

## Introduction

- Do you feel in control of your own destiny?
  - are you making the decisions that will affect your future?
  - or are you simply being swept along by events, by decisions other people make?
- I suspect most of us will be in both situations at different points in our lives
  - there will be times when we have particular decisions to make that will affect our future, perhaps in ways we can't imagine - choice of subject at school, course at University, job, or choice of life partner...
  - and there will be times when we have resources or time or personal circumstances that opens up a wide range of choices to us - **financial independence...** **no dependent family...** or whatever...
  - and there will be times when those choices are much more constrained - perhaps by family or personal circumstance, financial pressures or the situation of family members...
  - and there will be times when we simply feel caught up in a tide of events far beyond our control - from our own **credit crunch** to war, earthquake, famine, disease...
- How about in our Christian walk, our life with Christ?
  - do we know where we are going, what God is doing in us or through us just now?
  - or do we feel swept along, out of kilter with God and his purposes?
  - I kind of wonder where Paul was at as we come to the verses before us
  - perhaps he was feeling somewhat swept along by events?
  - but yet he had, under God's direction, chosen to come to Jerusalem...
  - and still, in the midst of the situation, he made choices...
- I intend the first two sections/points to be briefer, and plan to pick up and emphasise the last verse of the reading, Paul encouraged by the Lord

## Paul using wisely the world's justice (22:22-29)

- Paul is no masochist
  - we have the same rights to protection from injustice under the secular law as anyone else
  - Paul used those rights wisely, judiciously, not always
  - he used them so that Jesus' name was honoured, not scorned
  - he used them so that there were opportunities to get the gospel a hearing...
- So we may use, for instance, freedom of speech legislation:
  - not in a demanding, insensitive, arrogant way...
  - but in a way that brings honour to Jesus' name
  - at times where the core issue is a central gospel issue - the uniqueness of Christ, for instance - and not something more peripheral
- There is something of the same **worldly wisdom** on display later as Paul pits Pharisees against Sadducees! (23:6)
  - though its harder to be sure exactly what Paul was doing in introducing this point here!
  - certainly the openness of the Pharisees to resurrection in general opens them up to the possibility of Jesus' resurrection
  - but maybe it was just an opportunistic argument, something that occurred to him, and is perhaps neither commended nor condemned!

## Paul speaking boldly (22:30-10)

- Repeating a theme throughout these chapters - **and it will come up again!** - note Paul's **boldness** in speaking up for the gospel
  - **Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."** (23:1)

- We are too often afraid of offending, of upsetting, of saying the wrong thing...
  - we need Paul's holy boldness, rooted in a deep for the honour of God's name

## Paul encouraged by the Lord (23:11)

- What spoke to me most in this passage during what was for me a very pressured week was this one verse at the end of the passage!

### The Lord's concern

- *"the following night the Lord..."*
- He knew where Paul was, what he was facing, how he was feeling
  - he likewise knows and understands the situations we are in, what we are facing, how we are feeling - good and bad
  - nothing is outside the scope of his concern

### The Lord's presence

- *"the Lord stood near Paul..."*
- The Lord came to Paul
  - he didn't just send a message
  - nor did he just send a messenger!
  - he came himself
- God himself is with us - the Holy Spirit living within us is not merely a messenger of God, he is God himself
  - the Lord stands with us in each dark night and joyful dawn...

### The Lord's encouragement

- *"and said, 'take courage!'"*
- His presence was intended to bring comfort and encouragement:
  - *"take courage"*
  - and his presence with us today likewise brings encouragement in the face of trouble or hardship or challenge
  - there is a need for us to really dwell on his actual presence with us, and take courage, not merely intellectually acknowledging he is with us but never fully entering into the reality, the comfort, the encouragement, the peace of that presence.
- This is easy to say, but hard to do, in our time-pressured world
  - the testimony of believer after believer, historical and present day, is that take time to be with the Lord, to allow him to encourage us, to give him time to speak with us, is a good thing...
  - but few of us actually do this!
  - there is a telling joke told amongst or about ministers: **a minister is supposed to spend half his time with God, half his time with people, and the rest on administration!**
  - that's not what my week looks like, I confess!
- **Maybe its easier to do if you are in prison...**

### The Lord's purpose

- *"As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome"*
- The Lord had a particular purpose for Paul
  - he was to testify, to speak up and to speak about Jesus
  - some debate over whether the *"as you have"* implies in chains, or whether Paul would have understood this possible implication... but he wasn't daft!!
- The Lord has purpose for us
  - and here God pulls back the curtain for Paul, **for his encouragement**, so that what he is enduring is not pointless or endless

## Conclusion

- **We are to be wise, we are to be bold...**
  - **and we must make sure that we are alert to the Lord's encouragement**