

39. Peace in the eye of storm

May 11, 2014

You might have had an experience or two. Your previous situation was really sticky and even dangerous. Somehow you got over that situation, and you were letting out a sigh of relief as you turn around, but only to stare at the new situation that was at least equally bad or possibly even worse. There is a phrase for that: "Out of the frying pan and into the fire."

It describes apostle Paul's case quite well. Misunderstood and falsely accused by the Jews, Paul had recently been the flash point of a riot in Jerusalem; the center of a volatile debate in front of the Sanhedrin which already decided 'guilty' for Paul's case; then, followed by a life-threatening conspiracy by 40 Jewish ninja wannabes; to keep Paul alive, the Roman commander escorted him out of Jerusalem to Caesarea with a small army by night; but now he was about to meet a cruel and ruthless Roman governor who had a not so friendly reputation. All of these happened in three days. Indeed, no rest for the weary Paul.

I believe that the Lord is going to teach us how to have His peace in the midst of continuing trials that come to us one after another as if we are in the eye of storm.

A. THE LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR FELIX

Acts 23:25-30 He wrote a letter in the following manner: 26 Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Some of you are thinking about a 'Felix the Cat' cartoon by now. If you remember watching the 'Felix the Cat' black and white cartoon shows on TV, you just dated yourself.

In his letter, Commander Claudius Lysias put himself and his men in the best light, which is to be expected. Lysias implied that he learned of Paul's Roman citizenship right away and protected his life from the Jewish mob. But he said nothing of the way Paul was bound twice and almost scourged for the sake of interrogation.

The second half of v29 was very important to the author Dr. Luke – proving that Christians were not considered criminals by the Roman officials as it was in the previous occasions.

B. PAUL, GOVERNOR FELIX, AND CAESAREA

Acts 23:31-35 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. 33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I

will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.

Leaving at 9 o’clock that night, Paul and the Roman military escort went from Jerusalem to Antipatris, about 37 miles away. This must have been an all-night forced march for that many people to cover that much ground in that short a time.

The 70 horsemen and two hundred spearmen then continued with Paul while the 200 soldiers returned to their barracks in Jerusalem, since the dangerous part of the trip, the hilly regions where they were inhabited by Jews was now over. From Antipatris, the land became flat and open and largely inhabited by Gentiles.

Why would the Roman commander give such VIP treatment to Paul, a Jew? Perhaps the answer can be found in the Book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 16:7 When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Caesarea was built by Herod the Great and named after Augustus Caesar and it was the center of government and the Roman military headquarters in Palestine. You can still find many places that show the influence of Rome in their buildings.

Let’s meet governor Antonius Felix of Judea. He was married to Drusilla, a Jewess who was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and who left her husband to become Felix’s third wife. The Roman historian Tacitus said that Felix “exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave.” Actually, Felix was a slave. His brother Pallas was a friend of the emperor Claudius; through such influence, he rose in status – first as a child gaining freedom, and then through intrigue he became the first former slave to become a governor of a Roman province. But his slave mentality stayed with him. Ruthless, conniving, and murderous – that was Felix, apostle Paul’s judge.

As you review the events recorded in this chapter, you cannot help but be impressed with the commitment of the Apostle Paul to his calling. Paul did not look for the easy way but for the way that would most honor the Lord and win the lost. He was even willing to become a prisoner if that would further the work of the Gospel.

You are also impressed with the amazing providence and protection of God in caring for His servant.

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

God’s people can afford to be daring, in the will of God, because they know their Savior will be dependable and work out His perfect will. Paul was alone, but not really alone! His Lord was with him and he had nothing to fear. So he was resting in the Lord Jesus.

C. LIE, LIE, AND SOME MORE

Acts 24:1-9 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. 2 And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, 3 we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words

from us. 5 For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. 7 But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, 8 commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." 9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

Orator Tertullus – some of your version says, “lawyer” – began with the customary flattery. Obviously, he thought that to win the case, he had to win his judge’s heart even with complete lies. I like what an English statesman Edmund Burke said about flattery: “Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver.” Solomon wrote in the Book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 26:28 A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, And a flattering mouth works ruin.

Flattery is something people do in front of you without their sincere hearts in it. But gossip is something they do behind your back with their hateful hearts in it.

It was true that Felix had put down some revolts, but he had certainly not brought peace to the land. In fact, during the time Felix was suppressing criminals in his territory, he was also hiring criminals to murder the high priest Jonathan. And the Jewish priests hated him with passion, but for the sakes of their own interest, they were smiling at Felix here.

Tertullus, the high priest Ananias and his cohorts brought 3 charges against Paul:

1) Paul was a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world.

They tried to classify Paul with the insurrectionists against Rome. They knew one thing for sure that Rome would not tolerate any civil disorder that leads to insurrection. Paul’s past record didn’t help him here, because wherever Paul went, there was either a riot or a revival.

2) Paul was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

They coupled Paul with frequent Messianic movements in Israel. The Romans knew what havoc false Messiahs could cause and how they could whip the people into hysterical uprisings which were only settled at the cost of blood.

3) Paul tried to profane the temple.

But Tertullus gave no evidence for this charge because there was no evidence. This was a fabricated charge based on rumor only. For Paul, he had nothing to fear from the truth; but he knew that the truth does not always win out in a court of law .

Can you imagine the emotion running through Paul’s heart at this moment? Fear and anger he must have felt as he listened to these cruel lies. He’d done nothing wrong; yet in this intimidating courtroom, standing before this crooked judge, his life was on the line because of their one deception after another . After Jerusalem, he was hoping that the situation would get better, but now it seems that it was getting worse by the minute.

If you are in Paul’s sandals, how would you handle it? Was he disobedient to the Lord for him to have? Didn’t the Lord tell him that he would go to Rome to preach

the Gospel of Jesus? Why would the Lord not set him free from this situation so that he could go to Rome? That would be our logic and it makes sense to us.

Some storms in our lives are not the result of our disobedience to God; they are the result of our obedience to Him. A good example of this is Job. What was Job doing wrong when all of those calamities befell him? Nothing. In fact, he was doing so well that God was bragging on him in the presence of the angels and Satan. Then the attacks on Job began. These were allowed by God to bring about change in his life. So Job went through a perfecting storm.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The goal of a perfecting storm by the Lord is to make us more like Christ.

We may think that when a bad thing happens, it will always turn into a good thing, because we think that we should have a happy ending for Christians. That's our earthly limited mindset. If that is the case, all the Christian believers who suffered persecutions should have relief and happiness at the end, right? Not necessarily.

Hebrews 11:35b-40 And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

In case you forgot, Jesus was crucified, all of His disciples were murdered with the exception of apostle John. If our limited earthly logic is right, wouldn't they all kick back on their lazy-boy recliners and sip tall ice tea after their temporary persecution?

You see, God's goal is not to make us happy, but to make us holy. And I believe that if we are holy, we will be happy, ultimately. It is not all about happiness; it is about becoming more like Jesus. Our God is more concerned about our godly characters than earthly comfort.

Because of our limited earthly logic, we often have a wrong definition of peace.

Here is the true definition of peace that God wants us to have:

Peace is not the absence of affliction, but the presence of God.

And it gives us 3 important abilities:

- 1) **The ability to remain faithful in the Lord in spite of the panic of unfilled dreams**
- 2) **The ability to stay calm in the presence of God in spite of the panic of uncontrollable and unpleasant circumstances**
- 3) **The ability to wait on the Lord patiently in spite of panic brought on by uncertainty.**

That is why apostle Paul could stand tall in front of these murderous people.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Refuse to wrestle with the situation that will drain your strength, rather start to rest in God's faithfulness.

When we wrestle with the circumstance, we tend to panic, don't think clearly, and speak in haste, and only to regret. Stop and force yourself to rest in Him and focus on the Lord Jesus.

2) Release the pressure by claiming God's peace in your life.

Remind yourself of the promises and faithfulness of God. Meditate on God's Word for His peace which surpasses all understanding, because it will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.