

**The Hardships of Paul**

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:22-25

Code: 47-79

We're going to begin looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 22 and following. You can open to that section in your Bible while I make a few introductory remarks. If I were to title this portion of Scripture, I might title it "Humble Boasting...Humble Boasting." Frankly, boasting and humility are generally mutually exclusive, incompatible if not, in fact, opposites. But the apostle Paul does a marvelous job here of humble boasting. He boasts defending his own superiority to the other teachers and apostles, false apostles who had come to Corinth. And while boasting of his superiority, maintains his humility at the same time. This is a great challenge and Paul feels the tension of being forced to defend himself, being forced really to show himself superior to the false apostles and at the same time not compromise his humility. Doing such a carefully balancing act is not easy and for him was undesirable, even to attempt it, but he finally is forced into it.

In doing so he gives us what turns out to be one of the most wonderful and insightful sections of Scripture anywhere in his writings and, I think, maybe the richest example of humility anywhere in the New Testament, apart from our Lord Himself. Here is the real test of a man's humility, can he be humble when he's boasting about what is true of himself? He is forced here to show his superiority to the false apostles and does so yet never compromises his humility. It is a remarkable, remarkable portion of Scripture.

I don't need to remind you, but for those of you who haven't been here, just briefly to say this. Second Corinthians was written to the church of Corinth by Paul in defense of his ministry because some false apostles had come in preaching a different gospel, a different Jesus. They were agents of Satan. They were disguised as ministers of light. They were disguised as servants of righteousness. They were the agents of hell and false doctrine. They brought in damning lies. The Corinthians were seduced by them, began to believe them, give them the pulpit, let them preach and teach. Paul confronts that, deals with it the best he can with a personal letter, even a visit. And when he starts to see things turn back toward him, he writes this letter to affirm permanently in their minds his credibility. Remember, the false apostles in order to gain a hearing had to discredit Paul because the people loved Paul. Paul had founded their church, spent nearly two years with them and he had been their teacher. He was the servant of God and the messenger of the truth. And so in order for them to teach their lies, they had to destroy Paul and so they assassinated his character every way they could. It was successful in the minds of some people and they had turned from Paul to the false

apostles forcing Paul, finally, to this self-defense. Now he has been throughout 2 Corinthians saying a lot of things about the nature of his ministry, the character of his ministry, the character of his life. He's been answering a lot of the accusations but finally here in 2 Corinthians 11:22 he actually compares himself to the false apostles. Heretofore he hasn't done that, but here he does it in no uncertain terms. And the purpose of this section, and actually begins in verse 22 and runs all the way down to verse 13 of chapter 12, so it's a long section, the purpose of this section is to show Paul as superior, he is better than the false apostles. That's a hard thing for him to do because he's more comfortable talking about himself as the chief of sinners, does not like to talk about his superiority, even though it is true. He won't say more than is true, he made that very clear back in chapter 10 verses 13 to 15. He won't speak beyond what he ought to say. He won't overstate the case. He will speak truthfully but even speaking truthfully about what is true about him, about his real and genuine superiority is a hard thing for him to swallow. But the whole necessary defense must be done.

Now he's had a hard time getting started. Starting in chapter 10 he could have just launched into the comparison, but in verse 12 he said, "We're not bold to do this." We're not bold or eager or anxious to burst into this comparison. And so starting in chapter 10 verse 12 clear through chapter 11 verse 21 he's been giving a series of disclaimers, in effect saying...this is foolish...this is fleshly...this is forced and I don't want to do it. And he's just been saying that over and over with all those disclaimers. He wants us to understand how distasteful it is for these false teachers to set an agenda for him that forces him to have to brag about himself. He doesn't like that. He doesn't have a model in Jesus doing that and he doesn't like to have to follow a model set by false teachers. But he has no choice. It is foolish. It is fleshly. It is forced. But it is necessary. It's necessary to preserve the gospel. It's necessary to protect the church. It's necessary to honor the Lord. He must show that he is superior to the false apostles so that they will be rejected and with the rejection of those men, the rejection of their lying message. It is distasteful. It is necessary.

Finally...finally we come to verse 22 and he is ready to present his apostolic credentials. And as I said, in doing so he gives us a powerful example of humility because he shows us humility in the midst of necessary boasting.

Now the section that we're going to look at really is a fascinating one. We're just going to get in to verses 22, 23, 24 and 25 briefly this morning. There's a distinction between verse 22 and the rest of the passage and I'll show you what it is. In verse 22, would you notice three times he says "so am I...so am I...so am I." However, in verse 23 he says, "I more so in far more, far more," there's a very great distinction there. In verse 22 he shows where he's equal with the false apostles. In verse 23 and following he shows where he is superior to them. So he starts out by talking about where they're equal...so am I...so am I...so am I he says in verse 22. Are they Hebrews? Are they Israelites? Are they descendants of Abraham? I am too. There is equality there and a necessary equality because

apostles needed to be racially in that heritage. But then in verse 23 he launches into his superiority, "I more so.." and from then on down to the end of verse 13 in chapter 12 he shows his superiority, but he starts with his equality. Verse 22 then puts him on an equal footing with them in terms of heritage. Look at it.

"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I." It may well have been, by the way, that the false apostles were questioning this. It may well have been that they had spread some lies about Paul not having the right racial credentials. In fact, they may have said that since he was born in Tarsus he really didn't fit. All...all the original twelve apostles were Jews, therefore they were all Israelites, they were descendants from Jacob. They were all children of Abraham because, of course, Jacob came from Abraham. So they were all descendants of Abraham. They were all Israelites. And they were all Hebrews. That is to say they were of the nationality of the Hebrews and they spoke the language which is called Hebrew. So they would be classified then as Jews and Palestinian Jews as opposed to Greek Jews that spoke Greek or something else. They were all true Jews, Palestinian Jews. And with the exception of Judas, by the way, they were all Galileans. They all came from the northern part of Palestine known as Galilee which is the more rural part, being north of the great metropolis of Jerusalem.

So all the apostles were Jews. All of them were Palestinian Jews and with the exception of Judas who was certainly disqualified as an apostle, all of them were Galilean Jews. Any one then claiming to be an apostle would have to show that he was a Jew and that he was a true Jew, a Palestinian Jew. The false apostles may have been accusing Paul of not fitting the qualifications of being an apostle because he was born in Tarsus which is a Gentile city and therefore indicating he did not belong. Tarsus, by the way, was in Cilicia which is along the northern part of the Mediterranean where modern Turkey exists today, it's outside Palestine and therefore they may have been accusing him of being an intruder into the apostolic realm since he didn't have a birthright credential.

Well Paul wants to answer that. It is right, true apostles are ethnically pure, Aramaic and Hebrew-speaking Jews of Palestine rather than Greek-speaking Jews of the dispersion. But Paul is going to answer that question and here's how he does it. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I." It's really three ways of saying the same thing, although we could break it up a little bit.

Hebrews sort of refers to the Jewish people ethnically and linguistically. They are the Hebrew people who basically are associated with the Hebrew language. The root of that is probably from Eber. In the genealogy of Genesis 11 verses 15 to 17 as you go through the genealogy of the Jewish people, there is a person there by the name of Eber of whom Abraham is a descendant. Eber probably is the one who contributed Ebrew which was the name given first to Abraham in Genesis 14:13. So it probably goes back to the fact that he was a descendant from Eber.

Foreigners used it of the Jews. They called them Hebrews, descendants of Eber, and the Jews also used it of themselves. You'll find that in Genesis 40, and Genesis 43. Both the Jews used it and others used it of them as well. They accepted it as a moniker that stuck.

Paul born in Tarsus, however, was still a Hebrew in every sense. In Philippians 3:5 he calls himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews." Which means when it came to nationality and it came to ethnicity and it came to linguistics, he was every bit a Hebrew. He knew Aramaic. He lived his whole life in Palestine. And he followed all the Hebrew traditions to the very letter, fastidious to the max, even being a Pharisee. This apparently was an issue in his life because he mentions it in Acts 22 and verse 3, "I am a Jew," he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, it says. "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city," meaning Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel who was the premier teacher of the Jewish law of his day, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you are all today. So he says...Look, he has been teaching in Hebrew, I am a Jew, I was born outside of Palestine but I've been brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, educated strictly as a Pharisee according to the law, zealous for God, etc.

In the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts and verses 4 and 5 he gives a similar defense of himself. He says, "So then all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem." So obviously he was born in Cilicia but very early...very early as a very young child came to Jerusalem. And since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they're willing to testify that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion, and so forth.

So everybody knew Paul. He had been there since he was a very small child. He had been raised, he fit the qualification of being a Hebrew in every sense, ethnically and linguistically. And then he says, "Are they Israelites?" That refers perhaps to their descent from Jacob which speaks of their social life, their religious life and he followed that as well. He was in every sense an Israelite. He was faithful to the society, to the religion of the Jews.

And then he says, "Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I." He was here referring to his covenant identification. Socially, religiously, covenantally, linguistically, nationally, ethnically, every way you cut it he was equal to them. He was within the Jewish culture, following all the Israelite habits of society and religion. He was a part of the theocratic kingdom, he took his identity with God's chosen people in the promised land that God had pledged to Abraham and he was enjoying the covenant privileges and the covenant promises and blessings of God promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. So in every area, ethnicity, language, religion, society, theology, covenant promise, he says, "I am equal. I am equal." That's his whole point here in that verse where he says,

"I the same," or "So am I," in the English.

If you look at Philippians 3 for a moment you get another place where he affirmed all of these credentials. Philippians 3:4, "If any one has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." I'm telling you, even as the Jews go, he says, my credentials exceed everybody else's. "I was circumcised the eighth day," verse 5, "of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin," which is a very noble tribe, "a Hebrew of Hebrews," meaning he kept all of the traditions and spoke the language. "As to the law, a Pharisee," there were only about six thousand of them in the world at that time and he was one of them, they were fanatics about keeping the law. "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless." In other words, he followed the prescriptions of Judaism to the max. So he had all the right credentials to be chosen as an apostle from the standpoint of birthright, from the standpoint of heritage.

And what he is saying then in verse 22 is, "I'm equal to them in my inherited credentials as far as race and religion goes." But then coming to verse 23 he gets to the real point. And the real point here is to show not that he's equal but that he's superior and this has been hard to come by but he finally arrived and he's now willing to give his defense and it is a defense of his superiority. To the Corinthians should stop listening to the false teachers and turn back to Paul because he is superior to them in every way. And he does this, as I said, in a remarkable way, at the same time maintaining his humility completely.

Now if you were in the situation that Paul was in and you were asked to do this and you were supposed to defend yourself as a true apostle of Jesus Christ and you were to show them you were superior to the false apostles who were ravaging the church and you wanted to make your best case, how would you approach it? If somebody asked you your credentials, what would you say?

Well, you might be expected to say, "Well I've had a tremendous background. I was born in the Gentile world so I have some orientation there. I've been trained here in Jerusalem, I know my culture very well. I have been privileged to sit at the feet of Gamaliel, the most outstanding teacher, he was my trainer. I have had tremendous and immense experience in travel all over this part of the world. I have traversed this part of the world. I have met numerous people. I have rubbed elbows and shoulders with the elite of every culture, the hierarchy of Jerusalem, Gentile leaders, governors and so forth and so on. Later on in his life even kings as well." He could have said, "I have planted numbers of churches. I had gotten to know leading people in various cities and had the privilege of leading them to Christ. And I have...I have watched large masses of crowds be saved under my preaching. I've seen people burn idols and destroy idols in the response to the gospel. I've had an immense impact on the men that I've disciplined who are now out preaching and teaching," and so forth and so on. He could have given a lot of credentials like that.

But he doesn't. In verse 23 this is what he says, "Are they servants of Christ?" And the very statement itself makes him sick, so he says, "I speak as if insane," as an aside. What does that mean? Well to call false apostles servants of Christ at all is repulsive to him. So he says, "Are they servants of Christ?" only for the sake of argument. And then he has to add the disclaimer, "I speak as if insane." No false apostle is a true servant of Christ, this is just for the sake of argument. There's a bit of sarcasm in it and he can't just leave it at that, he has to add, "I speak as if insane." What an insanity to even suggest this for the sake of argument. But are they servants of Christ? "I far more." It's insane to even think of it. By the way, the word "insane" is a stronger word than the word "fool." The word "fool" used in verse 17 and used again in verse 21, fool or foolishness, *aphron*, *aphrosune* comes from *phroneo* which means "to think." The word for insane is *paraphroneo* which literally means "to be beside yourself," *para* meaning to be beside or alongside, to be beside your mind. The word *phroneo*, to think, or referring to the mind, "to be out of your mind," that's where it comes from, or "to be beside yourself," which is another way of saying you're insane. Paul says I'm a madman to even suggest that they're servants of Christ but for the sake of argument I have to say it. "And I more so."

A far better minister of Christ than they are. In what pertained to their birth privileges, he was equal. In what related to the truth of Jesus Christ, he was far superior. And his credentials will now be listed to make his point. First credential, "In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death, five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I spent in the deep, I've been on frequent journeys and dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

What? This is an apostolic credential? This sounds like a man who needs to do a reality check on the way he's approaching life. This is a guy who should hear a suggestion about changing his style of ministry. If ever a guy needed to read a book on being seeker-friendly, this is the guy. I mean, this guy is creating havoc every step he takes. In what sense is this a credential, this sounds like a credential to verify what he said in the parenthesis, "I speak as if insane." This would sound like the credentials of a man's insanity. How does he get himself into so many messes? How can a man possibly live such an irresponsible life being imprisoned, beaten so many times he can't count them, living in danger of death, five times having been lashed by the Jews, three times beaten by the Gentiles, stoned, shipwrecked? And then in verse 26, just a long summation of things, and verse 27 as well. What's wrong with this man? How is it that he's living this life and in what sense could this possibly be conceived as evidence of his apostleship?

Go back to Matthew chapter 10 and I'll answer that question. Matthew chapter 10, Jesus calls His disciples together, summons them, verse 1. Empowers them, gives them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, heal every kind of disease, every kind of sickness and they're identified for us in verses 2 through 4. So this is Jesus commissioning the disciples, he sends them out. He says in verse 7, "Go and preach...go and preach the Kingdom." And then verse 16, now this is ordination, this is their commissioning. Here's what he says, verse 16, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of...what?...wolves." That is, folks, right off the bat, a hostile environment, true? I'm just putting you like sheep in the middle of a wolf pack. That is a threatening situation for the sheep. That's how it's going to be. You go out and minister and you're going to be like sheep in a wolf pack. Verse 17, "Beware of men," they are the wolves, by the way, the metaphor is put aside and the reality is now given, "Beware of men, they will deliver you up to the courts and they will scourge you in their synagogues and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles."

Now He's talking here about the apostles of which Paul was to be one. Paul then is caught up in that prophecy and that pledge. And you want to know something? Paul was a living fulfillment of it, wasn't he? He was like a sheep in the midst of wolves. Everywhere he went they tried to devour him. They tried to eat him. They tried to destroy him. They delivered him to courts, did they not? Don't we see him in court after court after court in the book of Acts having to defend himself, having to answer some magistrate or some governor or some ruler and later on in the book of Acts some king whether it's Agrippa or Festus or Felix or whoever it is? He's always at some tribunal, eventually he's at Rome and he's put in prison there and later on back in prison in Rome again and he has to make another defense and nobody's there with him, as he says to Timothy. Was he scourged? Yes he was scourged, scourged in their synagogues you will be, and Paul was scourged five times and scourgings took place in the synagogues. "And you'll be brought before governors and kings for My sake." That is a prophecy, that's a prophecy Jesus gave of what's going to happen to the apostles. So look at Paul's life and if you want to ask whether he's an apostle, see if he fulfilled the prophecy.

The credentials of the man starts with his suffering cause that's exactly what Jesus said would be characteristic of the life of an apostle. That's what's true of him. Down in verse 34, well go back to verse 19 for a minute, I don't want to leave it yet. "When they deliver you up," literally a word meaning to deliver someone over to a sentencing, "When they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak, it will be given you in that hour what to speak." In other words, I'll be there with you and I'll put the words in your mouth. "It's not you who speaks, the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." This is a promise of inspiration to these apostles. "And brother will deliver up brother to death and a father his child and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You'll be hated on account of My name," and so forth. "And when they

persecute you in one place, go to the next place, just keep going." Verse 24 He says, "A disciple is not above his teacher nor a slave above his master." The point is, "If they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you. I'm your teacher, you're not going to be any different than Me. If I was your teacher and they hated Me, they're going to hate you because you're a reflection of what I taught. If I was your master and they hated Me, they're going to hate you because you're a reflection of what I commanded." Verse 25, "The disciple is going to be like his teacher, the slave is going to be like his master." That's not only true in the terms that you're going to behave like them, but you're going to be treated like them. So that's how it's going to be.

Turn to John 15 and in John 15 you have the pledge of the very same thing in another context. Later on in the life of Jesus He reaffirms these things to the apostles again in John 15 verse 18, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." Don't be surprised, that's how it's going to be. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you're not of the world, but I choose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." And then He reiterates what He said in Matthew, "Remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master, if they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you. If they kept My word, they'll keep yours also. All these things they'll do to you for My namesake because they do not know the One who sent Me. Because they reject Me, because they reject God, My Father, they're going to reject you because you preach about Me and about God, they're going to treat you the same way they treated Me. They hate My Father," He says in verse 23, "and they hate Me and they're going to hate you."

Chapter 16 verse 2, "They're going to make you outcasts from the synagogue. The hour is going to come when they think that they are doing service to God by killing you." And who did that? Who is the perfect illustration of that? Paul, he was a Jew who thought he was doing service to God by killing believers. He lived on both sides of that pledge. Chapter 16 ends, verse 33, "In the world you'll have trouble. Just remember, I've overcome the world."

Jesus made it very clear to the apostles that there was going to be a life of suffering. They were going to be before courts and judges and trials and kings, incarcerations and beatings. They were going to suffer immensely, they were going to be hated and resisted and resented. And that is the nature of the issue of ministry because what you're doing in ministry is you're taking the truth into the midst of lies, you're taking the message of God into the kingdom of darkness run by Satan and that creates a hostile reaction.

You say, "Well that's a very generic pledge to the apostles and Paul wasn't there." But he was one of the apostles, as you well know, so that certainly could extrapolate to refer to him. But if you want a specific one, go to Acts 9.



And here in Acts 9 is a specific prophecy given to Paul that indeed he would suffer. The Lord speaks to Ananias in whose house Paul was after, you remember, the Lord had struck him blind on the Damascus road and the Lord was working on him. Paul responding. And the Lord speaks to Ananias and says, "Paul is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." And immediately says this, He doesn't say, "I'll show how much success he'll have..." "I will show him how much he must...what?...suffer for My namesake." It's...it's the way it is. And how long did it take? Not long. Verse 22, "Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus was the Christ." And verse 23 tells us, "The Jews plotted together to do away with him." They wanted him dead. And that's the way it always was. It just really never was any different than that.

In the twentieth chapter of Acts, verse 22, Paul says, "I'm on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city saying that bonds and afflictions await me." I mean, that was the way he lived his life. I've often said that when he went into a town he didn't ask what the hotel was like, he asked what the jail was like because he knew that's where he'd end up. I mean, it was the working out of the principle of 2 Timothy 3:12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." But it was more than that, it was a specific apostolic prophecy. The false apostles had letters of commendation, they said, chapter 3 verse 1 of 2 Corinthians, but Paul had the scars of Jesus. Galatians 6:17, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ." You want some apostolic credentials? Let me take off my shirt and I'll show them to you, I'll show you my apostolic credentials. I'll show you the scars that I bear because of Jesus Christ.

So the first mark of his authenticity is his suffering. And it just...it was just a constant matter of his life. Chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians verse 4, affliction he mentions, affliction...all...he's only four verses into the epistle. Second Corinthians 1:4, affliction he mentions twice. Verse 5, sufferings abundant. Verse 6, afflicted, sufferings again. Verse 7, sufferings. Verse 8, affliction, burdened excessively. Verse 9, the sentence of death within ourselves. Verse 10, a great peril of death. And that's how it goes. Chapter 4 verse 8, "Afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed." Verse 10, "Always carrying in our body the dying of Jesus."

In other words, for the cause of Jesus knowing that every day could be your last, constantly being delivered over to death, death works in us...verse 12. Why? "Because I believe, therefore I spoke." And as long as he spoke exactly what he believed, he confronted the ungodly culture. He was on the brink of death every day. Chapter 6 same thing, verse 4, endurances and afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, hunger. That was his life. And in chapter 12 verse 10 he mentions insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties as a way of life.

So back to our text, 2 Corinthians 11. And I want to take our time through this, this is not something you can rush through, this is the man's life and there's so...there's so much example in here for all of us. He says, "I've been in far more labors and far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death." There's his first credential. Far more *kopiaos*, that's work to the point of sweat and exhaustion, labors. I've worked a lot harder and a lot more difficult situations. False teachers are just fat cats, they just get rich at other people's expense. They create a life of ease. They eliminate all trauma. Satan doesn't attack them because they're a part of his enterprise, understand that? There's a little principle to remember, in this life God does not do all of His judgment on the kingdom of darkness, that awaits the life to come, doesn't it? And so the kingdom of darkness does well in our society, it's taking over our culture, isn't it? Taking over our world, it already has. We see it expanding all the time while the church fights for its existence. That's because this is not the time when God is assaulting the kingdom of darkness. This is the time when the kingdom of darkness is assaulting God. And so we are the ones that find that our enterprise is difficult, Satan finds his relatively easy. He's dealing with the unconverted, the unregenerate and they fall wonderfully into place. False teachers flourish in the society in which we live. They flourish in our world run by Satan. They succeed. They become the fat cats. It's the people who confront the darkness and who give their life for the sake of the gospel that pay the price. They're the ones that experience the hostility. But forever we will be rewarded by the absence of that hostility and forever the ungodly and the false teachers will be rewarded by the presence of the fury of God.

So in verse 23 he says, "Far more labors, much harder work, far more imprisonments." The book of Acts only gives one of Paul's imprisonments, it's in the sixteenth chapter. It's when he was put in prison in Philippi. He was beaten up pretty badly, he and Silas. And then they were put in stocks. Stocks were wooden, just like you'd think they would be, and they...in ancient stocks they stretched, they had a series of holes, depending on the size of the man, they'd stretch his arms and his legs as wide as they could and then lock them in that extreme stretched position so that the agony would be excruciating. It wasn't just like this with your hands hanging through the stocks as sometimes you see depicted in the Salem witch trials. But this was an extreme agony and the tight muscles, the cramping. He had experienced that imprisonment and it's recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. That's the only one in the book of Acts really, that's the only specific imprisonment discussed. He is prophesied in Acts 20, as we just read, that he's going to be put in chains and in prison when he gets to Jerusalem. And we do know that when he got to Jerusalem he did have an incarceration there and the Romans were trying to figure out what to do with him because of the riot that started in the temple. And eventually they took him to Caesarea and he was kept in Caesarea for a while. So those...those imprisonments are referred to but we don't know any details about them. We also know that that imprisonment at Rome at the end of the book of Acts in chapter 28 was an imprisonment where he wasn't actually in a dungeon or a cell but that he had a guard that was there guarding him

all the time but he had a certain amount of freedom. It was an imprisonment but it was a modified one. Later on there was another imprisonment in Rome at which time he was beheaded according to tradition and his life was ended. So we do know there were a couple of Roman imprisonments, there was a time in Caesarea when he was incarcerated there waiting to go to trial in Rome for two years, and there was the time in Jerusalem that was predicted in Acts chapter 20 and there was the Philippian imprisonment. But there were more than that. We don't know how many imprisonments there actually were. Clement writing in A.D. 96 says that Paul was in prison seven times. And, of course, in A.D. 96 they'd have a pretty good idea because it would have been passed down from mouth to mouth, at that time John, they believe, wrote the Apocalypse, the book of Revelation, A.D. 96, or he...one of the apostles would have still even been alive and traditions would have been pretty accurate. So he was in prison very, very often and always for the cause of Christ, always for the preaching of the gospel.

Along with his imprisonments, it says, he was beaten times without number. He couldn't count them, the beatings. In the sixteenth chapter of Acts, the Philippian imprisonment, and verse 22, it says he was beaten with rods, and verse 23, they inflicted on him many blows, is what it says. Verse 24 tells us about some of the beatings. Five times the Jews gave him 39 lashes. Three times the Romans, Gentiles, beating with rods, that's eight times. We don't know how many more times. He says he can't even count them. He gives you some illustrations, there's at least eight...five times from the Jews, three times from the Romans, but I can't count all the beatings I've had, many more not recorded. Acts is very selective, by the way. When you go through the book of Acts, very, very selective. It gives summations and selected illustrations, not at all comprehensive of all of the events in the life of Paul. The man suffered incredibly.

At the end of verse 23 he says he was often in danger of death. How often? Every day, every day. First Corinthians 15:31 he says, "I die daily." I've heard people spiritualize that and say you need to die to self daily. Well I understand the spiritual meaning of that but that's not what Paul was saying. Paul was saying I die daily in this sense, I live through my death every day because I realize every day could be my death. You know, if you know you're going to die and you start to anticipate the reality of death, you live through that death mentally, emotionally. And he lived through it every single day...every single day he knew could be his last. Everybody was plotting to kill him. From back in Acts 9 which I read to you earlier, when he had been preaching around Damascus, it says in verse 23 that the Jews plotted together to do away with him. In verse 29 it says he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews and they were attempting to put him to death. Later on we find the Nabatean Arabians who were...had a colony in the city, came along with the Jews and joined the Jews together to try to put him to death. And those people weren't...weren't even a part of the Jewish community. And then it was in chapter 13 they were trying to kill him. And then chapter 14 of Acts they tried to kill him. And then chapter 17 they tried to kill him. And then chapter 21 they tried to kill

him. I mean, he lived his whole life like that and that's what he was referring to earlier in chapter 4, which I read to you, when he said he had the sentence of death on himself every day...every single day he knew could be his last. Riots started when he preached. Whole stadiums of people came after him. Rulers tried to kill him. He had to be hustled away. He even gives an incident at the end of this chapter which we'll describe where he had to be...he had to be taken out of Damascus by putting...by a basket taken out over the window that dropped out over the city wall, lowered in a basket to escape with his life. And that was at the beginning of his ministry, I would say a rather defining moment.

It's the way it always was. He faced death every day. He lived on the edge of life, never wavered in his commitment, never ever changed his message, never tried to cover up the truth. You see, prosperity, popularity and acceptance are usually the marks of compromise. If the society likes you, there must be compromise somewhere. You expect the kingdom of darkness to be hostile, don't you? You expect those who hate the truth and hate the God of the truth and the Christ of the truth to be hostile. False teachers, as I said, they're the fat cats, they're the prosperous, they're the successful, they're the popular, they're accepted because they're part of the evil system itself.

In verse 24 he gets a little more definitive in his summation. "Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes." Just a little Jewish history here for a minute. The Jews didn't have penitentiaries, prisons. That was not a Jewish idea. The Jews had a very good system of dealing with wickedness. If the crime was wicked enough, the perpetrator was executed immediately, end of issue and a strong message is sent when justice is swift and final. However, if there was a lesser offense than a capital offense, Deuteronomy chapter 25 verses 1 to 5 prescribed this very lashing. It was in the Deuteronomic law, the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy God prescribed it. And in that passage it says, "Don't give more than 40 blows less the person be degraded." Isn't that interesting? There was a certain amount of honor in committing a crime, taking your hits, making restitution and going on with your life. You made it right, you took your blows, and you went on with life.

We exercise that all the time with our children. The Bible advocates, "Spare the rod and...what?...spoil the child." Use corporeal punishment on a child, there's a certain dignity in taking your lumps and making restitution for what you've done wrong and going on with your dignity. It was the Quakers in our country that started penitentiaries and they started them because they thought that if people who did wicked things just sat around long enough they'd think about what they did and be sorry. That's why they called them penitentiaries because they thought they'd make people penitent. They don't, as we well know. And there's never any restitution. And judgment is not swift and corporeal.

But that's what was done in ancient Israel. And so when there was a certain crime committed of significant nature, the Jews were still allowed, although they had not allowed...they were not allowed to execute a person any longer, the Romans wouldn't give them that right, they had to go to the Romans. That's why they had to go to the Romans to have Jesus executed. They still had the right to do this and there would be...there would be a master of the synagogue, he was called, because this would be done in the synagogue. This is church discipline corporeally. And the master of the synagogue, according to the Mishnah which is the codification of Jewish law, this is how it went. The punishment would be brought out in this manner, the victim would put his two hands wide and they would be attached to pillars or posts on either side, so they'd be stretched like this.... The chest and back would be bared to the waist. Behind the man would be a large stone on the ground, elevating the master of the synagogue who would inflict the blows so that he had leverage and could reach clear across the shoulders so that he could whip the chest as well. And he would be able to keep his footing on that stone. An instrument of a thick strap of cowhide split into three six-inch strands, and then thickened somehow, was used in this whipping. One third of the blows had to be delivered on the chest and two thirds of the blows on the back and the shoulders. And it was required by the Mishnah that the master use one hand and this was his trade so he was good at it, use one hand and hit every one of the hits with all his might. And the Mishnah provided that if the victim died, the scourger bore no guilt. Forty was the limit of blows to create these welts and sometimes cuts on the body. But the traditional way of the Jews was to stop at 39 in case they might have muffed up on the count, they didn't want to break the law in their fastidiousness, so they stopped at 39. Fastidious about the law, they were busy beating the prophets this way, according to Matthew chapter 23 verse 34, Jesus said, "You beat the prophets like this." They beat all the wrong people and here they are beating the apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul himself. All those permanent welts and scars all over his body that he got from those...those, what would it be, a hundred and ninety-five lashes, leaving scars all over his body were what he was meaning in Galatians 6:17 when he said, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ." They would all be trophies of his devotion to Jesus Christ. If anybody asked him if he was sold out to Christ, you just take off his tunic that would be enough.

You see, that is the badge of his apostleship. And the question for the false apostles is, "Where are your scars?" Because if they hated Jesus, they're going to hate who represents Him. Have they hated you? Where are your scars? Where is the hostility in your ministry? Where are your detractors? Where are your enemies? Where are the people trying to destroy you? Trying to undermine you? Where are they? Because if you represent Jesus, they hated Him, they'll hate you. They resented Him, they'll resent you. In verse 25 he says, "I...I was beaten with rods three times," this is what the Romans did, they got these flexible sticks, rough sticks, flexible sticks and they just bound them all together and they used it as a...as a whip, like a whip but it would inflict a blow for each stick that touched the skin. That's what happened to him in Acts 16 at the Philippian jail. Verse 22 says he was beaten with rods. That's what they did to him there. That was one of the three times. And this...you're talking about five times he had been lashed, three times he had been beaten with rods and this is before he wrote 2 Corinthians and he still has more ministry after that. This is just up

to this point.

And he adds also in verse 25, "Once I was stoned," that was at Lystra, you can read about it in Acts 14:19, he was stoned. They were so made at him for preaching the gospel and this wasn't a Jewish anger, this was a Gentile environment. They took him out of the city and they stoned him. What they would do in stoning a person was drop him off of an edge like this...down below and then they would just get on top and just smash down large boulders to crush him. And they...it says in Acts 14:19, that they supposed he was dead. They surmised he was dead. He probably was not dead because the verb "supposing" usually in the New Testament means to surmise something that is not true. And if he was dead then he would have had to be raised from the dead because he got up and went on preaching, as you know and resurrection wouldn't be minimized. No resurrection in the book of Acts is presented ambiguously. There is a resurrection of Dorcas and it's not ambiguous. There's a resurrection of Eutychus, you know, who fell asleep during a sermon and died, fell out the window and died. There should be severe punishment on anybody who does that, actually. (Laughter) They went down there, raised him from the dead, brought him back up. So none of the resurrections in the book of Acts are ambiguous. It would be...it would be impossible to believe that Paul had actually had a resurrection and it was treated with ambiguity. So the fact that it doesn't identify a resurrection indicates probably wasn't one. Also, people often think that in chapter 12 here where he talks about when he went to heaven fourteen years ago, the fourteen years ago would have been much earlier than the time he was at Lystra so that wouldn't be the incident that qualified. So all we can say was he was stoned but didn't die and he was left for dead. They literally tried to crush his life out, came within a perhaps a few breaths of dying under the blood...the bloody crushing, but he survived.

Then he says, "Three times I was shipwrecked." Now the best we can add them up, take my word for it, probably took about twenty voyages, about nine of them before he wrote 2 Corinthians and 9 or 10 of them afterwards. We know the ones that he took before 2 Corinthians, they're recorded in the book of Acts chapter 9, 11, 13, chapter 14, 16, 17 and 18. You see he's going here and there in these ships and out of those nine voyages and maybe some others that he took, he had three shipwrecks. Shipwrecks were very common in those days. And he had those shipwrecks. On one of those... and by the way, that does not include the shipwreck in Acts 27 which was much later in his life and a number of other, probably at least nine or ten more journeys by ship that he took after he wrote 2 Corinthians which would add to the twenty. Just in the first half of that he had had three shipwrecks, so, you know, there's about a thirty-three and a third percent you get on a ship you're going to have a shipwreck. I mean, that's pretty bad odds. But the man...the man had to go where he had to go because he was under mandate from God. And one of those shipwrecks, he says, I spent a night and a day in the deep.

What does he mean? He means that for 24 hours he was hanging on to a piece of wreckage in the middle of the sea before he was rescued. Acts doesn't tell us about that. In fact it doesn't tell us about a lot of things. This is just a summation. It's just a brief summation of what the man went through. I can't...I can't force myself to rush through this. This is his life. This...I mean, he lived this, I can't pass it by lightly, that's why I'm having such a hard time getting pass this. It's going to take us a while to work through these things because I want you to really understand what he endured. But are you beginning to see that this is the stuff that marked him out as a true preacher? Because he fulfilled prophecies that Jesus made of what would happen to the apostles, because he fulfilled a prophecy directly given by Jesus in Damascus to Ananias of what would happen to him and how much he would suffer, because it is only reasonable to assume that a man of great power and uncompromising conviction and preaching clarity who confronts the kingdom of darkness is going to get this kind of reaction? And in those times there's a tougher world. Today I think if you're as faithful as Paul was then, you're going to get the same kind of reaction, it just can't be carried out in the same way. We're a bit more refined in our hostility today. But the hostility is still there. Sometimes, however, when I read these things about Paul, I feel absolutely useless, worthless, like I haven't even begun to understand what the price of ministry is.

This man got exactly what he should have expected to get from the world around him, just exactly what His Savior, His Lord got, right? And that was the mark of his true apostleship. You say you're a servant of Jesus Christ, show me your scars, show me the hostility, show me the rejection, show me the alienation, show me what it's meant in your family. You took a stand for a spiritual scriptural principle even in the Christian family and your family didn't like it? That's a scar. You proclaim Jesus Christ in an unbelieving environment and you suffer for it. Maybe you didn't get a promotion. Maybe you got alienated. Maybe you didn't get the grade you should have gotten in a class because you wrote a paper that advocated what the Bible teaches about a certain issue, not what the professor things. That's a scar. These are more civil times, I suppose, in some way, although they're fast becoming rather uncivilized, it appears. We may all be finding that out in the next quarter of a century, or less. But Paul says, "I'm an apostle, far more than you and here are my scars to prove it." You cannot live a life uncompromisingly confronting the kingdom of darkness and not have some scars to show. And those are your badge of authenticity.

Father, thank You for the insight You've given us into this amazing and incredible man. What a model he is for us and we feel, as I said, like nothing, so small, who have suffered so little and he suffered so much. But there was so much joy in it for him because of what you were accomplishing through him. He could say rejoice always and again I say rejoice, in everything give thanks. We thank You for his example. Thank You for his humility in the midst of his boasting. Yes he's boasting about his superior credentials but they're just evidences of his humility. He thought nothing of himself but literally gave himself away, enduring whatever came because he cared more about the truth and about the Savior. Give us that courage and those convictions and while we speak the truth in love

and compassion, we speak it unequivocally, uncompromisingly no matter what the price. Give us some of those scars that indicate that we indeed bear the marks of Jesus Christ. If You were here they would treat You just like they did the first time. And since we're Your servants, and You're our teacher, we expect to be treated that way too. Lord, that can't be mitigated unless we compromise the truth which is to abandon our calling and our faithfulness. Keep us faithful, Lord, give us great opportunity, give us some fruit and some joy and some reward along with the difficulties even as You did Paul whose heart rejoiced in his crown of rejoicing, even those who had come to faith through his ministry. We thank You for these things in Christ's name. Amen.

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