

Text: Acts 22:30-23:11

Target audience: All

Topic: self-defense

Theme: How to respond when you've been falsely accused.

My purpose for this message: To illustrate how a Christian should respond to false accusations.

Delivered: April 24, 2005 @ KEFC

A Wise Defense

Announcement about cell phones, pagers, and people coming & going during the service.

PRAY.

It was just past midnight, July 27, 1996. At the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, 50,000 sports fans were partying to Jack *Mack and the Heart Attack* in Centennial Park. A security guard on his rounds noticed a suspicious backpack beneath a park bench. He summoned the FBI and agents examined it. It looked like a bomb. It was. When it went off less than an hour later, it killed one and injured 111. In the weeks that followed, the security guard who discovered the bomb, was identified by networks and newspapers as a prime suspect.

But Richard Jewell was *falsely* accused and within months the FBI cleared him. Two weeks ago Eric Rudolph confessed to it as well as 3 other bombings. Says he hoped to knock out Atlanta's power grid and shut down the Olympics to shame the US for legalizing abortion.

Jewell got his revenge. His lawyer promised they were gonna sue "everybody from A to Z." CBS, NBC, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*... The out of court settlements are estimated to be worth over \$2 million.

That's one way to handle false accusations. God's got some other ideas. Put your hand up if you've ever been accused of something that wasn't true? Not a nice time, is it? How'd you handle it? Get even? Cut off relationships? Blast your accuser?

FIND Acts 22:30-23:11. This morning we're going to use Paul's responses before the Sanhedrin as a clinic on how to offer a wise defense against false accusations.

READ.

Story

Remember, Paul was in Roman custody in Jerusalem because a mob had rioted and tried to kill him outside the temple. Rumor was that Paul had committed a capital crime by taking a Gentile friend into parts of the temple forbidden to Gentiles and that's a capital crime. He hadn't, but then he'd never even been *formally* charged. But the real issue behind the accusation was that Paul was undermining Judaism. He'd tried to explain that to the crowd but when he mentioned ministering to Gentiles, they erupted. The Roman commander didn't understand the Aramaic Paul used to address the crowd, so he didn't know why the mob was angry.

But, when he attempted to get an explanation from Paul through torture, he was terrified to learn Paul was a Roman citizen with legal rights. So his plan became, release Paul and have the Jewish Sanhedrin examine him. The tribune seemed to be gathering that at issue was some religious point of law and he was confident that with the council's strong ties to Rome, these men would serve the empire's best interests.

Keep in mind that always, behind what appears to be chaos to us, is the purposeful hand of God. Because God was orchestrating Paul's captivity as part of a master plan

to invade the highest courts of the empire with the gospel. READ Acts 20:22-24; Acts 21:10-14; Acts 23:11.

But when God puts his children into difficult situations to sovereignly testify for Him, He does not abandon us or leave us to think up our own defenses. READ Lk.12:11-12. So what Paul said before this council on a certain day in perhaps AD 58, was neither accidental nor simply humanly characteristic of Paul; they were the words and ways of God. As they can be for you in similar situations.

1. Handle accusations with humility. Vv. 1-5.

Jonathan Edwards said *Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility.* Paul began his defense by entering his plea: not guilty. *I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day (v.1).* The presiding high priest was not a nice person and objected to Paul's claim of innocence. "Strike him!" he ordered.

"God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!" Paul bristled. You are like a wall painted over to hide the fact that it's falling apart." (By the way, Paul's warning proved prophetic. When the Jewish uprising against Rome began in AD 66, insurgents cornered and killed Ananias who was hiding with his brother in an aqueduct.)

Paul's retort was hardly godly but a normal response to being illegally mistreated. However, learning who he fired back at, he did what we all do when we realize we are wrong: he humbled himself!

"I didn't realize he was the high priest. Ex.22:28 says we are not to speak against God's chosen leader. "I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have done that."

How unnatural is that? Even if 90% of what you're charged with is false, to humbly own what *is* yours. Instead of me saying, "Well, what else could I do since I was being treated so badly." Or, "Look, I'll bet you'd react exactly the same way if she did that to *you*." Defend, excuse, justify. Or, admit what I did do wrong, or failed to do that should have. "I'm sorry; you're right." *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* (1 Pet.5:5-6)

2. Handle accusations with Truth. Vv.6-8

Part of Paul's wise defense was the truth. He announced to the council: "I'm being examined because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." That's the truth (even though some accuse Paul of manipulating the council members of the Sanhedrin. After all, the Sadducees members didn't believe people could be resurrected—ever. Pharisees members did. So, was Paul just trying to divide and conquer the council?

No, the resurrection *is* at the heart of the gospel.) 1 Cor.15:17: *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.* Jesus paid the blood payment for our sins on the cross. When He rose from the dead, He got the bill of sale. So this is not a ploy, just a simple, clear declaration of the truth.

But let's think further about the matter of truth when you're falsely accused. Maybe you not only tell the truth, but do so over and over; in as many ways as you can. Yet the important people you're trying to persuade, remained unconvinced. Now what? Shouldn't the truth set you free? People still doubt you. (By the way, why is that? I have several theories. Obviously, if I have a bad track record with the truth, I'm suspect. But there are other reasons people might doubt you. For starters, since fewer and fewer people act like the truth matters, is it any wonder people are dubious that the person they're evaluating should be trusted to tell the truth. Secondly, modern entertainment from books to movies to news, thrives on scandal: on people not being what they appear to be. We are conditioned to disbelieve, to mistrust.)

But truth has value whether you are believed or not. In fact I'll go further and claim it has value whether it's *said* or not. They made 3 charges against Jesus during his trials, "He claims he's a king; he urges people not to pay taxes (Lk.23:2-4), and he's blasphemed God. Asked to defend himself, he only admitted, "Yes, I am a king." Refused to answer the tax rebellion charge; refused to answer the blasphemy charge (Matt.27:12), neither of which were valid charges. Why no truthful defense? Because Jesus didn't have to convince anyone of anything. In the final roundup, all that was important was that the Father knew the truth. He always does. Let it rest with God.

And that leads us to Paul's 3rd response in his clinic on handling false accusations: Trust in the Lord.

3. Handle accusations with trust in the Lord.

The mood started to unravel as the Sadducees and Pharisees argued, so much so that Claudius Lysias again mustered his troops to take Paul into protective custody. In the barracks the following night, he had a visit from the Lord: *take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.* (v.11) Luke doesn't record how Paul responded but it's safe to assume that this was an enormous comfort to Paul. Why? Because the mission had displaced the problem as what mattered most. Of central concern to Paul was no longer overcoming false accusations; God was on a mission to stand Paul in the highest halls of Roman power so that there, he could share the gospel. And that's true of you too. No false accusation stands alone as an independent event in your life: God is working out his perfect plan and junk like false accusations are not left out. *...God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...* (Eph.1:11).

And while it's true that bad things do happen to us—Paul went to prison and eventually was martyred—from God's majestic seat, even all these bad things will prove to be of value. Rom.8:28: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Concl:

To be accused by others is to be human. To be accused by others *falsely* is to live among humans. To respond in humility, truth, and trust in the Lord to accusations true *or* false, may not be human, but it is to be wise, and it is to be faithful.

A central figure in the First Great Awakening Jonathan Edwards is today reputed by most to be the greatest American theologian. However, his 55 years on this earth were rocky and his enemies plentiful. His first church died from financial problems. A second pastorate in Connecticut lasted 6 months before being invited to teach at Yale. Then he went to help his grandfather pastor a church in Northampton Conn. Several years later, he was invited to Boston where he spoke on the great themes of justification by grace alone, man's total depravity and dependence on God. They didn't like what he said and did not invite him back.

By now Grandpa Stoddard had died and Edwards was on his own as pastor. In due time God began a significant work; a revival within the church. But dark clouds were gathering. People objected to how Edwards handled a church discipline situation. Businessmen objected to his insistence that they must do business biblically. The final straw however, came from insisting that only Christians take communion. Ending his Grandfather's practice of opening communion even to unbelievers, Edwards brought 4 years of bickering and backbiting to an end. He was dismissed by a vote of 200-20. Unemployed he went to live by a Mohawk Indian village and preach the gospel. And

wrote. Writings that have endured and grown more appreciated each century. Year before last we celebrated the 300th anniversary of Edwards' birth. What is remembered of him? The accusations? No, a legacy of faithfulness. So it was for Paul, and for Jesus Christ; may it be for us too.