

Acts 22:22-23:11

Outward Church: God's Work in Emotions

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / January 23rd, 2022

Big Idea: *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.*

Today is a big day for Cornerstone for two reasons. First, we finally made it back to Acts! I last preached Acts in June and, Lord willing, we're going to finish it by Easter. Second, today is the first day of our new worship service format—which is 20 minutes of worship, 20-minute message, and 45 minutes of discussion. And this is terrifying for me because I normally preach 30-35 minutes. So this is going to be an experiment, for all of us. How are you feeling about today? Happy? Sad? Anxious? That's human.

Maybe as you look at your life, you're just wondering, "God, what are you doing?" However you're feeling and whatever you're asking God, I hope we can find Acts 22:22-23:11 encouraging. Today I want to slow down and focus on what God is doing in Paul's emotion and state. In 2019, I preached a sermon called "Wise Emotions." Today I want to focus on SASHET, an acronym which Andy has been sharing:

S – Sad – Am I feeling sad or depressed?

A – Angry – Am I feeling angry or mad?

S – Scared – Am I feel anxious or fearful?

H – Happy – Am I feeling happy or joyful?

E – Excited – Am I feeling excited or looking forward to something?

T – Tender – Am I feeling loving or caring?

Apparently a sashet can be a little bag of potpourri. What's your emotion when you smell one of those? Love, feel happy, or if you're like me, a little bit of rage...? *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.* We see this in Paul's story. The story of Acts is about the joyful yet often difficult expansion of the gospel message (the good news about Jesus) from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Peter takes the message in and around Jerusalem before Paul takes it to Turkey and Greece. Throughout his journeys and as we come to the end of Acts, Paul has faced many hardships.

He's been ridiculed and stoned, imprisoned too. He's about to be wrongly imprisoned, put-on trial, get shipwrecked, and suffer and eventually die for Jesus. Can you imagine how he must be feeling in today's text? He has returned to Jerusalem after a long absence. But the Holy Spirit has told him "in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await" (Acts 20:22-23).

How would you feel? Would you be excited to go to Jerusalem? To do Jesus' work? I know I wouldn't. But no matter his emotion, God is there and God is working. And when Paul gets to Jerusalem, he's arrested at the temple under false charges. He preaches that Jesus of Nazareth is God, and the gospel is for the Gentiles.

Acts 22:22-24 (ESV)

²² Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

Now how would you feel? I would be panicking. I would be A – Anxious, and worried that I was about to become T – Tenderized. The text doesn't tell us what emotions Paul was experiencing, but he was able to think clearly enough to exert his rights, not just for his protection, but so he could share the gospel.

Acts 22:25 (ESV)

²⁵ But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?”

Now that got their attention! The centurion, an officer over 100 soldiers, ran and got the tribune, a commander over 1,000 soldiers, including several centurions. This tribune had rescued Paul when the riot at the temple started, but had also bound him in chains and was about to flog him, torture him with whips to pry out why the riot started. I probably would have spoken up much earlier, but here Paul speaks up, exerting his Roman rights for the sake of the gospel. Part of the perks of being a Roman citizen is you had the right to a trial, couldn't be subject to certain types of punishment, and couldn't be executed at will.¹ For the Tribune to do those things to Paul, means he could be subject to them himself.

No matter Paul's emotion or state, God is there and God is working. God had been preparing Paul for this moment for a long time. He shaped his past to bring him to this place, directly by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because God has greater purposes, greater plans. I've found in my own life that I am most anxious, most angry, most sad when I forget to look up. There's a new *Netflix* movie called, “Don't Look Up.” It's about scientists trying to warn a distracted world that a planet-killing comet is going to hit earth.² As Christians, we're supposed to look up! The reality we see is not a scary asteroid but God's mercy and grace. Paul looks up. He attunes his mind to what God is doing in the midst of the fray. The next day the Roman soldiers bring Paul, unbound, to the chief priests and council.

Acts 23:1-5 (ESV)

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.³ Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?”⁴ Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God's high priest?”⁵ And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Paul again, is being punished in an undeserving manner. He simply says he's lived life according to his conscience before God and he gets struck in the face. The high priest, not the same Ananias as Jesus' day, but a later one, orders him struck, and Paul calls down God's judgment on him. “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!” Have you ever painted a wall? I painted some cinder blocks in my basement, but before you do that you need to sand down the old paint and gook on the wall. If you don't, it will just peel off, or worse, form mold or mildew. Paul is saying, “You're an old dirty wall that you've painted over with white paint to look nice. You look great on the outside, but on the inside you are mold. You don't care about God's law. Otherwise, you wouldn't have struck me like that.”

Those standing around rebuke Paul for talking to the high priest like that and Paul says he didn't realize it was the high priest and simply by his office shouldn't have spoken that way. I don't know if Paul is being sarcastic, or he couldn't see the high priest due to poor eyesight, or the high priest wasn't wearing his normal high priest garb. We don't know, but to me it seems like Paul's emotions have gotten ahold of him. The Bible is not afraid to show Paul's humanity.

¹ Arnold, Clinton E.. Acts (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 225). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

² Don't Look Up Netflix description. Accessed 1/11/22. <https://www.netflix.com/title/81252357>.

Paul is angry. Acts doesn't say that's right or wrong, but God works through it. I think there's grace in that for us. Even at our worst state, or in our worst emotions, God is there and God is working. Even when I get angry with my kids, or feel depressed, or am really excited about what God is doing, God is still there and still working. This doesn't mean our anger is justified. Paul seemed to recognize he was wrong and says so, but God is still there, still working. How might we embrace not just our emotions, but what God is doing in them? When I express unjust anger at my kids, I try to apologize. When I feel happy, I try to thank God for it. How might God want you to respond to what you're feeling?

Acts 23:6-8 (ESV)

⁶Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." ⁷And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

Something inside Paul stirred. The Holy Spirit nudged him, "Paul, now is not time for civility, but for resurrection." Paul declared that he was on trial because he believed in the resurrection of the dead, that the dead would rise again. The Sadducees only believed in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, the Torah, not the prophets or wisdom writing, so they didn't believe in the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the whole Hebrew scriptures, and wanted everyone to abide by it. They did believe in the resurrection. This statement provoked an argument between the two camps. God uses their angry emotions to deliver Paul.

Acts 23:9-10 (ESV)

⁹Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" ¹⁰And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

Notice how God is still working in the emotions and state of the people, but this time to Sadducees and Pharisees. I read one commentary that said they should have known better. They should have known Paul was baiting them, and probably did. But God allowed their emotions to be what they were, to become enraged and try to tenderize each other, to accomplish his plans through them. God worked through their emotions and turbulence and he can work through ours, our good ones and bad ones. *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.*

Sometimes God will use our emotions and turbulence for his purpose. When we see others feeling happy, excited, anxious, rage, tender and sad, let's not be too quick to try and get them to a place of happiness. The goal of sharing our emotions in our groups is not to make everyone happy by the time they leave. Rather, the goal is to enter into each other's state, to be there, to be present, to see what God is doing. That's what Jesus does for us. He enters into our state, our emotions, but he does so without sinning.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus knows what it's like to be flogged, flogged like Paul was almost flogged, or emotionally or spiritually hurt by others. Jesus took the wrath of God so that we can be set free, made whole, and forgiven. If you'll believe in Jesus, and trust him, he takes your judgment too. He takes your sin and gives you life and freedom. And so if you're trapped in a world of emotions, rage, sadness, anxiety, or bitterness let Jesus take your hand. Maybe he'll lead you out, or maybe he'll simply hold your hand in the place where you're at. Maybe you'll have the opportunity to share Christ like Paul did, to bear witness to God's goodness.

Acts 23:11 (ESV)

¹¹The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

Take courage, this was all part of God’s plan. *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.* Take courage, *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.* God used Paul’s emotions and those of the crowd to share the gospel with the whole world. God can work through yours too.

Today we have an opportunity, for the first time, to split up into groups. We’re going to start by sharing, just being present, entering into each other’s state, and then we’re going to answer three questions. We’re going to start with an upward question to help us focus on God, then an inward question to help us do some reflecting, and then an outward question to help us look outward. *No matter your emotion or state, God is there and God is working.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA.

Discussion Questions

Upward – What does this story of Paul’s near flogging and testimony tell us about God’s love for Paul, his direction over his life, and his plans for the good news about Jesus (gospel)?

Inward – When you think of God’s love for you and direction over your life, do you feel sad, angry, scared, happy, excited, or tender (SASHET)? Why do you feel that way?

Outward – Think of the people in your life. Is there anyone who, due to their current state or emotions, might be open to the hope of the resurrection? What’s one step you can take?

Spiritual Exercises

Reflect – Ask God to examine your heart. Ask him to reveal where you’re at, and to meet you in this place. Don’t ask God to change you quite yet. Simply ask him to be present and trust him.

Confess – Ask God to reveal any recent sinful action, state, or emotion? Emotions aren’t inherently sinful, but good, but it is easy to let them control us. Does the Spirit bring anything to mind?

Worship – Quiet your heart and ask God to meet you in worship. Listen and sing along to *How Great Thou Art* with lyrics performed by Chris Rice. YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Cc0QVWzCv9k>

Content Curation

Sermon #1 – Back on November 4th, 2019, I preached a sermon called “Wise Emotions” from the book of Proverbs. You can watch, listen, or read it here:

<https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/wise-emotions-proverbs-1911-12/>

Sermon #2 – There’s a lot of different themes we could focus on in Acts 22:22-23:11. We could have talked about authority, and submission to those in charge. We could have talked more about the hope we find in the resurrection. We could have even talked about politics! But I thought we needed a breather from that due to our [recent series](#). However, I did listen to one sermon on our passage that does a nice job explaining the text and applying it to... you guessed it, politics. For any interested, you can listen to “[Redeeming Politics \(Acts 22:22-23:11\)](#)” from Poquoson Baptist church in Virginia.

Book – As we reflect on our own state, we need to be careful not to over-focus on ourselves. I read *Flourish: How the Love of Christ Frees Us from Self-Focus* by Lydia Brownback in the summer of 2020. She has lots of practical ways to focus on Christ above ourselves. But be warned. She pulls no punches. Enjoy! [Audible Link](#). [Christianbook](#) (if you go through Christianbook, talk to Ann first!).