

PAUL'S TRIALS (1)

ACTS 22, 23



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Paul's Trials (1): Acts 22, 23
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Introduction to Acts 22, 23

Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth advising them that he was planning to head their way after he delivered the gift to the Christians in Jerusalem (Rom. 15).

He was right, but he could not have imagined how King Jesus would accomplish that journey.

Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, and subsequent deliverance to Caesarea, is a study in the grace of God. God uses even His enemies to accomplish His purposes. We can't always see the ways God's sovereignty is being expressed, but we can always *rely* on it. He does all things well and for our good, even if the road is a little bumpy along the way.

Just ask Paul.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Paul's Testimony

Psalm 71.1-3.

In You, O LORD, I put my trust;
Let me never be put to shame.
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save me,
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

Sing Psalm 71.1-3.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

In You, O Lord, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.
Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Read and meditate on Acts 22.1-21

Preparation

1. What did Paul tell the Jews about his background?
2. What happened to him as he went to Damascus?

Meditation

We can go quickly here, for much of this is familiar ground. For the Jews, the masses were tools to manipulate for their own purposes. For the Romans, they were rabble to be controlled or brutalized. For Paul they were men and women made in the image of God, with reasonable souls, who deserved a fair opportunity to hear the Good News.

No hard feelings, just the facts: Paul related his story about coming to faith in Jesus. A simple outline: here's who I was (vv. 3-5, 20), here's what happened to me (vv. 6-16), and here's why I'm doing what I'm doing now (vv. 17-21). Paul cited his past work as a persecutor of the Christians, which many present would have remembered. (vv. 3-5). He then explained that, without seeking it, he received a revelation from Jesus, which amounted to a call to repentance and faith and an appointment to service (vv. 6-16). Finally, telling it "slant" (Emily Dickinson), he identified his audience with an earlier one by reporting that the Lord (v. 19) had indicated they would not receive Paul's testimony. Then he "blew that room away" (as we shall see) by mentioning the Gentiles (v. 21).

No one can gainsay our experience of what Christ has done for us. We know Him. We know His Presence, blessings, power, promises, Word, Spirit, truth, and love. We need to be ready to explain our hope whenever people ask a reason for it (1 Pet. 3.15) – and, sometimes, even when they don't. Paul relied on his testimony on more than one occasion. This suggests that we should, too.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

In Paul's testimony he recounts "a great light from heaven shone around me" (Acts 22.6), and then goes on to say that he was blinded, or could not see, "for the glory of that light" (Acts 22.11). In many respects he was

repeating what David wrote, "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" (Ps. 36.9).

His was a glorious transformation with an immediate change in the direction of his life (Acts 22.18, 21).

Ananias told him that God had chosen him: 1. To know His will. 2. To see the Just One. 3. To hear the voice of His mouth. 4. To be His witness to all people of what he had seen and heard (Acts 22.14, 15).

Not everyone has such a dramatic testimony. But each testimony is as exciting in its own way as this one. Why? Because each of us has been called to the exact same mission.

So many people think that their testimony is not a good one because they might not have had a huge before and after story. The godliest person I ever knew, with an active witness, who was called by the Lord to "unseat the saints", and share Christ with those who needed to hear, said that she "could not remember a day in her life that she did not love Jesus." But love Him, she did. And she served Him wholeheartedly all the days of her life. Pat Hunter did not have a dramatic testimony. What she had was a dramatic life, filled with the overwhelming love of Jesus. Her life was not an easy life. And frankly, I wondered how she could handle all the family issues, and health issues that she did. But to know her, you knew a little bit about what being near Jesus is like.

So each one of us has a testimony. And it may be as exciting as Pat's, or it may be like Paul's; but each of us has decided to follow Jesus. And our history of how that happened affirms it to us. No turning back.

"Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God" (Josh. 23.11).

And the same question posed to Paul is also asked of us: "And now why are you waiting?" (Acts 22.16)

We are called into our Personal Mission Field to be His witness of all that we have seen and heard (Acts 22.15). How we came to this truth is important because it is our story. And the way it came to be ours may be helpful to guide someone else into God's truth. For in His illuminating light, we saw His light, and now long to proclaim this Light to others.

For reflection

1. Following Paul's example, what are the main points of your coming to faith in Jesus? Or perhaps your testimony is more like Pat Hunter's?
2. Sharing your testimony is no guarantee people will believe in Jesus. But why is sharing your testimony important?
3. If you could choose one verse of Scripture to "hang" your testimony on, what would it be? Why?

A simple relation of the Lord's dealings with us, in bringing us, from opposing, to profess and promote his gospel, when delivered in a right spirit and manner, will sometimes make more impression than labored speeches, even though it amounts not to the full proof of the truth, such as was shown in the change wrought in the apostle. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 22.1-11

Pray Psalm 71.12-16.

As you prepare for the day, seek the Lord's grace and protection, as well as His Presence, wisdom, and boldness to work your Personal Mission Field for Christ and His Kingdom. Ask Him to give you opportunities to talk about Jesus today.

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Sing Psalm 71.12-16, 3.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

O God be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!
Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain

2 One Cool Roman

Pray Psalm 52.1, 2.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God *endures* continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

Sing Psalm 52.1, 2.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Read Acts 22.1-29; meditate on verses 22-29.

Preparation

1. Why did the Romans not flog Paul?
2. How would you describe Paul's demeanor in these verses?

Meditation

Paul's mention of "Gentiles" sent the Jews into a rage again, and they demanded that he should not live (v. 22). Their demonstration of rage might seem silly to us, but it indicated they were deadly serious (v. 23). So the Romans took Paul into the barracks and prepared to flog him (v. 24). Here we get a look at Roman hinterland justice: Beat the truth out of them. Inquiries, deliberations, hearings – all that takes time. Just flog 'em 'til they 'fess up. Paul was familiar with that protocol and played the Roman citizenship card more forcefully than before: "Is it lawful..." (v. 25)

Cool and patient, he asked a simple question (v. 25). It startled the centurion to think he was about to beat a Roman who had not been tried and condemned (v. 26). So he went to the commander and reported what he had learned.

The commander was apparently not a very good listener. Or else he had a short memory (cf. 21.38, 39). Paul had already explained that he was a citizen, meaning a Roman citizen in good standing. Paul was born into citizenship; he didn't have to buy his way into it, like the commander (v. 28). He would make the Romans live by their own code or risk the consequences of violating it. It was a fearful thing to find oneself at odds with Roman justice.

Paul had earlier written that government is God's servant for good (Rom. 13.1-4). But it takes good citizens to make government do what's right and good. It was not good that Paul should be flogged or turned over to the Jews. He would make Roman government serve God's good purposes by invoking Roman law and public policy to the advantage of the Gospel.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!'" (Acts 22.22)

Is there anything about that verse that strikes a familiar chord?
Is this same thing happening now in the world?
Is there any place for this kind of intolerance from the people of God?

As Christians, mobs and violence and words of hatred have No place in our lives. None. Christians are not the cancel culture! Christians must not hate others. Ever. Yes, we are to hate evil; but that starts first in our own lives:

“You who love the LORD, hate evil!” (Ps. 97.10) In your own heart.

“Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.” (Ps. 119.104) In my own life.

“I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law.” (Ps. 119.113) Bifurcated thinking in my own mind.

“I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law.” (Ps. 119.163) Untruths coming from my own mouth.

A very effective way to deal with evil in the world is for Christian people to keep God's Law. Themselves.

“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.” (Prov. 28. 4)

Imagine the power for good we could have against evil if we, as the Body of Christ, were just obedient to His Law.

It is those without the power of the Holy Spirit who rage against goodness. Just like those folks who were out to end Paul's testimony and his life.

But that murderous attitude must not come from us!

We certainly are allowed to take a stand for righteousness. If we don't, who will? It is the means and the attitude that we employ that is key: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6.8) Justice, mercy, and humility do not tear off clothes or throw dust in the air. (Acts 22.23)

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matt. 5.44, 45) Love, blessing, good deeds, and prayer are the antithesis of imprisonments and scourgings. (Acts 22.24, 25)

Does this kind of intolerance ever take place within the church? Sadly, it does. But has no place there either.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 Jn. 4.7, 8)

Standing strong and firm for the Law of God never looks like what happened to Paul. Or to Jesus. Or to Stephen. Or to any other persecuted Christian throughout all of history. Past, present, future.

Standing strong for righteousness looks exactly like Jesus, and Paul, and Stephen. None were afraid to speak the truth. They were courageous and bold. Heroes of the faith.

And none of them ever summoned a mob or persecuted others for disagreeing with them.

“The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4.18).

For reflection

1. The Scriptures teach us to be angry, but not to sin (Ps. 4.4). How can we keep our anger from causing us to fail in loving our neighbors?

2. What does it mean to “hate evil”? What should you do if you discover any evil in your life?

3. What is your responsibility in helping government to be God's servant for good?

Paul pleaded his privilege as a Roman citizen, by which he was exempted from all trials and punishments which might force him

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to confess himself guilty. The manner of his speaking plainly shows what holy security and serenity of mind he enjoyed. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 22.22-30

Pray Psalm 52.3-9.

Pray that God will restrain wickedness all over the world, and that He will strengthen His saints by His Presence with them today. Pray for His Presence to be near you throughout this day as you work your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 52.3-9.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

"But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!"

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

3 The Law in Their Face

Pray Psalm 7.17.

I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness,
And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Sing Psalm 7.17.

(Finlandia: [Be Still My Soul](#))

All praise and thanks to You, O righteous Savior!
My hope, my trust, my confidence are You!
Embrace me with Your kindness and Your favor,
and to Your glory make me ever true.
We sing Your praise and glorify Your Name,
Who brings our foes to judgment and to shame.

Read Acts 22.1-23.10; meditate on 22.30-23.10.

Preparation

Paul found himself in the strange situation of being under two sorts of law at once – Roman and Jewish (v. 30). But he could cope with the situation, even if his accusers would not. He may have been guilty of speaking before being spoken to here (23.1), and that may explain the high priest's action of having him slapped (v. 2). But that was out of bounds; he could have just motioned for him to wait.

Paul exploded. He could bear the inconsistency and hypocrisy of this situation no longer. The priest intended to judge him by the law of the Jews, yet contrary to that law he had Paul struck (v. 3)? No way.

But then Paul himself was reminded that his outburst put him in danger of reviling a ruler of the people, so he backed down, citing the Law of God (vv. 4, 5; cf. Ex. 22.28) to show that, contrary to what has been reported of him, he is a man who abides by the Law of God.

Paul went on the initiative. In declaring himself a Pharisee, he shifted the accusations against him – even though they were false – into a positive mode, saying that he was on trial for the beliefs of that party (v. 6). Everything Paul said was true.

The court erupted into shouting, as the Pharisees saw no reason to continue the trial but the Sadducees were not about to let Paul go (vv. 6-9). When it seemed things might turn violent, the Romans intervened (v. 10).

Paul had simply stated the truth about his situation, but he was careful to frame his defense to find common ground with at least some of the court. But, as we shall see, this whole situation was not about learning the truth. It was about being rid of Paul.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees...” (Acts 23.6), his memory may have suggested something he had read from wise Solomon:

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” (Prov. 26.4, 5)

To take the focus off himself, Paul very wisely tossed a divisive thought into the mix. “Why don't you folks discuss the validity of the resurrection and whether or not spirits and angels exist?” (Acts 23.6-8) And there you go! The religious started to argue with one another, and to save face, one group even ended up defending

Paul.

Oh, that we today had that kind of wisdom when dealing with those who rail against the Jesus in us! Jesus said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10.16).

On many occasions Jesus employed this same wisdom when dealing with those who were troubling Him: They asked Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” But Jesus answered them with a loaded question: “The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?” And because of all the hubbub that an incorrect answer to that question would have caused they answered with a resounding: “We do not know” (Matt. 21.23-27). And for the moment, that ended it.

On another occasion the Sadducees came to Him with a ridiculous question about the resurrection that they didn't even believe in themselves. His answer: “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22.23-33). And that silenced them, for the moment.

A beautiful and quiet wisdom flows from the mind of God. And when we see it in action in the lives of Jesus and Paul, we long to have that wisdom for ourselves, so that our work in our Personal Mission Field is full of God's wisdom, too.

And the amazing thing is this: God promises to give His wisdom to us if we ask Him for it! “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (Jms. 1.5).

And this wisdom is to be used for His glory. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (Jms. 3.17).

And if it keeps us from being foolish and helps a foolish person not to be wise in his own eyes—so be it.

For reflection

1. How can you have more of the wisdom of God? What would that look like in your life?
2. Why should we expect certain people to oppose the Good News of Jesus? When they do, does that mean we have failed in our witness? Explain (recall Acts 17.32-34).
3. Why is it wisdom to avoid arguing with people about the things of the Lord?

*Though the answer of Paul contained a just rebuke and prediction, he seems to have been too angry at the treatment he received in uttering them. Great men may be told of their faults, and public complaints may be made in a proper manner; but the law of God requires respect for those in authority. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 23.1-5**

Pray Psalm 7.1-8.

Seek the Lord's protection against the enemy of your soul. Confess and repent of any sins. Call on the Lord to lead you in the ways of righteousness throughout this day.

Sing Psalm 7.1-8.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still My Soul*](#))

O Lord, my God, in You do I take refuge;
save me from those who my poor soul would tear!
Deliver me from my foes' angry deluge,
lest I be swept beyond all hope and care.
Let not injustice, let not evil stain me,

lest to the dust my glory trampled be.

Arise, O Lord, rise up in wrath to save me!
Let rage and judgment fall upon my foes!
From all around to You let thanks and praise be.
Rise up on high; the wicked curse with woes.
O Judge of all, observe my just demeanor
and vindicate me by Your grace, O Lord.

4 Oh, Right, Another Plot

Pray Psalm 24.1, 2.

The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.
For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters.

Sing Psalm 24.1, 2.

(Foundation: *How Firm a Foundation*)

The earth is the Lord's, as is all it contains; the world and its peoples He daily sustains.
He founded it fast on the seas long ago, and bid gentle rivers throughout it to flow.

Read Acts 23.1-22; meditate on verses 11-22.

Preparation

1. What did Jesus promise Paul?
2. What were the Jews planning to do?

Meditation

Jesus appeared to Paul to encourage him (v. 11). We note that Jesus did not extricate Paul from this situation, as He had done for Peter and others of the apostles. He was content to let Paul stay put, and He told him both to “be of good cheer” and that he was going to Rome.

Jesus was arranging the details of Paul's safe and economical transport to Rome. Paul had previously, from Corinth, told the Romans he was planning to come to see them (Rom. 15). That would have meant a good bit of expense for him and probably Luke and maybe one or two others. What better way to get to Rome free of charge than on the Romans' lira?

Another plot against Paul. Yawn. The ridiculous oath of these Jews would leave “more than forty” of them hungry (vv. 12-14). But their action shows that hatred of Paul was widespread. People wanted him dead, and even the religious leaders of the people were willing to conspire with this murderous plot (v.15). Standing for the Gospel is serious business.

So how did Paul's nephew find out about this (v. 16)? We don't know. And why were the Romans so willing to receive his report and believe it (vv. 17-22)? Would we not have expected Roman bravado to say, “We can handle this, young man”? The king's heart is in the Lord's hand, as we know (Prov. 21.1).

The report of this plot was the commander's opportunity to be done with this man and his troublesome presence. As we shall see, he immediately prepared to move Paul out of the city. Meanwhile, are those grumbling tummies we hear in the background?

The Lord Jesus begins moving the pieces in the game of getting Paul to Rome safely and economically. In the same way, the Lord protects, guides, keeps, and provides for us as we faithfully obey His calling and Word.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is a sweet and awesome thing to contemplate the fact that the Lord Jesus thinks about us in the same way that He thought about Paul. We, too, can hear these words from our beloved Savior: “Be of good cheer, _____; for as you have testified for Me in _____, so you must also bear witness at _____.” (Acts 23.11) We

can fill in our own names and trials and cities. He sees. He cares. He leads and guides us, as well.

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you *are* Mine” (Is. 43.1).

“Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me. When *as yet there were* none of them” (Ps. 139.16).

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...” (Jer. 1.5)

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29.11).

“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great are the sum of them! *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you You” (Ps. 139.17, 18).

“LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments” (Ps.119.166).

“The Lord Jesus begins moving the pieces in the game of getting Paul to Rome safely and economically. In the same way, the Lord protects, guides, keeps, and provides for us as we faithfully obey His calling and Word.”

For reflection

1. How do you know that God guides, keeps, and provides for you day by day? Whom have you told about this lately?
2. How could Paul be “of good cheer” in the midst of all he was facing? How does this counsel you?
3. Whom can you encourage today with the litany of verses in today’s *Treasure* section?

God has instruments for every work. The natural abilities and moral virtues of the heathens often have been employed to protect his persecuted servants. Even the men of the world can discern between the conscientious conduct of upright believers, and the zeal of false professors, though they disregard or understand not their doctrinal principles. All hearts are in God's hand, and those are blessed who put their trust in him, and commit their ways unto him. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 23.25-35

Pray Psalm 24.7-10.

In prayer, open all the “gates” of your soul – your thoughts, affections, and priorities – and call on the Lord to make His Presence known there. See Him in all His regal glory. Seek the filling of His Spirit. Call on Him to rule in and through you today as you work your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 24.7-10.

(Foundation: *How Firm a Foundation*)

O lift up your heads, all you gates of the soul, for the Savior would enter and render you whole!
The Lord strong and mighty in battle draws nigh; He rules in His glory above us on high.

O Who is this King, Who approaches our gate? His might is before us, His glory is great!
This King is the Lord of all glory above, Who comes to indwell us in mercy and love!

5 Handoff

Pray Psalm 61.1, 2.

Hear my cry, O God;

Attend to my prayer.

From the end of the earth I will cry to You,

When my heart is overwhelmed;

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Sing Psalm 61.1, 2.

(Quebec: [Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts](#))

Lord, hear my cry, heed my complaint! Hear, for my distant heart is faint.

When from the end of earth I sigh, set me upon that Rock on high.

Read Acts 23.1-30; meditate on verses 23-30.

Preparation

1. How many soldiers were mustered to accompany Paul?

2. Why did Claudius send Paul to Felix?

Meditation

Claudius took the threat seriously, as we see by his mustering nearly 500 soldiers to accompany Paul to Caesarea (v. 23). How powerful must the Roman garrison in Jerusalem have been, that they could dispatch 500 soldiers north and still have enough power in place to maintain order!

Note Claudius' opening words to Felix: "Greetings." Sort of like "Dear ____" today. If you look at Roman correspondence from this period, this is a typical opening line, either "Greetings" or "Greetings and good health." Compare that with the way Paul began his letters: "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Gospel changes everything, even down to the most mundane social protocols.

And for the sake of getting Paul to Rome, King Jesus mustered Roman military power to begin his westward journey. How cool is that? The common grace of God was at work in that Roman force, ensuring safe passage for the Lord's missionary.

In this story we are seeing just how powerful Jesus is to accomplish His Kingdom purposes. Look at the way He overruled the Jewish court, revealed the plot to assassinate Paul, and mustered the Romans to protect His witness. Jesus uses even His enemies to do His will, making them feign obedience to Him so that His will prevails over theirs (Ps. 81.15).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, two hundred spearmen, and horses for Paul to ride was a lot of protection for one man. And yet this militia was what God wanted for Paul, and this is what He got for him.

When the children of Israel were escaping Egypt, Pharaoh pursued them with "all the horses and chariots...and his army." (Ex. 14.9) But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Ex. 14.13, 14).

When the king of Syria was troubled about things that the prophet Elisha had said, he sent horses and

chariots and a great army to encourage Elisha to mend his ways. Elisha's helper was terrified when he saw the troops amassing. He said to Elisha, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So, Elisha answered him and said, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And then Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." "Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kgs. 6.14-17).

God is able to care for His own. As Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Dan. 3.17).

And as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1.17). And as Jude wrote, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24, 25).

Our King. Our Savior. Our Protector. Our Keeper.

God's care may not always look like 500 soldiers, or the defeat of an Egyptian army, or visions of angelic caretakers, or preservation from fiery furnaces; but most assuredly it is always there. His will supersedes over all (Matt. 6.10); and He continually loves and cares for His own. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (Jn. 10.27-29).

We are always and forever His cared-for sheep.

For reflection

1. How do you need God to care and provide for you today? Tell Him in prayer.
2. What are some ways you can see Jesus at work and ruling throughout the unbelieving world?
3. What evidence have you seen lately of God's keeping and caring love?

Here indeed the providence of God is seen still more clearly. For even if the tribune's plan were to seek to avert a public disturbance of which account would have had to be given before the governor, still he executes God's plan in delivering Paul. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Acts 23.23

Pray Psalm 61.3-8.

Thank the Lord for His constant protection, care, and provision. Pray that you will know His Presence throughout the day as you serve Him in your Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 61.3-8.

(Quebec: [*Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts*](#))

You are a Refuge, Lord, for me, towering o'er my enemy.
Let me find shelter 'neath Your wings, dwell in Your tent eternally.

Lord, You have heard what I have vowed; You have on me Your grace bestowed.
You will prolong my years, my life, keep me alive 'mid trial and strife.

I will with You e'ermore abide; let lovingkindness take my side.
Let truth preserve me all my days; I will forever sing Your praise!

6 To Caesarea

Pray Psalm 54.1, 2.

Save me, O God, by Your name,
And vindicate me by Your strength.
Hear my prayer, O God;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.

Sing Psalm 54.1, 2.

(Beatitudo: *Father of Mercies, in Your Word*)

Save us, O God, by Your great Name; vindicate us with power.
Answer our prayer, remove our shame, in this our desperate hour.

Read Acts 23.1-35; meditate on verses 31-35.

Preparation

1. To whom did the soldiers present Paul? What else did they present?
2. How did the governor respond?

Meditation

Felix received Paul, inquired about his citizenship and provenance, and promised a hearing once his accusers had arrived (vv. 33-35). Felix wouldn't hear the case, or any more of the details than what Claudius related, until all parties were present. Roman order in the service of the Gospel (Rom. 13.4).

Paul was kept in a prison in Herod's palace (v. 35), which may suggest he was not regarded as a threat. He would have been safe there and would enjoy considerable deference and hospitality for two years. Meanwhile, we can only wonder about those poor, hungry blokes back in Jerusalem.

We can see that Luke is a reliable historian. Plenty of facts (Thucydides) woven into a gripping story (Herodotus). Luke's attention to details – places, change of guard (vv. 31, 32), Roman protocol, individuals, exchanges, laws and protocols – help to bring reality to his story. Sometimes Christians think the events of the Bible occurred in time other than the time/space continuum in which we live – “Bible time”, or something like that. “That Was Then” time. But the Kingdom of God unfolds in real time, real history, and all history's players and places are at the Lord's disposal for His Kingdom purposes, even the rulers of the world (Prov. 21.1). The time/space continuum of Acts is the same one we inhabit, and which the Scriptures refer to as “the last days” (Acts 2.14ff.; cf. Mic. 4.1-8).

The action slows down a bit and we catch our breath as we await the next stage of Paul's ongoing trial. We're not hearing much from Paul at this stage, but we know he must be thinking about what's going to happen next. And he is sure that Jesus' Word to him would not fail (v. 11).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“I will hear you when your accusers also have come” (Acts 23.35). And with that, Paul was sent to his room!

Our grown children love to tease me about my parenting methods of yore. One of their favorites is when I would say, “If you don't stop x, y, or z I'm going to separate you!” And that is what amuses them. They didn't really want to be playing together anyway, so for me to separate them was really, sort of, exactly what they wanted.

And here we see Paul, eager to write letters and minister to people in his Personal Mission Field, and because

of the nastiness of the folks in Jerusalem he has been separated from them and sent to his room, oh no!, so he can write and talk and live a relatively nice life, albeit “kept in Herod’s Praetorium”(Acts 23.35).

We can be sure that Paul saw each of these days as valuable, and that he worked hard to make each one count. “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12).

Whether his life was threatened or his freedoms curtailed, Paul’s attitude was always the same: “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24).

And this was the secret to Paul’s peaceful and prosperous heart and life.

Here is a letter he wrote to Timothy from prison: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4.7, 8). Forward thinking. Peaceful. Accomplished.

Paul always made good use of his time. His circumstances never changed the essence of his life. They did not affect what he did, wrote, thought, or believed. They were merely the background music to his love for Christ Jesus, and his work in the Kingdom of God.

And Paul made bold to say to us: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11.1).

For reflection

1. How can you keep your eye on Jesus and your mind on His promises when all around your world seems to be unraveling?
2. Jesus has promised to be with you always. He is at work in you to will and do of His good pleasure. He will never fail you nor forsake you. How should you respond to these promises?
3. Whom will you encourage today to keep their eyes on Jesus and their mind on His promises?

After reading the letter from Jerusalem, Felix wanted to know Paul’s home province. When he learned it was Cilicia he decided to hear the case, because the political status of Cilicia did not require its natives to be sent back there for trial. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 23.35

Pray Psalm 54.4-7.

Seek the Lord’s help for all your work today, not just your job. Offer all your time up to Him, and yourself as a living sacrifice. Thank Him for His deliverance and salvation, and call on Him to guard you against the enemy of your soul and uphold you in all you do today.

Sing Psalm 54.4-7.

(Beatitudo: Father of Mercies, in Your Word)

You are the Helper of our soul; You will sustain and bless.
Recompense evil to our foe in Your great faithfulness.

Willingly will we praise You, Lord, gladly adore Your Name!
You have redeemed us by Your Word and blessed us by the same.

From all our trouble, by Your grace, You have redeemed us, Lord.
While all our foes in sad disgrace reel backward from Your Word.

7 Reason to Rest

Pray Psalm 26.8-12.

LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house,
And the place where Your glory dwells.
Do not gather my soul with sinners,
Nor my life with bloodthirsty men,
In whose hands is a sinister scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.
But as for me, I will walk in my integrity;
Redeem me and be merciful to me.
My foot stands in an even place;
In the congregations I will bless the LORD.

Sing Psalm 26.8-12.

(Aberystwyth: [Jesus, Lover of My Soul](#))

Lord, I love Your dwelling-place, there where all Your glory shines.
Keep my soul before Your face, lest for sinful ways it pines.
As for me, in righteousness, I shall walk on level ground.
Save me, Lord, renew and bless! Let me with Your Church be found!

Read Acts 23.1-35; meditate on verse 11.

Preparation

1. What did Jesus tell Paul to cheer him up?
2. Where was Jesus preparing to send Paul?

Meditation

This was now the fifth time Jesus had spoken to Paul directly (cf. Acts 9.4-6; 18.9, 10; 22.17-21; 2 Cor. 12.9). There may have been other, more extended and in-depth conversations between them earlier in Paul's journey of faith (Gal. 1.11, 12). How precious to Jesus was His chosen apostle to the Gentiles! How precious to Paul were the Savior's words! No wonder Paul was so cool and civil throughout his trials. He was resting in Jesus' Word.

We do not expect such revelations today. Now we have the written Word of God, which Paul tells us is "profitable" for all our revelation needs (2 Tim. 3.15-17). The written Word can make us complete in Jesus and equip us with everything we need for the good works for which we have been saved (Eph. 2.8-10).

The Word of God is the Word of Jesus Christ. All Scripture speaks of Him (Jn. 5.39), and His Spirit teaches and calls to remembrance all that Jesus has spoken (Jn. 16.14). Wherever we look in Scripture, if we read deeply enough and connect carefully with other passages, we will hear the voice of Jesus saying to us, "Rejoice!" and "Be my witness!" and "I have more work for you to do!" and "Rest!" and much, much more.

Like Paul, we have reason to rest: Jesus speaks to us every day from His Word.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul kept his focus on Jesus. He said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8.18); and he lived like he believed it.

Solomon wrote, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" (Prov. 24.10). And what we see in

Paul is that his strength was grounded in the knowledge of his own weakness. He believed what Jesus said to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12.9).

Jesus wanted Paul to take His Words to heart. And he did. "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" (Acts 23.11). Paul thought and behaved in a manner that was: Cheerful, peaceful, restful, and ready to bear witness.

Jesus wanted His disciples to take His Words to heart. He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." (Mk. 4.35) So they all got in a boat and set out for the opposite shore. But as sometimes happens on the open water a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was filling with water. And Jesus was in the stern of the boat resting peacefully with His head on a pillow because He knew they were crossing over to the other side, and He was behaving like He believed it. However, the disciples were not so sure about their prospects of the safe arrival on the other shore and so they panicked. They woke Jesus up saying, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mk. 4.38) He then got up and stepped onto the deck and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" "And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mk. 4.39).

But here is where things get troublesome for the disciples. Instead of being sympathetic to their "fainting in the day of adversity", Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mk. 4.40) What He wanted them to comprehend was that the whole adventure had begun with Him saying, "Let us cross over to the other side." Enough said. Let's go. To the other side. Not let's go and we'll sink midway. Enjoy!

Jesus wants us also to take His Words to heart. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (Jn. 14.1-4). "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14.6).

When we believe His Words, we have reason to rest.

For reflection

1. What can keep or hinder us from hearing and believing the words of Jesus?
2. Paul was holding on to the promise of Jesus that he would get to Rome. What promises is Jesus calling you to hold onto today?
3. Whom will you encourage today to hold fast to the promises and Word of Jesus?

*... let us learn, even in most extreme afflictions, to stay ourselves upon the word of God alone; and let us never faint so long as he quickeneth us with the testimony of his fatherly love. And because oracles are not now sent from heaven, neither doth the Lord himself appear by visions, we must meditate upon his innumerable promises, whereby he doth testify that he will be nigh unto us continually. If it be expedient that an angel come down unto us, the Lord will not deny even this kind of confirmation. Nevertheless, we must give this honor to the word, that being content with it alone we wait patiently for that help which it promiseth us. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 23.11**

Pray Psalm 26.1-7.

Wait on the Lord in silence as He examines your soul. Confess and repent of any sins He suggests. Rejoice in His lovingkindness and commit yourself to walking in His truth today. Offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving for all His many gifts and blessings.

Sing Psalm 26.1-7.

(Aberystwyth: [*Jesus, Lover of My Soul*](#))

Vindicate me, Lord on high; I have walked within Your Word.
Never wav'ring, though I sigh, I have trusted You, O Lord!
Prove me, Lord, prove even me! Test my heart and try my mind.
Let Your steadfast mercy be in the path for me to find.

Men of falsehood shall not sit in my presence, nor will I
suffer any hypocrite to find favor in my eye.
All the wicked I abhor; 'round Your altar let me stand,
loudly singing evermore of Your gracious, mighty hand.

Paul's Trials (1): Acts 22, 23

For reflection or discussion

1. What was Paul's attitude to the Law of God? What should we learn from this?
2. How was Jesus at work in this chapter to fulfill the promise He made in verse 11?
3. What evidence do we see to support the teaching of Proverbs 21.1?
4. What are you learning from this part of Acts about working your own Personal Mission Field?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 23?

For prayer:

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