**Antigo Community Church – October 31, 2021**

**There but for the Grace of God…**

**Acts 22:30 – 23:35**

Introduction

“There but for the Grace of God…” How many times have you heard this? Said this?

Examples

In this statement, we recognize that apart of God’s intervention, mercy, goodness… we would be in a very different (and not better) place.

Today – in our account we’ll see just such a moment in Paul’s life.

Recap where we are in the story…

Paul arrives in Jerusalem – fully aware of what might await him – bound, imprisoned, death (21:13) anxious to deliver the financial gifts from the churches throughout Asia

Jews (unbelievers) from Asia stir up the crowd in the Temple with false accusations against Paul – He is against our people and our laws. He has defiled the Temple by bringing in Greeks (Gentiles)

Crowd seizes Paul and is set on killing him – enter Roman troops – Paul’s life is spared

Commander allows Paul to address the crowd

In Aramaic – “Brothers” – Paul contextualizes his story for this group of unbelieving Jews

I’m one of you! Zealous for the Law. Persecutor of the “Way”

Road to Damascus – Saw and heard the “Righteous One” Resurrected Christ – EVERYTHING

CHANGED!

“Go tell what you have seen and heard” to… the Gentiles! Crowd lost it! “Rid the earth of him!”

Paul touts his Roman Citizenship or he would have been beaten/killed – scourged (see text notes)

NOW – Paul has an audience with the Sanhedrin

**Scripture Reading – Acts 22:30 – 23:11b (NIV)**

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin…pause…frozen in time – a look back…

These were his role models – his aspirations were to be among them – Gamaliel, his Rabbi was

one of them. Then he remembers Stephen’s stinging words ringing in his ears…

**Acts 7:51-53 “You stiffed-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”**

He watched and approved the stoning of Stephen…Paul can hardly believe who he once was.

There but for the grace of God….

But something snapped/changed as he continues…

“My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” 23:1

How is this possible? What changed? How did Paul go from an enemy of the Way to its chief spokesman?

Road to Damascus – He encountered the risen Christ! The Righteous One. Everything changed and he never looked back.

**Jesus said “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Acts 9:15-16**

The fulfillment of this – in Paul’s own words:

**1 Cor. 11:23-27 “I have been in prison frequently, flogged severely, exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”**

Is Paul complaining? – NO Does he have regrets? – NO

He’s grateful! Paul writes:

**2 Cor. 4:16-17 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”**

**Romans 12:1** “**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”**

Mercy – expound the role that it played in Paul’s life

There but for the grace of God…

Later at the end of his life:

**2 Timothy 4:6 “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”**

Finish the account:

Reaction – “Strike him” Paul’s response “you whitewashed wall (hypocrite)…” apology

Genius moment – “I’m here because of my belief in the Resurrection” Group implodes!

Why did Paul not give his testimony as with the crowd? He knew they would never receive it…

Conspiracy to kill Paul – Oath - Plot foiled

Sent to Caesarea – headquarters of Roman rule for Judea – to Felix (Governor) with:

200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen!

Felix to hear charges brought by his accusers

Conclusion/Application

Gospel – Your Damascus road experience…

Christians – side-tracked, lulled to ease, security

Rom. 12:1 Life of sacrifice – obedience

Divided life vs. singleness of purpose – clear conscience

**As you go:**

**It’s important to, periodically, take a good long look in the mirror and ask, “Do I have a clear conscience, a singleness of purpose before God?” Then, make adjustments as necessary.**

**There but for the grace of God…**