that He is alive. He thought Jesus Christ was nothing of what He claimed to be, he finds out that Jesus Christ is everything He claimed to be. His attitude toward Jesus Christ was totally transformed; he became convinced of the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. “ *Who art thou, Lord ? I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutes.*” I wonder am I speaking to someone this and you're saying, “ I'm not sure about this salvation. I'm not sure about this Lord Jesus tonight.” My if you will admit that you're a sinner and by faith receive this Lord Jesus into your life you can walk out of this building tonight saying, “ *I know, I know, I know, I know that Jesus Christ is real.*” 1.

2. The AUTHORITY of the Lord Jesus:

Paul asked two questions. Question number one, “ *Who art thou, Lord ?*” Question number two, “ *What shall I do, Lord ?*” In other words, what is your will for my life ? You solve the first question, which Jesus Christ is, then you can give the rest of your life to deciding and finding out what the Lord Jesus wants you to do. Paul's first question had the word “ *Lord,*” at the end, this is what Christ had been to him previously. His second question put “ *Lord,*” first and this is where Paul kept him from this time onward. My are you living under His Lordship ? Oh, you didn't know He is the Lord. Most of us have been brought up with the idea that you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour and then somewhere along the line if you wanted to you could make Jesus Christ

Lord. Does that not sum it up ? Let me give you a verse that will blow out that out of the water. “ *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.* ” (2:36) Do you see what it says ? I don’t make Jesus Christ Lord, you don’t make Jesus Christ Lord, God has already made Jesus Christ Lord. The question is, have you yielded to His Lordship ? Are you living day by day under the authority of Jesus Christ ? Now do you see what Paul is doing in his testimony ? He touches on 1, 2,

3. HIS PURPOSEFUL CALLING:

For look at (22:21) After his conversion and a brief period of ministry in Damascus (9:20-25) Paul spent three years in the Arabian desert (Gal 1:17-18) Then he returned to Jerusalem (9:26-29) where he wanted to say but God’s command was “ *Depart,* ” (22:21) Jerusalem was no mission field for him. God had told him so. His field was the world the far flung Gentile world. That’s was Paul’s calling. To be, an apostle to the Gentiles. (Rom 11:13) My is this not our calling ? To reach the far flung world for Jesus Christ. Do we realise that God has saved us for a purpose ? That we might be the instruments in His hand to bring the lost to His feet ? Sure, (a) (b) but as soon they heard the word “ *Gentile,* ”

(c) *There was OPPOSITION from them:*

For (21:22) says., “ *And they gave him audience unto this word ...* ” Why did they react in such a violent way ?

The key was Paul’s decision to offer to the Gentiles what they though was the exclusive right of the Jews, access to God. Do you know something ? This bias is not extinct. It shows up in other forms today. It shows up in the local church when old timers begrudge new people in the church holding office. It shows up in disinterest in missions, when people are parochial in their outlook. It shows up in denominational jealousy, when Christians think “ *they are the people.* ” Now do you see what happened here ? When Claudius Lyses saw the riot was starting again he took Paul into the barracks for “ *examination by torture,* ” and here we see,

(3) THE ATTITUDE FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL

(a) *Look at his Composure:*

As Paul accepts the situation as God ordains it. He had know for some time that he faced arrest when he arrived at Jerusalem (20:22-23 21:4, 10-13) But he calmly accepts this as God’s will not “ *losing his head,* ” because his heart was fixed on God. (Ps 112:7) My how do you react when you are in a tight spot ? When you are up against it ? When your back is against the wall ? Are you calm, composed, and collected, knowing that God is still in control ?

(b) *Look at His Claim:*

Do you see what Paul says in (22:25) ? Paul played his trump card. He produced his Roman citizenship. Now strictly speaking it was possible to have Roman

citizenship in only three ways.

1. By birth, from citizen parents:

2. By reward for services:

3. By freedom after slavery.

But during the reign of Emperor Claudius, citizenship was sold and maybe it was this that accounted for the captain's name of "*Claudius Lysias*." How Paul's father obtained his freedom we do not know, but Paul knew how to make use of his Roman citizenship for the cause of Christ. My Do you see the hand of God behind all of this ? You see, the Lord was using the great power of the Roman Empire to protect his servant and eventually get him to Rome. And what was Paul's desire through all of this ?

(c) Look at His Concern:

His concern was that the Lord would be exalted. Is this not implied in Paul's testimony ? Is this not expressed in Paul's letters ? "*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*" (1 Cor 10:31) My is this not the point of a public testimony ? To exalt the Lord, to glorify and magnify Him. Wang Ming Dao was a Chinese pastor who had been led to Christ by another Chinese. At the time of the Communist takeover, he was pastoring the largest church in what was then Peking. He was tolerated for a couple of years then thrown into prison by the communists because of his testimony and ministry. While, in prison, under torture, afraid of ever more suffering he recanted his faith and was therefore released by the authorities. In the day

and weeks that followed, Wang Ming Dao was seen wandering through the streets of the city weeping and mumbling, "*I am Judas, I have betrayed my Lord.*" Unable to bear his shame, he went to the authorities confessed his faith in Christ and asked to be placed in prison. The authorities complied with his request and he was imprisoned for another twenty-seven years. When released once again, at the end of his life Wang Ming Dao was considered by the Chinese church as a hero of the faith he had once recanted. My there is a Wang Ming Dao in each of us. Fear of the world has ensnared us. Our tendency is to dilute the gospel and to lower our standards in order not to give offence. We love the praise of our fellow human beings more than the praise of God.

My are you afraid ? Are you fearful of further criticism ? Of permanent rejection, of increased persecution and because of that, you are backing down, you're compromising, you are silencing your testimony ? Do you need to stand up and be counted ? Do you recall what it was said of the early disciples ? "*they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*" (5:41)

