

Episodes in Life of T/lord 11 the Lord Stood by Him

by Robert Constable

The sermon explores the transformative episodes in the life of Jesus and their implications for believers, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness and the Lord's presence in our lives.

Duration: 39:50

Scripture: Matthew 9:9, John 5:1-9, John 9:1-7, Acts 22:30 - 23:11, Acts 28:30-31, Romans 8:28

Topics: "God's Presence"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the miraculous events witnessed in the life of Jesus, such as the calling of Matthew and the healing of the blind man. The sermon then shifts to the plot against the apostle Paul, where forty men vowed to kill him. However, God intervened by using a young boy to deliver the message to the chief captain, and Paul was safely escorted out of Jerusalem. The speaker encourages listeners to find encouragement and assurance in God's presence, reminding them to trust in Him and fulfill the assignments He gives. The sermon concludes with the message that even in times of discouragement, God is always present and will accomplish His purpose.

Transcript

This has been a good week for me, in the review of these episodes in the life of the Lord Jesus. My, the places we've been, and the things we've seen, and the things we've heard. Haven't they been great? My, when we saw the Lord Jesus walk by the office of Matthew, the publican, and call him to follow him, and we saw this cheating tax gatherer become a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Wonderful things. And we saw him go by the pool at Bethesda, and look down at that man, and ask him if he'd like to be better, and see hopelessness turned into radiant joy. Say, this is something to behold, isn't it? We saw him come to the blind man that had been blind from his birth, and give him sight, and hear the wonderful witness of that man.

One thing I know, for as I was blind, now I see. And hear him say to the Lord Jesus, Who is a Lord that I might believe and worship him? A blessed thing. And then we saw the Lord Jesus this morning after his Passion.

Everything we had considered up until this morning, we got out of the Gospels. We visited places with the Lord. We talked to people with the Lord.

We followed Jairus, didn't we, on his desperate run to the seaside to find the Lord to heal his daughter. We slipped quietly through the throng with a woman with the issue of blood. But this morning, we left the Gospels and we continued with the Lord.

We considered an episode out of the life of the Lord Jesus that had to do with his meeting with the disciples after his resurrection. We said this morning all these other meetings with him could have been expected. Matthew might have said to himself, if he ever comes this way.

The man on the pool at the porch of Bethesda might have talked with the others around him and said, if the prophet ever comes through the porch, I wonder what would happen. Jairus thought, if only he was near, I could get to him. There was a possibility, but this morning there was no possibility.

They had seen him fall down under the weight of the cross on the street of Jerusalem. They had seen him nailed to a Roman gibbet. They had seen a Roman soldier fire a spear right through his side.

They had helped to take him down and lay his body in the tomb, and there wasn't any possibility whatever so far as they were concerned they would ever see him again. And he was there. Oh, man, what an episode in the life of the Lord that turned out to be.

Oh, what gladness. Oh, when then were the disciples glad. We cannot put the expression into that verse that that verse has in it.

Oh, the gladness. Oh, the overrunning joy when they realized it was him. It was really him.

Not his ghost, not his spirit. Jesus himself in the midst. And we talked this morning about the wonderful fact that this didn't just happen to a group of disciples in a closed room in Jerusalem.

This has been happening ever since. When men did not expect him, when it was apparently the least likely that he would appear, he has come into human life and he has picked that life up. He has turned sorrow to joy, frustration to fulfillment.

Everything's been changed from that day on. Oh, yes, this has gone on now for nearly 2,000 years, the Lord Jesus has been doing this. Because while he was localized and straightened, while he was limited in his walk around Galilee's roads and Jerusalem streets, while he was only one person, he couldn't be everywhere.

He couldn't share himself as he longed to share himself with men. He had a baptism to be baptized with. And he was straightened until it was accomplished.

But when it was accomplished, ah, he'd given his life then. He had given his life to share it. And men everywhere could come into the living reality of the life of Christ on earth.

And no longer was it necessary for people to be just human beings. They became human beings indwelt with the very life of God. An entirely new race of men, a distinct people.

We are the sons of God amongst a distinct company. A company indwelt with the life of the living and almighty God, with the spirit of the living Christ. And all the episodes in our lives, we shook hands as we

left the meeting this morning.

And in several instances as I held the hand of one of you, I said, this is his hand. His hand. Your hands are his hands.

Your circumstances are the circumstances in which he lives. Your opportunities are the opportunities he faces. For Christ is living in us.

And the episodes of our lives and the incidents of our everyday experience are episodes in his life and in his experience. Sometimes we get away from this, don't we? We don't hold on to it too well. It's too wonderful really in one sense, too wonderful almost to believe.

And too wonderful consistently to appropriate. This is our problem. The power is there, the life is there, the potential is there.

Everything is there. We just don't possess it. We don't appropriate it.

We make it our own, live in the power of it. And then sometimes we get feeling bad about ourselves because of this. And I think this is good.

It's good not to be complacent. It is good to realize that there is more to be possessed than we have yet possessed. I hope this gripped us this morning.

I hope it has gripped all of our hearts this week. There is more to be possessed than yet we have possessed. Even for those that have possessed a very great deal.

There are times in our experience when we get pretty low. And what does the Lord do then? Well, he knows about it. And I want to turn your attention this evening to another episode in the life of the Lord Jesus in the book of Acts.

But it is farther along now than the one we looked at this morning. In fact, this is in the 22nd chapter. So will you turn to chapter 22 with me? Acts chapter 22.

And I want for us to begin reading at the last verse of chapter 22. That's the 30th verse. And then we will read down several verses in chapter 23.

Now, let me fill you in with what goes on here. The apostle Paul has returned to the city of Jerusalem after having been met by the Lord and having received life from him. He has come back to the city in which previously he had persecuted the Church with a madness.

He has come back and he has brought his witness with him. He has come to tell these very men that gave him the documents by which he could throw the members of the Church into prison that this was wrong and that he himself had met the Savior, the Messiah. He had come back and he had told his story.

And what a storm this had stirred up. You know, I suppose he was like everybody else. Filled with a new story, with a new life, with a new everything.

He came back to share it with his old friends. He didn't want any part of it. What a disappointment.

And so, because it made such a fuss in the city, he was taken into prison. He had started a riot. And so he was put in prison.

And, oh, there was noise and confusion and everything else. And we pick it up right there on the moral after his arrest. Because the captain, the chief captain, would have known the certainty whereof Paul was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bonds and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them.

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law.

And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wish not, brethren, that he was the high priest. For it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.

Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit.

But the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry, and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man, but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down and to take him by force from among them and to bring him into the castle.

And the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. And the Lord stood by him. This is the episode, another episode in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I suppose, really, that there has been very few people, anyway, who have lived on the earth since the Lord Jesus, who so thoroughly lived in the power of the Spirit of God, than the Apostle Paul did. Here was a man who appropriated a very great deal of the potential in his salvation. But although he was a masterful preacher and a great writer, although he could argue his case like an expert, although he was totally convinced of what he believed, that didn't mean everything was going to go smoothly for him.

In fact, it went just the other way. He had hard going, and he had been especially having hard going this day. Well, you can imagine, it says that the chief captain was afraid that they were going to tear him to pieces.

This is quite a riot, this is quite a stir he has created here. When he came back to talk to his friends, came back to tell them about the Lord Jesus, here was a man with an absolute passion for righteousness. He had that before he was saved.

That's what he says here, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. He had a passion for righteousness, and he speaks of the fact that God forgave him all that went before because he did it ignorantly, because he thought he was serving God. He had a passion for righteousness, this man.

And then he is brought on trial before the council to give an account. He demanded to say that he had lived in good conscience before God. And what had happened? He had his face whacked because he

claimed what was true.

And then he lost his temper. He flared up and said, God will smite you, you whited wall. And then found out that he lost his temper with the high priest.

And he had been brought up to respect the high priest and to regard the servants of God in his nation as with the respect that they were supposed to be entitled to. And do you ever say something and then go home and say, I wish to goodness I hadn't said that. All the dumb things to say.

It seems like I always say the wrong thing. Do you ever have an experience like that? Well, that's exactly the way the Apostle Paul felt, so if you felt that way, he shared your feelings. And then he had to apologize publicly for what he had done.

And none of us exactly enjoy being brought to the place where you have to make a public apology, but at least he had the grace to make it. But it doesn't help our ego any to do this. And then as he talked to these who were all known to him and people he regarded and respected, the Sanhedrin is divided.

Oh, my, where is he getting here? No, no place. It just creates a second riot is all it does. And he's rescued again by the captain.

That was his day. My day. He could have written a book or a column.

My day. Wouldn't it have been a lulu this day? So he's back in prison. Or at least back in the house of the captain, the chief captain.

He's in ward. And if he was anything like me, and I think he was somewhat like me in some ways and somewhat like you, that was a low night for him. You know, this has been a foul day.

The things I got mixed up into, the things I said. Boy, I sure messed up my opportunities today. You'd think I'd have better sense.

All the way I've been brought and taught and everything else goes out the window. Why can't I do things right? And he's feeling this way. He's feeling real the disastrous failure of the day.

The sincerity of his heart was insulted. His passion for righteousness defeated. His testimony was frustrated.

Just a thoroughly bad day. And you know, when you get into this kind of a mood and this kind of a situation, you always think, well, this is the end. It'll never be any better again.

I have done it now. And I'm dead. So doubts about his future would have overwhelmed his soul.

Wouldn't you feel this way after a day like this? Oh, you have felt that way after days that were less trying than Paul's day. And so have I. But then he remembered what the Lord Jesus had said. In the world you shall have tribulation.

Jesus had never said it would be a bed of roses. He had never indicated that from now on everything was going to work a hundred percent. No, he said quite the opposite.

The world has hated me, it'll hate you. This is what he had said. And then the Lord stood.

And the Lord had a word for him. Just the right word. Don't worry, Paul.

So you failed in Jerusalem. I know about Jerusalem. I've been in Jerusalem too, Paul.

Do you remember one day the Lord Jesus was in Jerusalem? And after a hard day he left the city and went out and stood on the top of a hill just outside the city wall and he turned around and looked back on the city. And as he thought about that town with all those people in it, he broke his heart. And he began to cry, O Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and killest them which are sent unto thee, how oft would I have gathered thee as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing.

And he would not. And now your house is left unto you desolate. And turning to walk for his night's rest, his body shook with sobs as he cried over that city.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Oh, he'd been tried in that city too. He'd stood before these very men.

Paul had had his face slapped, but they spit in Jesus' face. They reached over and jerked the hairs out of his cheeks. They laid the lash upon his back.

They mocked him. They beat him up. They herded him out of the city and nailed him on a cross outside the wall.

He knew Jerusalem. He'd been there. And so this night he comes to Paul.

I've been there, Paul. I know about Jerusalem. It was a dark night, Paul, but I've been there.

Don't worry. Thou hast testified concerning me. What a good word this was.

You know, sometimes we get dejected in the Lord's service because we aren't real clear about what our job is. We've kept our responsibility in such general terms and we sort of put the Lord's work in a certain special category and we don't determine for ourselves what it is the Lord wants us to do. And maybe Paul had this problem right here.

Today, in industry, it's a great thing to talk about job definitions. In other words, you bring a man in, you give him a job, you tell him precisely what you want him to do so that he knows whether or not he's doing what you want him to do. You have a common understanding between the employer and the employee.

He has a definition of his job. And nobody can come to him and say, Why didn't you do this if it's not in his job definition? He wasn't supposed to do it. Well, the Lord had given Paul a job definition.

And Paul had forgotten it because it wasn't in writing. And that was the root of his problem this night. Look at chapter 22, verses 10 to 15.

Paul is giving his testimony and he said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Paul says, Arise and go to Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. You'll get your job definition in Damascus. And when I could not see for the glory of that light being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me and stood and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked upon him, and he said, The God of our fathers has chosen thee that thou shouldst know his will

and see that just one and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth, for thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. There's his job definition.

Thou shalt be his witness of all that thou hast seen and heard. This was all that Paul was supposed to do. He wasn't supposed to get Jerusalem converted.

Oh, he wanted to see Jerusalem converted, but this wasn't his job. His job was to witness his own experience with the Lord Jesus. And that's where it ended.

There wasn't anything more. So the Lord says to him as he met him that night, where we were reading, Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem. So the Lord says, you've done your job.

Now we live in a culture that's sort of a success culture. Or maybe I should say that we live in a culture wherein there is the cult of success. You know, you've got to be successful.

This is the final criterion of everything, is are you successful? And then this success is expected to manifest itself in certain ways. But the big Hewon cry is be successful. And Paul was overcome of this idea this night.

He thought that he had to be successful. First he had a wrong idea about his job. He thought he wanted to convert the city of Jerusalem.

And then he thought that he ought to be successful in his job. And he was a total failure this night, according to what he thought, but not according to what the Lord thought. The Lord didn't expect him to convert Jerusalem.

The Lord hadn't been able to convert Jerusalem. He certainly didn't expect Paul to. But he had done the thing the Lord wanted done.

That's all that was necessary. And so the Lord came and stood by Paul and said, Don't worry, Paul. Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem.

So must thou bear witness also at Rome. Oh, what a word this is. Paul had wanted to go to Rome.

He had expressed the desire that someday he'd like to get to Rome. And here this night, when he was at his very lowest, the Lord came in, stood by him and said, You have done what I asked you to do in Jerusalem, and now you're going to do that same thing in Rome. What a change! What a change for Paul! He wasn't being called on the carpet by the Lord because he'd failed.

He was being commended because he'd succeeded in doing the thing the Lord asked him to do, and because he had, the Lord said, I'm going to have you do the same thing in Rome, Paul. Everything changed. Everything changed.

Sometimes we get upset because we think we're failures. Failures in the thing the Lord wants us to do. One, do we know what the Lord wants us to do? This we ought to get clear in our minds.

Well, for instance, he doesn't ask a man to do a woman's work. He doesn't ask a woman to do a man's work. He doesn't ask young people to do the work that calls for the judgment of older people.

He doesn't ask older people to do the thing that young people have got the strength for. He's not a stupid boss, you know. He gives people assignments according as he has given them the gift and the power to do the thing he wants done.

That's all. Then we get concerned because we have our own ideas about what maybe we should be doing, and we don't succeed at it. And we get all upset, just like Paul did.

And the Lord said, look, don't get so upset. It isn't whether you succeed or not. It's not what appears on the surface.

It's the motivation that counts. Did you want to do the right thing? The method may fail, and the accomplishment may be nil. The well done is for effort.

And our problem is that sometimes because we're not clear about the job, or because we run into some problems in the job, we run down on the effort. We give up. We say, oh well, it's not for me.

And this is what this episode in the life of the Lord Jesus is to warn us against. Be of good cheer. In Rome also, the be of good cheer was vindicated in the next two or three years of Paul's ministry.

He was sent out to do a job, and he did a job. And then in the last paragraph in the book of Acts, we find the fulfillment of the latter thing here, of his assignment. Preaching, and Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Ah yes, the Lord made good, you see, on what he said to Paul that night. We may count upon it, but the Lord will make good on what he says to us in our discouragement. Now there's three things here.

There's the mental mood of Paul, his circumstances, and his overruling Lord. And I want to make a quick reference to these. Is Paul still in prison? Still in prison.

Even in the end of the book of Acts, he's still in prison. He has faced increasing hostility everywhere he went. He's been left for dead many times.

The difficulties have not grown less, they have grown more. But everything has been changed in the life of Paul. You say, well, if he got so down while he was in Jerusalem, how did he face greater difficulties, greater complexities, more opposition, if he couldn't take it there? Well, the Lord had stood by him.

And now, having this word from the Lord, he went on. There was no longer dejection, but there was assurance. And Paul never wavered again.

From here on, he walked in the triumph of Christ. He said, thanks be unto God, who always causes us to walk in the triumph of Christ. That was his attitude.

Yes, he had learned something about his Lord. From now on, he was poised and balanced in all his attitudes and in all his activities. What immediately followed the episode that we read about tonight was that there was a plot.

And 40 men bound themselves by a deep oath not to eat food until they had killed the apostle Paul. Believe me, this was serious business. They meant business.

And God called a little boy, a lad, to the place where he overheard this. And he brought the message through to the chief captain. And do you know what happened? Forty men, above 40 men, it says, took the vow to kill him.

Do you know how he went out of Jerusalem? Surrounded with 470 men, 200 horsemen, 200 footmen, as an escort from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Why, he put near royalty to get that kind of an escort. He was taken out of that town like a VIP.

He used the privileges of his citizenship and he appealed to Caesar. And from that time on, he was satisfied with his master's assessment of his work. And in no doubt whatever as to the issue, he knew that he was going to get to Rome come earthquakes, come hurricanes, come shipwreck, come vipers, come barbarians.

It mattered of all. The Lord had said in Rome also. Nothing else mattered.

Nothing else mattered. So what does this episode mean to you and to me? Well, it means this. The Lord Jesus has something for us to do.

And he puts it in clear terms. We need to find it in his word. One of the things he has put upon all of us to do is to witness.

Now, this is not a difficult thing to do insofar as understanding it is concerned. He was to be a witness of what he had seen and heard. That's all.

That's all we're asked to do, is to be a witness of what we ourselves have experienced with the Lord. That's all. Now, we've all got that job.

We may have some other jobs, too, but we've got that one. It isn't up to us at all how people respond. Whether they like it, whether they dislike it, whether they believe it, whether they disbelieve it.

This is none of our business, none of our affair. All God asks us for is the witness. He takes care of the thing from that point on.

He'll accomplish his purpose. And when we have witnessed and we have been told that we're a little bit way out and that there's something wrong with us and we've been laughed at or something like this, then we're apt to say, oh well, I guess I'm not gifted for that. It's just not my way of doing things.

So we quit. Because we expect to do more than the Lord has expected of us or asked us to do. We're looking for results.

He says, just witness. I'll show you the results later on. And as I close this week of meetings with you, dear people, this week, I would like to say this.

Your discouragement is not unique to you. The very finest of the servants of Christ have been way, way down. But that's the time the Lord comes and gives a word of encouragement, of assurance, of commendation, of assignment.

So if you're discouraged tonight or if you are discouraged this week, if you have come to the place where you don't know what to do, get an assignment from the Lord. Do the thing you know he wants you to do. And then just trust him for the rest.

The Lord will stand by you the same way he stood by Paul. And together we shall all rejoice in his presence, shall we pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank thee that thou knowest us all together.

Thou rememberest that we are dust. Thou art the one that searchest the heart and the reins. Thou knowest our down sittings and our uprisings.

And our thoughts are not hidden from thee. Thou art the one before whom all things are naked and open. And we are glad for this.

We are glad, our Heavenly Father, that there is a single thing, not a thought in our minds, but what thou knowest it all together. And thou hast still loved us. And thou dost know our weakness, our frailty, our proneness to grow cold, how quickly we get discouraged.

Yes, thou knowest all about this, but thou dost know our hearts. How we would serve thee better. How we would walk with thee more consistently.

How we would witness more faithfully. And we thank thee that whatever there is in our hearts of this, thou hast put it there. For thou hast said it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

We thank thee for such grace as this. And we pray thee that thou wilt work in our hearts, make clear to each of us what thy will is, and lead us.

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