HOW TO NAVIGATE NEGATIVE WORLD

Pastor: Josh McPherson

Text: Acts 22:30–23:11

Big Idea: How to navigate negative world reality → **Roll hot. Live clean**

The reality of Negative World

- There are three epochs of evangelical reality in America:
  - **Positive world** — everyone loved us
  - **Neutral world** — nobody cared about us
  - **Negative world** — everybody hates us

Two commands for navigating negative world

- **Roll hot**
- **Live clean**

Text setup: Acts 22:30–23:1

- Paul has been arrested. He was stretched out and they were ready to whip him.
- He revealed that he was a Roman citizen.
- So he released him and ordered the chief priests and the Sanhedrin to assemble.
- He brought Paul and had him stand before them.
- Paul is now standing before his accusers.

ROLL HOT

Roll Hot — Way Number One: Stand Tall

Text: Acts 23:1

- "Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, 'My brothers…'"
- The first way to roll hot in a negative world reality is:
    - **stand tall**

Key emphasis

- Many Christians are making it their highest aim to scrunch down, not stand tall.
- The instinct is:
    - keep your head down, keep your mouth shut, don't rock the boat
- Paul's answer would be: **Why?**

Supporting argument

- Silence in the face of evil is to participate in and perpetuate that evil.
- Why keep your head down when God calls you to stick your head up?

Key emphasis

- Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin.
- He could have taken an off-ramp.
- In the next six chapters, multiple off-ramps are available.
- He could have lived a long, happy life if he had just caved a little.
- All he had to do was:
    - compromise a little
    - sit down
    - shut up
    - make it go away

Supporting argument

- One tactic of the enemy in negative world is to make believers think:

    - they will be happier if they shut up
    - compromise is the easier road
    - appeasement is the godly way

Analogy: Chamberlain doctrine

- Like Chamberlain with Hitler:
    - "He's not that big a deal."
    - "He's a good guy."
    - "I had dinner with him."

- Meanwhile, Hitler is lying to his face.
- Either Chamberlain was:
    - woefully ignorant or intentionally ignorant

- The same thing is happening in the church:
    - people are pretending Satan's work in the culture is not that serious

Illustration: Blitzkrieg

- Military experts thought Hitler was months away.
- The next week Nazi tanks were rolling by the Eiffel Tower.
- That is how Satan is moving now: hard, fast, covering huge ground
- The world of 5 or 10 years ago is different.
- Some old sermons age well because they are the Word of God.
- Others are irrelevant because the world has changed.

Key emphasis

- There is a demonic blitzkrieg running across the country.
- Pastors are wondering:
    - why people no longer come to church
    - why they get shot at all the time
    - why they are no longer liked in the community

- They are like people in Paris thinking Hitler is still five months away when he is already in the streets.

We are at war.

- Paul knows exactly what he is doing.
- He could have kept his head down.
- He could have taken the appeasement route.
- He could have said things that lowered the temperature.
- Instead, he is rolling hot.

To live in negative world reality, be willing to: Stand tall, be unashamed, be unapologetic.

Roll Hot — Way Number Two: Shoot Straight

Text: Acts 23:1

Supporting observation

- Paul is not muttering.
- He is not kicking his shoes.
- He is not apologizing.
- He knows exactly what he is saying and who he is saying it to

Supporting argument

- The word for "duty" is tied to the same idea we get politics from.
- Paul is saying:
    - I am fulfilling my civic duty to God
    - I am faithfully living out my heavenly citizenship before you

Paul is going to deliver the goods again, and they are going to have to deal with it.

Paul is never on the defensive. He is always fighting down the hill. He is always on the offensive.

- Paul never carried the burden of proof to defend Jesus.
- He put that burden on them.
- He is saying:
    - you defend your rebellion
    - you defend your rejection of Jesus
    - you defend your false interpretation of the law
    - you defend your self-righteousness
    - you defend your legalism
    - you defend your rejection of the one God sent

Roll Hot — Way Number Three: Punch Back

Text: Acts 23:2–5

- The high priest Ananias orders those near Paul to strike him in the mouth.
- Paul says:
    - "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall."
    - "You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck."

Key emphasis

- Paul is not rolling over, apologizing.
- Paul is using: logic, rhetoric, and the law to punch back.
- Paul is not playing softball. He is throwing darts.

Supporting argument

- Christians, pastors, and churches must develop a stomach for what it means to:
    - be in the world, not of the world, love Jesus, love people, turn the other cheek when necessary, punch back when necessary

Clarification

- This is not about physically punching people. It is about not being afraid to stand and say:
    - "You whitewashed wall."

- "You are violating the very law you claim to represent."

Key emphasis

- Paul had:
  - not been judged
  - had no trial
  - had no evidence presented

- There were only:
  - wild accusations
  - sweeping accusations
  - baseless accusations

- On that basis they would physically mar him in court.

- Paul says: "I will not have that."

6. Roll Hot — Way Number Four: Don't Apologize

Text: Acts 23:4–5

- Those standing near Paul say:
  - "How dare you insult God's high priest?"

Clarification

- In general, Christians should seek forgiveness and extend forgiveness
- Not asking for forgiveness can reflect pride.
- Withholding forgiveness pulls the bitterness of hell into life like a cancer.
- So yes: ask forgiveness and extend forgiveness because Christians have been forgiven much

That is different from apologizing for things the culture says are wrong simply because we want the pressure to go away.
Don't apologize for things Jesus wouldn't apologize for.

- Many theologians and commentators say Paul misstated things here or apologized.
- Some say that Paul's eyesight was poor and he did not realize it was the high priest

- Others say:
    - Paul had been away traveling and did not know Ananias had become high priest

Supporting argument against that reading

- Paul was sharp .His rhetorical abilities were second to none. He was not a man known for firing from the hip and then backpedaling. That is not Paul's normal mode.
- The point is:
    - that man is not honorable
    - which is why Paul called him a whitewashed wall

If you start apologizing for things Jesus does not apologize for, you are not on Jesus' team.

Roll Hot — Way Number Five: Be Shrewd

Text: Acts 23:6–10

- Paul knows:
    - some are Sadducees and some are Pharisees

- So he calls out:
    - "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."

Immediate result

- A dispute breaks out between the Pharisees and Sadducees and the assembly is divided.

Summary of Paul's movement

- Paul says:
    - I have obeyed my duty as a citizen of heaven
    - I have obeyed my conscience before God

- They slap him.
  He says:

    - "God will judge you."

- They demand apology.
- He replies in a way that exposes Ananias.
- Then, before they can think, he punches again with one sentence.
- Now the whole mob is fighting itself.
- Paul is brilliant.

The Pharisees stand up and argue vigorously:

    - "We find nothing wrong with this man."
    - "What if a spirit or angel has spoken to him?"

- The dispute becomes violent.
- The commander is afraid Paul will be torn to pieces.
- The troops go down, take Paul away by force, and bring him into the barracks.

Once again, Paul throws a wrench into their plan.

- They were about to have their little monkey trial and condemn him.
- He interrupts it by being tall, straight, forceful, unapologetic, and shrewd

LIVE CLEAN

Live Clean — Way Number One: Do Your Duty

Text: Acts 23:1

- "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty…"

Question pressed in the sermon

- Have you considered that you have a duty you are obliged to fulfill in your allegiance to Jesus?

Clarification

- "Jesus loves me" is gloriously true.

- And having been recruited into the army of God as a heavenly citizen, you have a duty to fulfill.

Key emphasis

- Not duty in the negative sense, duty in the honorable sense
- You have been invited onto a team.
- You have been given responsibilities to carry out and fulfill.
- No one is uniquely fitted as you are to do them.

Key emphasis

- Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to give you a deep-seated sense of duty.

- "I have a duty I am willing to lay my life down to accomplish in living faithfully for the one, the only, the true, the noble, the glorious, the holy King of kings."

Key emphasis

- No soldier whose heart has been given in allegiance to the king ever did his duty grumbling. So do not hear duty as grumble-duty.
- Hear it as honor-duty.

Applications

- Follow Jesus faithfully.
- Serve Jesus passionately.
- Pursue him relentlessly.

Illustration / quotation

- From *The Pursuit of God*:
    - "It is the Christian's privilege to know the mystery of having found God yet still pursue him."

Wake up and ask Jesus for strength to joyfully do your job.

Clarification

- Christianity is centered in relationship not box-checking religion. But do not lose the sense of holy duty to a worthy King.

Live Clean — Way Number Two: Heed Your Conscience

Text: Acts 23:1

- "I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."

Key emphasis

- From the time Jesus knocked Paul off his horse and gave him something to do, Paul has lived to maintain a clear conscience.
- He is saying: As of this moment, to this day, I have lived in a way that maintains a clear conscience before God
- That could change tomorrow.
- It could change in that moment if he failed to:
    - stand tall
    - shoot straight
    - deliver the goods
    - punch back
    - refuse to apologize for God

Christian conscience is right at the heart of Christian living.

- Paul mentions conscience:
    - twice in Acts
    - no less than 26 times in his letters

Four things to understand about conscience

1. Conscience is given by God as an internal steering mechanism

- It is a gift from God.
- It is intended to steer you through life, through decisions, through temptation, through the minefield of daily choices

2. Conscience can be shaped or warped depending on the most consistent input

- It can be shaped by the Word of God.
- It can be warped by:
    - the spirit of the age
    - the world
- It is aligning your actions with your values.

3. Conscience is subordinate to the Word of God

- You cannot disconnect conscience from the Word of God and trust it.

Illustration: Obama

- When asked about the definition of sin, he said something like:
    - disconnecting conscience from inner values
- There is a nugget of truth in that.
- But the fatal problem is:
    - by what standard are those inner values measured?

Supporting argument

- If sin is simply violating personal conscience in relation to personal values, then sin becomes anything that is not true to yourself.
- That collapses morality into self.
- Obama once supported "traditional marriage."
- Then shifted as soon as he got into office.
- If internal values shift, conscience shifts.
- That proves conscience is no help if values are shaped by:

    - the world, the spirit of the age, the flesh, instead of the Word of God.

This is not just about Obama.

- How many times have your values been shaped by:
    - your own thinking
    - selfish proclivities

- So much so that your conscience is seared?
- So much so that obeying Jesus almost feels like sin because it violates your "true self"?

That is how America got to the crazy house.

Supporting theology

- The more conscience is shaped by the world and self, the less it can be trusted.
- The more mind and heart are shaped by the Word of God, the more conscience can be trusted.
- Romans 1 and 2 teach that all men have a built-in conscience so no one is without excuse.

4. Conscience can be suppressed by sins and sharpened with obedience

- Ongoing repeated sin can suppress the voice of conscience, the sharpness of conscience, and the agility of conscience
- **Obedience sharpens conscience.**

Three Ways Conscience Helps

1. Matters of conscience remind us where God's moral law is clear

- As you read the Word… sit under good preaching… study the Word in Stronger Man or Noble Women… read it with family… do devotions…nyou build the internal steering mechanism to hear the voice of God more clearly.

Application

- Then when temptation presents itself, conscience reminds you:
    - God has already spoken on this

- Example given:

    - there is never confusion in temptation over whether lust is allowed

- As soon as temptation comes:
    - "God is clear on this."
- Then a decision must be made. By grace, the more obedience is chosen, the sharper conscience becomes.
- The sharper conscience becomes, the greater the joy in obedience.

2. Matters of conscience guide us where God's moral law is silent

- There are modern issues with no direct verse attached.
- Example:
    - "Should you let your kids go to prom?"

- There may not be one proof-text answer.
- But conscience, shaped by Scripture, synthesizes biblical principles and drips wisdom into life.

That leads a believer one way rather than another in relation to purity, culture, common patterns and outcomes. That is where the Spirit of God works.

Key emphasis

- Rarely take strong positions on issues of conscience in a way that unnecessarily binds another person's conscience. But do fuel the fire of biblical principles so conscience wakes up.
- Some parents are simply going through life naïvely:
    - "We did it, so you do it."
- Meanwhile, they are fertilizing struggles in their children with poor choices and weak boundaries.

Cultivate a sensitive conscience to God.

3. Matters of conscience move us toward righteous living before God

- Christian conscience is guiding every waking moment.

- It is unhelpful when Christians legalistically bind other people's consciences over things that should not bind them.

- It is just as unhelpful when Christians turn the volume down on conscience through foolish behavior and maybe sinful decisions until there is no sensitivity left to the voice of God.

Nothing good ever comes from violating your conscience.

Live Clean — Way Number Three: Remember You're Bulletproof

Text: Acts 23:11

- "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify about me in Rome.'"

Key emphasis

- Jesus is telling Paul "You may be tempted to be discouraged, you may be tempted to think this is a waste of time, you may be tempted to think this is unjust, you may be tempted to be fearful but… **take courage"**

What Jesus is saying

- They may hold positions of power. But Jesus is the one in ultimate authority.
- Do not be:
    - overwhelmed by them
    - impressed by them
    - discouraged by them
- Jesus sits enthroned in the heavens.

If you are rolling hot and living clean, you are bulletproof until God is done with you.

<u>Do not give God a reason to take you home early.</u>

“Lord, if I start to fall, just take me.”

- **Roll hot.**
- **Live clean.**
- **You are bulletproof until Jesus is done with you.**

Application

- Wake up tomorrow, do your duty, heed your conscience, remember you are bulletproof until God is done with you, then you get to go home.
- Do not give God a reason to take you home early.
- Be excited for the day that he does.

Condensed Sermon flow

1. Negative World Is Here

- Positive World
- Neutral World
- Negative World

2. Two Commands

- Roll Hot
- Live Clean

3. Five Ways To Roll Hot

- Stand Tall
- Shoot Straight
- Punch Back
- Don’t Apologize
- Be Shrewd

4. Three Ways To Live Clean

- Do Your Duty
- Heed Your Conscience
- Remember You're Bulletproof