

## Text: Acts 26.30-32

Today we are in a text that offers little internal substance for us. Consequently, we need to think carefully about what is said in it and its place in the book of Acts. Why did Luke include it? (We will ask that question for the next couple of chapters as well.) — A better way to ask that question is, “Why did the Holy Spirit include it?”

Our working thesis of the Bible is 2 Tim 3.16-17:

2 Tim 3.16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate [complete], equipped for every good work.

Let’s read our text today. Perhaps you will see what I mean:

Read Ac 26.30-32

All Scripture is profitable...

All right, then, we need to think about our text and see how we can profit by it, though at first glance, it might be a text we could simply pass over and move on to the next one.

Before we get to a proposition, then, we need to take what we have apart, and perhaps fill in some background information.

### I. Understanding our passage

A. First, Herod brings the hearing to a close: he stands up (30)

1. The king stood
2. The governor (Festus) and Bernice followed
3. The other officials also rose

We can picture this motion in our mind. Last week we pointed out how Agrippa avoided answering Paul directly as Paul pressed him with gospel questions. The stand is part of that avoidance.

## B. The rest of the chapter occurs “when they had gone aside” (31-32)

1. There is some question as to how Luke knows about this
  - a. Luke might have been at the hearing
  - b. The men aren’t unfriendly with Paul
  - c. Perhaps they later talked it over with Paul or Luke and confided some of this to them:

“You know, everybody was saying ...” and “You know, even Agrippa said...”

### 2. Declaration of innocence (31)

- a. All of them (“they”) made comments about this

This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment

- b. They were not followers of Paul, they weren’t convinced by Paul, but they thought he was doing nothing wrong
- c. This is the fifth time Paul’s innocence is declared in Acts

#### 1) The Pharisees (Ac 23.9)

Ac 23.9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”

#### 2) Lysias, the arresting tribune in Jerusalem in his letter to Felix (Ac 23.29)

Ac 23.29 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

## 3) Twice by Porcius Festus himself (Ac 25.18, 25)

Ac 25.18 “When the accusers stood up, they *began* bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,

Ac 25.25 “But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him.

## 4) In our text by all the officials discussing the case (31)

## 3. Agrippa goes further (32)

- a. Not only not guilty
- b. By rights, might have been set free

However, “The reader knows what Agrippa did not know—how Festus had wanted to do the Jews a favor and how Paul had felt forced to appeal to save his life (25:9–11).”<sup>1</sup>

I suppose we are mostly just restating the obvious here, but all this discussion brings me first to my title:

*Navigating the Ministry in a Hostile World*

Now we know for certain that the world is generally hostile to the truth of the gospel. You don’t have to search far to find evidence of that.

- Online, any article about Christianity that allows comments when soon be full of angry retorts about the supposed evils of religion
- The same occurs when prominent Christians operate on Twitter

When you see things like that, it is very tempting to respond, but we should know that is a waste of time — comment boards online *never* (or very rarely) change anyone’s mind.

Ministry to others can really only occur one-on-one in personal conversations.

<sup>1</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 510.

**Consequently:** I recommend that you don't bother. Stay out of the debates. Don't post political stuff on social media. It isn't worth it and it can hurt your testimony.

But again, my title:

### *Navigating the Ministry in a Hostile World*

My comments on social media are "in my notes" — I think we should all be ministry minded all the time. We need to think of others all the time. How are we going to minister to them? How can we communicate the gospel in a hostile world?

That requires something of us, which brings us to my proposition:

**Proposition:** The fact of the hostile world requires Christians to exercise wisdom in the way they conduct Christian ministry.

One more thing before we get to my next point:

I define "Christian ministry" as "serving people by giving the gospel." Sometimes that involves activities that give a platform for the gospel, but gospel ministry is the heart and soul of Christian service. We want people to hear and believe.

In our world, though, we conduct that ministry in a hostile environment, just as the apostle Paul did.

## II. Paul's wisdom in his Roman Empire ministry

### A. Survey of the rights of Roman citizenship

1. ius suffragii: The right to vote in the Roman assemblies.
2. ius honorum: The right to stand for civil or public office.
3. ius commercii: The right to make legal contracts and to hold property as a Roman citizen.
4. ius gentium: The right for a Roman in a dispute with a non-Roman to be governed by Roman law [my paraphrase]
5. ius conubii: The right to have a lawful marriage with a Roman citizen ... and for the children of any such marriage to be counted as Roman citizens.

6. *Ius migrationis*: The right to preserve one's level of citizenship upon relocation to a polis of comparable status.
7. The right of immunity from some taxes and other legal obligations, especially local rules and regulations.
8. The right to sue in the courts and the right to be sued.
9. The right to have a legal trial (to appear before a proper court and to defend oneself).
10. The right to appeal from the decisions of magistrates and to appeal the lower court decisions.
11. A Roman citizen could not be tortured or whipped ...
12. If accused of treason, a Roman citizen had the right to be tried in Rome, and even if sentenced to death, no Roman citizen could be sentenced to die on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

#### B. Review of Paul's use of the rights of citizenship

1. Philippi, after illegal beating (Acts 16.37)

Aim: (speculative) to ensure good treatment for the fledgling church in Philippi

2. Jerusalem, to prevent an illegal beating (Acts 22.25)
3. Before Festus, appeals to Caesar (Acts 25.11)

Aim: to prevent Festus compromising with the Jews to give Paul over to their hostility

4. But consider 2 Cor 11.25

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor 11.25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.

“‘Beaten with rods’ is a specifically Roman punishment meted out in public by a lictor. This punishment would have taken place in the Roman colonies where Paul spent time,

<sup>2</sup> “Roman Citizenship,” in *Wikipedia*, April 20, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roman\\_citizenship&oldid=1083825131](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roman_citizenship&oldid=1083825131).

such as Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Troas, Philippi, and Corinth. As a Roman citizen Paul was technically exempt from such punishment, but citizenship did not accord one an iron clad guarantee against injustice, only the right to certain formal procedures.”<sup>3</sup> — the beating at Philippi might be one of these three occasions

### C. Observations on Paul’s strategies

1. Everything Paul does in the ministry is for the furtherance of the ministry
2. This includes every time Paul appeals to Roman law for the protections it granted him
3. Paul could have insisted on his rights to avoid Festus handing him over to the Jews: but he couldn’t count on Festus’ integrity
4. Paul’s stratagem becomes God’s means of bringing Paul to Rome

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Ac 23.11 ¶ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”

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## III. The facts of modern Christian ministry

### A. Our “Judeo-Christian” legal system largely preserves freedom for the gospel

1. Freedom of speech
2. Freedom of assembly

### B. Our legal heritage is under assault by totalitarian forces

1. I am not advocating that we all must become legal experts in order to further the gospel
2. But we must understand our times
  - a. Recognize the hostility of the world (Jesus predicted it)

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 498.

- b. Be ready to use legal means to preserve ministry opportunity
- c. Most of all: be busy about ministry

### Paul's "last words" to Timothy

<sup>2</sup> Tim 4.1-2 ¶ I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The fact of the hostile world requires Christians to exercise wisdom in the way they conduct Christian ministry.

Let the life and ministry of Paul be your motivation and your guide as you serve the Lord today.