

Acts 23

We're going to see a leader in the early Church have a very difficult experience with no positive results and yet he's affirmed by the Risen Lord Jesus Christ as faithful to the gospel. The Apostle Paul arrives in Jerusalem and within a matter of days, he is the target of hostility coming from the Jews. In this context, Paul is not able to preach, teach, or plant a Church. It could be said that this visit to Jerusalem is unsuccessful for Paul.

But then there's Jesus. The risen Lord Jesus appears to Paul and tells him to take courage because he will testify about Jesus in Rome just as he has in Jerusalem. (Acts 23:11) Evidently, Paul's lack of success in Jerusalem doesn't disqualify him from the next mission: Rome. That brings us to the main point in this passage.

Main point: Gospel success is different than worldly success.

No matter how you slice it, Paul was not a success in Jerusalem the way we measure success. When the Church has accommodated to postmodern American culture, the measure of success in the Church today is bodies, bucks and buildings. Bigger is better and more is better even still.

Could it be that God uses a different measuring stick than we do?

Perhaps we have some insight as to what that measuring stick might be right here in this verse. *Take courage.* Jesus didn't say well done, but take courage. I get the impression that the response to the gospel will be pretty much the same in Rome as it was in Jerusalem.

Testifying in Rome isn't based on amazing success in Jerusalem. It's based on the fact that Paul was faithful in a context that required courage. What Paul encountered in Jerusalem was scary. Take courage Paul, this is the new normal for you. When you get to Rome, it's gonna be about the same. Who wants to hear that? Who prays for that?

There's no wiggle room in this offer. You **MUST** testify in Rome.

Sometimes being faithful is more important than being successful. I can't help but think that because Paul was faithful in Jerusalem, that the Lord rewards him with the privilege of testifying in Rome.

There's a whole lot of life to be lived during the time after the promise to testify in Rome is given and before Paul's arrival in Rome. During all of that time, God was sovereign. Paul's daily needs for food, shelter, and health are met. Paul will face all sorts of challenges including financial provision, imprisonment, unfair legal trials, loneliness, enforced journeys, harsh conditions, etc. There seems to be a lot of people who want to take his life. God is sovereign over all of that.

Paul knows this aspect of the sovereignty of God as well. Not only does Paul know that Jerusalem can't take his life, he also knows that cruelty can't take his faith. He will believe. He will have faith. He will trust in the goodness of God through all of the pain, injustice, misunderstanding because Jesus died for all of that. Jesus died for all that is wrong. Jesus died for all that hurts. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God won the eternal victory.

Gospel success is different than worldly success.

Home Group Discussion Questions:

1. If you didn't do this last week: Spend some time hearing one another's stories:
What was life like before you met Jesus?
How did you meet Jesus?
In what ways has your life changed now that you are a follower of Jesus Christ?
2. Read Acts 23 and discuss those aspects of this chapter that stand out to you.
3. Why do you think people want to be successful? From where does the drive to succeed come?
4. Would it be okay with you if God called you to be faithful rather than successful?
 - a) Would it be okay with you if you were successful in the eyes of God even if it meant you were not successful in the eyes of people?
5. What do you think is the difference between being faithful and being successful?
 - a) What are some ways in which you are faithful to what God desires of you?
6. How do you think Paul's experiences as an Apostle and especially his experiences in Jerusalem prepare him for Rome?
 - a) How have some of the challenges in your life prepared you for what God has for you?