

SERMON OUTLINE

SERMON TITLE: How to Cope with Criticism

SERMON REFERENCE: Acts 23:1-8, 11

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1) INTRODUCTION

- a) If we stand for the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will receive criticism.
 - i) If we are not enduring criticism for Christ, then we shouldn't pat ourselves on the back.
 - (1) For the Bible says that all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
 - (a) 2 Timothy 3:12
 - ii) There is no way in this world of once-born men can someone be a twice-born man or woman and survive without being criticized.
 - (1) We cannot live godly in this kind of a world without being criticized.
 - b) Matthew 5:11-12
 - i) This passage says not if, but when.
 - ii) The criticism must be false, and it must be for Jesus' sake.
 - (1) Some of us are criticized for things that we really deserve to be criticized for.
 - (2) If we are criticized for standing for the Lord Jesus Christ, then that is exactly the way it should be.
 - (a) "Great is your reward in Heaven."
 - c) Sometimes, what we get is not persecution but punishment.
 - i) Persecution comes when bad people persecute us for doing good.
 - ii) Punishment comes when good people punish us for doing bad.
 - d) The Apostle Paul knew what it was to be criticized, castigated, and condemned.
 - e) Acts 23:1-5
 - i) The Apostle Paul stood before a high court.
 - (1) The high court was the Sanhedrin.
 - (a) They were not just a normal group of people.
 - (i) They were extremely powerful.
 - (2) This was the same group that had caused Jesus to be put to death and Stephen to be stoned.
 - (3) Paul used to be a member of this group.
 - (a) They looked upon him as a traitor.
 - ii) Paul earnestly beheld the council.
 - (1) He looked them straight in the eye.
 - (2) He stood with confidence, poise, and conviction.
 - iii) Evidently, Paul did not know that the man speaking to him was the high priest.
 - (1) He certainly was not acting like a high priest.
 - f) The Apostle Paul was criticized, he was persecuted, and he was physically abused for his stand for the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i) And yet, he went through this criticism triumphantly.
 - g) We will be criticized and persecuted if we live for Jesus, especially in the last days.

- h) Today's message will show us how to cope with criticism and how to have peace with persecution.
 - i) It will share three things that Paul had in his life that enabled him to cope with criticism.

- 2) PAUL HAD A RIGHTEOUS LIFE (ACTS 23:1)
 - a) Paul spoke of his conscience.
 - i) Acts 23:1
 - b) The Apostle Paul had a righteous life.
 - i) That righteous life came out of a good conscience.
 - c) Conscience is that inner voice, that judge that God has put inside us that accuses us or excuses us for our actions.
 - i) Conscience cannot make us to be good, and it cannot make us to be bad.
 - (1) It is the alarm that goes off when we are bad.
 - (2) It is the peace that affirms us when we do right.
 - ii) We hear people say, "Let conscience be your guide."
 - (1) We can only let conscience be our guide to the degree that God guides our conscience.
 - d) Paul had a good conscience.
 - i) Acts 23:1
 - e) How do we have a good conscience?
 - i) Acts 24:16
 - (1) A good conscience is a conscience that is free of offense toward God and toward men.
 - (a) If we don't have this kind of a conscience, then we will never be able to stand criticism or endure persecution.
 - ii) Is there in your heart any unconfessed sin?
 - (1) Our sins are an offense to a holy God.
 - (2) We will not be able to stand criticism if we are not as pure as the driven snow.
 - iii) Is there any problem between you and a brother or sister that you have not made right?
 - (1) Not what they have done to you, but what you have done to them.
 - iv) Have you offended someone?
 - (1) Can anyone point a finger of accusation back at you and say something about you that you have not endeavored to make right?
 - f) A good conscience gives us tremendous liberty and freedom.
 - i) We don't have to worry about someone saying, "What about this, and what about that?"
 - ii) We cannot be sinless, but we should be blameless.
 - (1) When we do sin, we confess it, we forsake it, we make it right, and we make restitution.
 - (2) Matthew 5:23-24
 - (a) This is basic Christianity.

- (i) When we have it, we can stand criticism.
- (3) If our conscience bothers us, then criticism will bother us.
- iii) When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they wounded their conscience.
 - (1) They hid from God because their conscience condemned them.
 - (a) Genesis 3:6-10
- iv) People don't like to hear us talk about Jesus because their conscience bothers them.
 - (1) They run from God exactly as Adam and Eve ran from God in the Garden of Eden.
 - (2) That is the reason why some people don't enjoy going to church.
 - (a) When we are right with God, we enjoy the worship service.
 - (b) If your conscience bothers you, then you will feel condemned every time the preacher preaches.
- v) David sinned against God, and his conscience was wounded.
 - (1) He tried to run from God; he tried to get away from God.
- vi) When we are right with God (there is no unconfessed sin) and when we are right with our fellow man (there is nothing that we have not made right), then criticism does not bother us.
- g) There are different kinds of consciences.
 - i) We can have a defiled conscience.
 - (1) Titus 1:15
 - (2) This is why we cannot let conscience always be our guide.
 - (a) Conscience is like a thermostat.
 - (i) It can be set to operate anywhere.
 - ii) We can have a seared conscience.
 - (1) 1 Timothy 4:2
 - (2) We can so sin against our conscience that our conscience burns out, and it doesn't operate.
 - (a) If we do bad long enough, then we don't feel it anymore.
 - (3) A seared conscience is a deadened conscience.
 - iii) The worst kind of conscience is what the Bible calls an evil conscience.
 - (1) Hebrews 10:22
 - (2) An evil conscience is a conscience that literally approves evil.
 - (a) Some people call good bad and bad good.
 - (3) Isaiah 5:20
 - (4) People can get so distorted that they don't know the difference between right and wrong.
 - (a) They think that what is wrong is right, and what is right is wrong.
 - (b) People will play enough tricks on their minds that they literally approve evil with a seemingly good conscience.
 - iv) When we have a defiled conscience, a seared conscience, or an evil conscience, we will not be able to cope with criticism in the Bible way.
- h) Paul said, "I stand here with a good conscience."

- i) Acts 23:1
 - ii) When we have a good conscience and know that our life is void of offense toward God and man, we can then cope with criticism and have peace and joy in persecution.
- 3) PAUL HAD A RESURRECTED LORD (ACTS 23:6)
- a) Acts 23:6
 - i) Paul knew that it wasn't really him whom they were upset with.
 - (1) It was his Lord.
 - ii) Paul was suffering criticism and enduring persecution because he had been preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - b) The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a disturbing truth.
 - i) If it is true (and it is) that Jesus Christ walked out of His grave and rose from the dead, then we have to deal with that.
 - (1) We cannot be neutral about it.
 - ii) Someone has said that if Jesus Christ is still in that grave, then nothing really matters; but if Jesus Christ came out of that grave, then nothing but that really matters.
 - iii) We have to face the fact of the resurrection.
 - c) The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a divisive truth.
 - i) Acts 23:7-8
 - (1) The Sadducees, who didn't believe in demons or angels, also didn't believe in a resurrection.
 - (2) The Pharisees believed in demons, angels, and the resurrection.
 - ii) The Sadducees and the Pharisees had gotten together.
 - (1) Neither one of them knew Jesus.
 - (2) The only thing that got them together was to stop Paul.
 - iii) When Paul said that he was there because of the hope of the resurrection, there arose a great division.
 - (1) There were some who did believe in the resurrection, but they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah.
 - (2) There were others who didn't believe in the resurrection at all.
 - (3) The idea of the resurrection caused division.
 - (4) Acts 23:6-8
 - iv) Two things that oppose each other cannot both be right.
 - (1) Some believe that we should just homogenize all the world's religions.
 - (a) They believe that is the way we will have peace.
 - (b) Matthew 10:34
 - (i) Jesus didn't come just to blend everything together.
 - (ii) He came to separate right from wrong, light from dark, sheep from goats, and truth from error.
 - (2) Either Jesus Christ came out of that grave, or He didn't.
 - (a) Which side are you on?

- (3) When you take a stand for truth, you will have a head-on collision with error.
 - d) The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a truth that delivers.
 - i) It was a truth that delivered the Apostle Paul.
 - ii) Acts 23:6
 - (1) Paul knew that the same thing that caused him persecution was the same thing that gave him peace, even when people made a vow to kill him.
 - (a) Acts 23:12
 - iii) When we are persecuted or criticized, and we can see through the empty grave to being one with the Lord Jesus Christ, then that helps us to stand.
 - (1) If we don't have that kind of hope, then we will cave in.
 - iv) We are not ready to live until we are ready to die.
 - (1) When a person is no longer afraid to die, then for the first time in his life, he is ready to live.
 - v) Paul had people coming against him, but he had the resurrected Lord.
 - (1) Acts 23:6
 - e) Paul was morally clean and theologically clear.
 - i) He had a righteous life, and he had a resurrected Lord.
 - (1) He had something that enabled him to stand against criticism and to have peace in persecution.
- 4) PAUL HAD A REASSURING LIFT (ACTS 23:11)
- a) Acts 23:11
 - i) The Lord came and put His arm around the shoulder of Paul.
 - ii) Whether this was a literal appearance of the Lord or a vision, we don't know.
 - (1) The point is that Jesus is never more real to us than when we suffer for Him.
 - b) When we stand for Jesus, we will know what the Bible calls "the fellowship of His suffering."
 - i) Philippians 3:10
 - ii) The Lord says, "You suffered for me. I am going to come near to you."
 - (1) When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the fiery furnace, Jesus jumped in there with them.
 - (a) Daniel 3:8-25
 - (2) The Lord comes alongside of His servant.
 - c) When Jesus is there, we can cope with criticism.
 - i) He will be there if we are morally clean and theologically pure.
 - (1) Then, we will also be spiritually close.
 - ii) The Lord was there by Paul and speaking to him.
 - (1) Acts 23:11
 - iii) Just when we need Him, Jesus is near.
 - d) Jesus gave Paul a word of courage.

- i) Acts 23:11
 - (1) “Be of good cheer.”
 - (2) In this verse, the word “cheer” means “courage.”
 - ii) The Lord gave Paul stamina, strength, and might in the inner man.
 - iii) It was not that Paul was so great, but it was that Jesus was so great.
 - iv) “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”
 - (1) Hebrews 13:5
 - (2) The Lord was there with Paul.
 - (3) The Lord will be there with you.
 - (a) He will even tell you what to say.
 - (i) Luke 12:12
 - (ii) Isaiah 50:4
 - e) Jesus gave Paul a word of commendation.
 - i) Acts 23:11
 - (1) “You have testified of Me in Jerusalem.”
 - ii) The Lord knew what Paul had done.
 - iii) Now, Paul was in trouble.
 - (1) God is the judge, not men.
 - (a) If men were the judge, then some people would have criticized Paul for getting into trouble.
 - f) Jesus gave Paul a word of confidence.
 - i) Acts 23:11
 - (1) “You must bear witness also at Rome.”
 - ii) Their criticism couldn’t stop Paul.
 - iii) Philippians 1:6
- 5) CONCLUSION
- a) In this day and age, if you live a Christ-honoring and Spirit-filled life, then persecution and criticism will come your way.
 - i) 2 Timothy 3:12
 - b) May God help you at that time to have the following:
 - i) A conscience void of offense toward God and man.
 - ii) A bulldog grip on the truth that Jesus Christ is the Lord who walked out of that grave, resurrected.
 - iii) A sense of the presence of the Lord Jesus who will come alongside you and say, “I appreciate your faithfulness to Me.”
 - (1) When that happens, you will not only be able to cope with criticism, but you will rejoice in it.
 - (2) God will help you, and you will be victorious all the way.
 - c) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.
 - d) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
 - i) Romans 3:23

- ii) Romans 10:9-10
- iii) Romans 10:13
- iv) Acts 16:31
- v) John 3:16