

The Story Continues, 33
Attitude, Attitude, Attitude!
Acts 23:11ff

Life is full of ups and downs. Just when you think that things are going well in your life, watch out, trouble is on the way. I truly wish we could all come to the place in life where everything just worked out. Wouldn't it be grand to be trouble free, totally contented, and to never have to worry about trouble catching up with you again?

Well of course you know that life here will never be that way. In fact, life here is full of trouble and difficulties. Since we will never be through with struggle here it is important that we somehow have the proper attitude. Our perspective on life makes all the difference. Sort of like the college girl I read about recently.

Having The Proper Perspective

"Dear Mom and Dad, I'm sorry to be so long in writing, but all my writing paper was lost the night the dormitory burned down. I'm out of the hospital now, and the doctor says my eyesight should be back to normal sooner or later. The wonderful boy, Bill, who rescued me from the fire, kindly offered to share his little apartment with me until the dorm is rebuilt. He comes from a good family, so you won't be surprised when I tell you we are going to be married. In fact you always wanted a grandchild, so you will be glad to know you will be grandparents early next year."

Then she added this postscript:

Please disregard the above practice in English composition. There was no fire. I haven't been in the hospital. I'm not pregnant. And I don't have a steady boyfriend. But I did get a D in French and an F in chemistry, and I wanted to be sure you received the news in proper perspective.

Love, Mary."

Now, I'm not sure I would recommend the same course of action that Mary took to everyone facing tough times but attitude in life really does make a huge difference.

When we get to the section of Acts we are going to look at today, we could get all bogged down in trying to describe all the rulers mentioned and where the cities were and what the court was like and what prison was like in those days and the intrigues that continually followed Paul and the stress and struggle he endures. But I think these few chapters are more than a just a travel log or a lesson in First Century civics. It is a lesson in how a good attitude can make a huge difference in a person's life.

It is important to remember how we got to Acts 23:11. Paul had traveled from Asia Minor to Jerusalem bearing an offering for the Jewish Christians who had endured a horrible famine. His fellow disciples warned him not to go because it was too dangerous for him but he would not listen to them and he brought the gift into the Holy City. When he arrived, some of the leaders of the church encouraged him to pay the fees for some men who had taken a vow so that the Jews both Christian and non-Christian would know that Paul had not abandoned the Law of Moses.

When he was in the temple, some Jews from Asia Minor saw him there and caused a riot that could have caused Paul's death, had it not been for the fast action of the Roman guards and the providence of the Lord. More than once while he was speaking the crowd almost tore him apart. It is no wonder that after all he had gone through the Lord stood near him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness for me also in Rome." Acts 23:11.

If you think that was the end of the tough times you would be wrong. In fact they get more intense now. It began with a group of 40 Jews who vowed to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. They asked the council of the Jews to have the Tribune bring Paul down to them on the pretext of wanting to learn more about Paul and what he did. When he arrived at the council the men would strike and kill Paul.

Thankfully Paul's nephew heard about the plot and headed to the barracks where Paul was being held and told him about it. Paul sent the boy to the Tribune who immediately summoned two of his centurions to take Paul that night to Caesarea where he would be safe. In Caesarea Paul would stand before the

governor of the area by the name of Felix. When he arrived in Caesarea Paul was kept safely under guard in the Praetorium.

It took only 5 days for the High Priest Ananias and his lawyer Tertullus and some of the Jewish elders to come down to bring charges against Paul. The basically claimed that Paul had violated their temple laws and that if Felix would just examine him he would find out what they claimed was true.

Now for Paul it has been a very difficult 12 days. He was simply trying to do good and people wanted to kill him! You would think that his attitude would be horrible! You would think that he would lash back at the Jews who brought the charges. You would think he would try to convince Felix to let him go. But no! I want you to listen to Paul's first recorded words after the angel of the Lord stood beside him that night.

Acts 24:10-16 –

10When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I cheerfully make my defense. 11You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the

synagogues or anywhere else in the city. 13And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. 14However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

What an incredible attitude! He “cheerfully” makes his defense? After all he has been through the past 12 days? After hearing about the plots to kill him and knowing that the Jews would like nothing better than to get him back to Jerusalem? He simply states the facts. He does not lash out. He does not beg for mercy. He does not show any signs of being frightened. He impresses Felix so much that he decided to hear him again on another day.

Some days later Felix and his wife Drusilla, who was a Jew, sent for Paul and this time notice what the discussion was about!

Acts 23:24, 25-

24Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25As Paul discoursed on righteousness,

self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

Felix was so challenged by what Paul was saying to him that he was afraid!

Incredible! No pleading for himself. No comments about the Jews. No requests for immediate release. Paul was more concerned about Felix and Druscilla than he was his own life.

Two long years pass and Paul is still in prison in Caesarea. Felix is hoping that Paul might bribe him but he never does. Festus succeeds Felix as governor of Palestine and only three days into his rule, he went to Jerusalem. Surely by now the Jews have forgotten about Paul. Wrong! The first thing they want Festus to do is to transfer Paul to Jerusalem to be tried. The Jews were planning to ambush him along the way and kill him. Festus was wise enough not to fall for their plot and told them they could come to Caesarea and bring their charges against Paul. Well the Jews did just that but after they made their charges they could not prove them.

Festus found himself between a rock and a hard place. He wanted to please the Jews and do something for them early in his administration but he could find nothing wrong with Paul. The fact that Paul was a Roman citizen I am sure played into Festus' concerns. Festus asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried.

Paul refused and appealed to Caesar since he was a Roman citizen. Check this out for attitude. Now remember he had been held for over two years so see if you detect any frustration or any anger.

Acts 25:10-12 –

10Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

He refused to be manipulated and he didn't try to manipulate Festus. He simply claimed his rights as a citizen and asked for trial in Rome.

Some time later Agrippa II and Bernice, both children of Agrippa I arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus to his new post. Festus told him all about his experience with Paul and Agrippa made known his desire to hear what Paul had to say. Agrippa's request was granted the next day when Paul was brought in to speak before him. What would you expect Paul to say? Wouldn't it have been easy to

have a bad attitude or to claim mistreatment after having been held so long in custody? Again, look at Paul's attitude.

Acts 26:2, 3 –

2"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Paul then goes on to tell Agrippa about his life story. He tells of his background and then he tells him about his conversion! Incredible! He even ties Jesus into the Law and prophets as the long promised Messiah.

You can't miss this part though. Festus interrupts Paul and tell him that his learning has driven him insane. Listen to Paul's reply.

Acts 26:24-29 –

25"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

Wow! Once again, no concern for himself. He wants Agrippa to be saved! Paul's attitude is incredible. He is clearly focused on what God desires.

Now that you have had a few minutes to think about all this what do you think is the secret to Paul's good attitude? I have a few suggestions!

1. When God sent his angel to stand by Paul, Paul believed God's message and let go of his anxiety. God said he was going to Rome. Paul didn't know how or when or what might await him, but he knew that he was going. Paul's trust in God allowed him to live in peace, no matter the circumstances.

2. Paul accepted his present circumstances and refused to complain or fret over them. He was not self centered but was self less. Because of that he was able to see people constantly who needed to know about Jesus.

3. Paul made the most of every opportunity. Paul didn't waste time. He challenged people to consider Jesus.

The same thing can happen to us also. We don't have to allow the circumstances of our lives to keep us captive and certainly we can avoid blaming everyone else for the stresses of life. We can live life to the fullest and take advantage of incredible opportunity, if we watch our attitude!

We are not trying at all to trivialize life but we are trying to encourage you. You are not stuck with no options in your life. Change your attitude. Love the unlovely. Jump at opportunities. Be patient! And God will richly bless you.

My mom loved to hang up inspirational poems and sayings around our house growing up. There was one she hung in the boy's bathroom. I supposed she wanted us to see it several times a day when we would enter the bathroom. The bathroom inspiration was written by Rudyard Kipling, a little poem called "If."

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

It is all about attitude! What about yours? God can change your attitude, he really
can. Come to Jesus!