

PAUL'S DEFENSE SPEECHES

Acts 21:40 – 26:32

Key Verse 23:11

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.””

In the previous lesson, we looked at Paul's second and third mission journeys (15:36 - 21:39). Paul committed his entire life to preaching the gospel across Europe and Asia Minor, without compromise and with the spirit of martyrdom even in the face of life-threatening hardships. His life goal was to consider his life worth nothing to him and to complete the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. May God empower us through the Holy Spirit to finish our race of faith with Paul's spirit for the spiritual revival of Europe.

Today we will learn about Paul's five defense speeches: before the people, the Sanhedrin, Governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa. While imprisoned, Paul held firmly to God's promise, which was different from his expectation and prayer to witness Jesus not only in Jerusalem but also in Rome. He wished with all his heart to form the body of Christ Jesus between Jewish and Gentile Christians and to challenge the mission to Rome with their spiritual support. He prepared many things carefully according to the instructions of the apostles in Jerusalem to win the hearts and love of Jewish Christians. But the violent and repeated hardships and persecutions by the Jewish Christians surprised him greatly and made his vision and many things uncertain. In this moment of helplessness, the Lord Himself strengthened his faith: that Paul would fearlessly testify about Jesus even before kings and governors and finish the race of faith for world mission. This promise gave Paul new confidence in victory that God would lead him according to his wonderful counsel even through chains and hardship. May God help each of us to accept His promise and comfort by faith and, like Paul, to be preciousely used as witnesses of Christ for God's work of salvation.

I. Paul before the Jews and the Sanhedrin (21:40 - 23:11)

Through intensive Bible study and discipleship in Ephesus, Paul experienced the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. God's word spread widely throughout Asia Minor, and even those who had practiced sorcery publicly burned their scrolls. Through this mighty work, God planted a greater vision in Paul's heart: world mission, beginning with Rome (19:21). So Paul traveled to Jerusalem, bringing a thanksgiving offering from the Gentile Christians in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints (Romans 15:25-26). His prayer was to encourage Jewish Christians by showing them the powerful work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles and to strengthen spiritual unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul knew suffering awaited him in Jerusalem (20:23). Many even warned him not to go (21:4,11,12). But Paul made a clear decision: he would risk everything to build the body of Christ between Jews and Gentiles. He was confident to overcome all hardships and courageously prepare himself for world mission. His heart burned with the vision of witnessing Jesus in Jerusalem, then in Rome, and even to the ends of the earth. He considered his life worth nothing to him (20:24) and was ready not only to be bound but to die for Jesus (21:13). But he did not know that God's plan was different from his own plan.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem and went to the temple, his presence caused great anger. As they had done with Jesus, the crowd shouted, "Get rid of him!" (21:36; Lk 23:18) The commander of the Roman troops had to keep him under guard. But even in this painful moment, filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul boldly stood before the people as a witness of Jesus. He asked the Roman commander for permission to speak (21:39b). Let's look at 21:40: "After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:..." In his first defense speech, Paul seized the opportunity to testify about Jesus before all. Though he was arrested, he spoke steadfastly as a chosen instrument and shepherd of God's people (9:15).

In 22:3-5, Paul began by testifying who he was without Christ. He was a devout Jew, trained under Gamaliel. In his false zeal, he persecuted the church and imprisoned believers. But then, on the road to Damascus, he heard a voice from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (22:7) In his boundless forgiving love, Jesus met him personally and gave him spiritual insight for his iniquity. With the fearless servanthip of Ananias, Paul received the grace of healing and accepted God's call to be a witness of Jesus to all people (22:14-15). Paul accepted this grace and was baptized. His prayer was that his own people would also experience the same grace and rejoice in the mighty work of God among the Gentiles. But the Jews rejected his testimony, especially his call to the Gentile mission. Again there was a great uproar and the commander had to keep Paul under guard again.

In 22:29,30, Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin. He boldly testified: "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." (23:1) Before meeting Jesus, Paul's conscience was stained by hatred and violence. But Jesus' unconditional and forgiving love turned his life by 180 degrees. He became a new creation. The power of Jesus' blood filled him with deep peace and the vision of God. Since then, despite misunderstandings and persecutions, Paul stood before God in all good conscience and testified to God's work. The Sanhedrin had to praise God for the healing work of one man, Paul. However, instead of repenting, the high priest ordered Paul to be struck. Paul, realizing the Sanhedrin was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees, declared: "I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." (23:6) This caused to a fierce dispute between the two groups. The commander had to break off the interrogation and had Paul led into the barracks.

Let us read 23:11: "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Paul had fought a courageous battle of faith before the Sanhedrin in a hostile environment. But the great uproar of his people and the Jewish Christians, who even wanted to kill him, made him desolate and much uncertain. He was now trapped in a Roman castle. Opposition to God's counsel persisted everywhere. The hardships caused by the persecution were beyond his imagination. The hypocritical religious leaders were apparently determined never to give up acts of persecution against Paul. In this bleak situation, he wondered what God's counsel was. He wondered if he could still reach Rome and be a witness there and to the ends of the earth.

On our campuses today, we also face strong opposition against the work of God through the lies of the ungodly spirit of the time, atheism, materialism, and humanism among the young students through Bible study and discipleship ministry. Many young students are very much influenced by ungodly thoughts. We fall into desolation through the opposition of the spirit of the time and through the forces of unbelief. In the face of this uncertainty, we ask ourselves: "Can and may we really send 100,000 missionaries to all countries of the world by 2041? Can we really build 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams and 120 base camps for world mission?"

But in our darkest und most uncertain moments, we can hear the voice of the Lord who appeared to Paul and be strengthened: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Bonn, so you must also testify in the M-countries, in Istanbul, Cairo, and Riyadh." Let's think about God's encouraging promise in three ways.

First: "Take courage!" This command assures us that the Almighty Lord will surely carry out His plan for our missionary life according to His sovereign will. This promise

dispelled the dark storm clouds of uncertainty that overshadowed Paul's heart. Instead of looking at the ground in depression, we can raise our eyes, look ahead with confidence in victory, and embrace God's counsel, which will surely be fulfilled to the ends of the earth.

Second: "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem [...]" God rejoiced in Paul, who had risked his life, whatever the cost, to bear witness to the gospel in Jerusalem and to build the spiritual bridge between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Third: "...so you must also testify in Rome." The risen Lord reaffirmed His vision of bringing the gospel to Rome through Paul. He encouraged Paul that just as he had been a witness of the gospel in Jerusalem, he must also appear in Rome as a witness of Christ and a defender of the gospel. This divine promise filled Paul again with confidence in victory and gave him new strength and spiritual insight for God's guidance through his captivity in chains. His zeal to proclaim the Gospel in Rome flared up again. The Lord strengthened His servant Paul amidst captivity and the threat of assassination, encouraging him to persevere in his calling in all circumstances and to follow God's guidance, no matter the cost. Through this encouragement from God, Paul was again filled with God's spirit. Encouraged by this promise, he likely sang: "As you labor for the Lord He is with you, Walks by your side day by day; 'Tis His will that you should tell of His mercy, Carry the bright gospel ray. Heralds of light, speed away; Carry the bright gospel ray, Dark the night of sin, Let the sunlight in, Heralds of light, speed away."

Daniel found himself in such a bleak and uncertain situation due to the hardship of the Babylonian captivity. But he heard God's encouragement: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3) Then Daniel was filled with new confidence and God's vision. By faith, he embraced God's counsel for the spiritual restoration of his people. Thus, with an exceptional spirit, he faithfully held the lamp of prayer for his people. He lived to the end as a wise Bible teacher and leader for His people, encouraging them to overcome their hopeless situation and hold fast to God's hope and spiritual identity.

In the midst of trial, a servant of God found heavenly comfort in His words from Mark 11:22: "Have faith in God" and Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." The risen Lord encouraged him to follow God's sovereign counsel for world mission, even if it was different from his expectations and prayers: "Take courage! As you have testified about me to the students in Bonn, Germany and Europe, so you must also testify in Istanbul, Cairo and Riyadh, and beyond in the online world and to the ends of the earth!" The Lord comforted him with His promise to be a witness of Jesus Christ for young people and the next generation through daily common

life, and to mobilize them as messengers, Bible teachers, and co-workers for the global Christian mission.

After completing my master's degree in business administration, I had many options before me, such as starting a professional career. However, God spoke to me through Matthew 6:33 and Deuteronomy 6:5, encouraging me to make a life decision, to seek His kingdom first and to follow His guidance with all my heart, soul, and strength. God blessed me abundantly. He raised me as a shepherd for the next generation and allowed me to witness the powerful work of the Holy Spirit through the GLEF as a leader. Amidst this mighty work of God, Satan became envious. A woman tempted me to follow her and turn away from God's grace and mission field. In that bleak situation, I chose to hold firmly to the grace God had given me. God then led my life in a direction different from my expectations and prayers. I was left alone in a desolate situation, often struggling with the uncertain future. But in this moment, the Lord Jesus encouraged me: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Bonn, so you must also testify in Germany, in Europe and to the ends of the earth!" Jesus, who endured immense pain and disgrace on His way to the cross and was obedient even to death, gave me renewed strength and vision. Not only did He empower me to overcome every trial, but He also helped me continue faithfully in my calling as a worker of the Word under all circumstances and to be used as a fisher of men (2 Timothy 2:15).

In the midst of trials within his family and temptations from the godless spirit of the times at his school, God comforted a 16-year-old young man with these words: "Take courage! As you have testified about me to your friends at CoJoBo, so you must also testify at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in Bonn, in Germany, in Europe, and in Brazil!" Through Romans 6:11, he began a new life in Christ Jesus by co-working wholeheartedly in the online mission with next-generation co-workers and in campus mission with his father. God's counsel is often different from our own plans, expectations, or prayers. Yet He leads us according to His sovereign will and certainly fulfills His promises in our lives.

In this hour, we can hear Jesus' promise, even when God's counsel is different from our own plans or expectations: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in the University of Bonn, so you must also testify in Europe, in the M-countries, and to the ends of the earth." Encouraged and filled with the vision of world mission and the confidence of victory, let us proclaim the gospel on campus and form 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams. In this way, God will fulfill His counsel that through us He will not only bring about spiritual revival in this generation, but also send 100,000 missionaries to the ends of the earth.

II. Paul before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa (23:12 - 26:32)

In 23:12-35, more than forty Jews conspired to kill Paul, but God protected him through the help of his nephew and the Roman commander. With the assistance of 470 Roman soldiers, Paul was brought safely to Caesarea by night via Antipatris, where he was placed under the protection of Governor Felix. God used this deadly plot not to harm Paul, but to advance His purpose, leading Paul further on his way to Rome. In the midst of tribulation, God remained faithful to His sovereign counsel, sending Paul as a prisoner in chains to be a witness of Jesus in Rome. Thanks be to the Lord, who always guides us through His promise.

Now in Caesarea, Paul was kept under guard in Herod's palace. Governor Felix summoned him for interrogation. The Jewish accusers, with the help of the Roman lawyer Tertullus, brought serious charges against Paul: that he was a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and that he had even desecrated the temple. Despite these vicious accusations, Paul did not allow himself to be intimidated. Out of absolute trust in God's guidance and counsel, he fought the good spiritual fight for the mission to Rome. He refuted the charges and boldly gave a clear testimony about Jesus to those present. Let's read 24:14: "However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,..." By referring to the Way, "which they call a sect", Paul pointed to the path of true salvation that Jesus had opened, the only way to the Father (John 14:6). In his defense before Felix, Paul invited everyone listening to follow him on the way of Jesus, to recognize the mighty work of God among Gentile Christians, and to serve God's will for world mission.

Felix prolonged the trial without making a clear decision, and Paul was forced to remain in captivity in Caesarea for two years, despite being innocent. Two years of unjust imprisonment is by no means a short time. Yet Paul did not see this period as a standstill, but as a valuable time of preparation for his mission to Rome. Even in prison, he continued to work as a diligent Bible teacher and prepare for God's counsel. Paul patiently served Governor Felix through Bible study and preached the gospel. He spoke to Felix about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, with long-suffering love, hoping Felix would gain insight into God's work. Although Felix ultimately rejected the word of God and hoped for a bribe, Paul stood firm in faith. He accepted his imprisonment with gratitude, viewing it as a time of preparation. He used every opportunity to serve him with the word of God and to testify to God's grace and the hope of resurrection for the salvation of the bearers of hope.

Let's look at 25:1-9. After two years, Felix was replaced by a new governor, Festus. Once again, a Jewish delegation brought many serious accusations against Paul.

When a person is held in custody for two years without guilt, he would become ill with self-righteousness and unjust treatment and goes mad. But Paul was not afraid of the political system or of the injustice of people. He steadfastly held on to God's promise and guidance that God would lead him to Rome as a witness of Jesus and fulfill His purpose through him. Paul understood that his defense before Festus was a decisive opportunity to take the next step toward fulfilling God's promise for the mission to Rome. Let us read verses 10 and 11: "Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" By declaring, "I appeal to Caesar!" Paul actively chose to follow God's promise and guidance. It was his resolute decision of faith for the counsel of God in the midst of unjust, two-year-long imprisonment. Without this appeal to Caesar, Paul could have been set free (26:32). But he consciously chose not freedom, but faithfulness to God's counsel: "...so you must also testify in Rome." (23:11) Outwardly, Paul was a prisoner in chains. But inwardly, his heart burned with the great vision of God to bring the gospel to Rome. With this decision of life, Paul set a milestone for world mission through the Rome Mission. He was truly an overcomer and conqueror. (Rev 21:7)

Consider 25:13-27. A few days later, King Agrippa and his sister Berenice arrived in Caesarea. Festus explained his dilemma to them: he had to send a prisoner to Rome without any clear charges. Agrippa wanted to hear Paul in person. Paul saw this as another opportunity to testify about Jesus. In 26:9-18, Paul once again spoke of his conversion through his encounter with the risen Lord, testifying that God had called him to be a witness to the Gentiles. Let us read verse 22: "But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen." Despite fierce opposition from the short-sighted Jews, who wanted to kill him out of anger, Paul was not intimidated. He boldly testified to God's heavenly calling and faithful guidance, and he proclaimed the gospel of Christ at every opportunity, even in captivity.

Let's read verse 29 together: "Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." With these words, Paul planted his prayer in the hearts of Agrippa and all those present, that they too might come to know the love of God, accept His gracious counsel for the Gentiles, and serve as co-workers for world mission. Paul's testimony about Jesus reached not only ordinary people, but also kings and rulers. Even in chains, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, he boldly testified to the saving grace of Jesus before the noblest men. At the end of this hearing, everyone present recognized that Paul was innocent. They would have released him if he had not appealed to Caesar. So they concluded that he should be sent to Rome.

Paul's defense speeches show that his imprisonment was not a time of defeat, but a part of God's sovereign counsel to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Each of Paul's defenses brought him one step closer to Rome, where he would stand as a witness for Jesus according to God's purpose. Through his life decision for God's vision and his unwavering spirit, Paul became the pioneer of world mission and a source of encouragement for countless witnesses of Jesus. He was truly a witness of Christ Jesus and a history maker.

In 1521, Martin Luther was threatened with condemnation as a heretic at the Diet of Worms and was called upon to recant his teachings. Like Paul, he courageously stood before the authorities to defend the gospel. Luther accepted God's counsel, gained new confidence and vision, and, by refusing to recant, laid the foundation for spiritual revival in Europe. His uncompromising proclamation of the gospel and his translation of the Bible became a great blessing for the Reformation in Europe and throughout the world. God used him as a powerful witness of Jesus Christ, whose influence continues to this day.

Thanks and praise be to the Lord, who has filled us with His great vision even in the midst of trials. God will use our living testimony at the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University, Bosphorus University, and Middle East Technical University to fulfill His sovereign counsel for world mission. May God use each of us very preciously as witnesses of Jesus Christ, as overcomers and conquerors in His eternal work of world salvation.

Today, we have learned Paul's defense speeches. In the midst of captivity and harsh rejection, even from the Jewish Christians, the Lord comforted Paul with His assurance and renewed His promise to him. Paul gained new confidence in victory and resolved to stand as a witness of Jesus not only in Jerusalem, but also before Romans, governors, and kings. Let us not remain helpless in times of desolation. Instead, let us hold on to God's guidance and promise and walk in the footsteps of Paul's faith. Let us become spiritual conquerors and history makers for world mission like Paul. God will surely lead us according to His purpose. Through our 1:1 Bible study and discipleship ministry, He will bring about the spiritual revival of Europe and fulfill His wonderful counsel for world mission.