

# The Christian Arsenal

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## ACTS 22:21-23:35

Last week, we saw that Paul finally arrived in Jerusalem. He had been falsely accused by the Jews of carrying a Gentile into the Jewish portion of the Temple. They had falsely accused Paul of polluting the Temple. The mob of Jews had dragged Paul out of the Temple and they beat Paul and they would have probably beaten him to death if the Roman soldiers not come to his rescue.

***We saw last week how Paul addressed this mob of Jews and he basically gave them his salvation testimony. Acts 23:1...***

The sole purpose of Paul's testimony before the Jews in the Temple and the Jewish religious leaders was to get them to understand that he didn't just get up one morning and decide to go preach Jesus to the Gentiles. Paul was trying his best to get these Jews to understand that he did what he did because God told him to do it!

We saw how they listened to Paul ***until Paul told them that God had told him that He would send Paul far away to the Gentiles.***

***Verse 22 of chapter 22*** tells us that when they heard this they raised their voices and said, ***"Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"***

It's extremely difficult to change the mentality of a mob that is bent on violence. We've seen this played out on our own TVs so many times, haven't we?

***These folks had listened to Paul with their ears but not with their hearts. Their hearts were set against him and their minds were already made up. They wanted Paul dead!!***

The Roman commander thought the best thing for him to do was to find out exactly what Paul was really guilty of and the method he chose was to have Paul scourged. The theory was that this scourging would pull the truth out of Paul.

Well, as they were about to scourge Paul, Paul asked the centurion who was standing by *if it was lawful to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen who hasn't been condemned.*

**Verses 25-29...**

Things seemed to be looking up for Paul, but look at ***Verse 30...***

The Roman commander was confused. He had a dilemma. On the one hand he had a Jew whom a mob of other Jews was attempting to kill, and on the other hand, this same man could not even be scourged legally because he was a Roman citizen.

So, the Roman commander decided that since this was a Jewish problem, he'd just let the Jews handle it. So, he turned Paul over to the Sanhedrin...the highest religious council in Israel...the Jewish Supreme Court.

So, let's see what happens as Paul addresses this council of religious Jewish leaders...

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## Acts 23:1...

Had he? Had Paul's conscience really been clear? Hadn't Paul persecuted the church? Hadn't Paul tried to stamp out Christianity?

Yes, Paul had done these things. But, he had done them sincerely believing he was pleasing God.

See, we can't always trust our conscience. Conscience will tell you that you **shouldn't** do what is wrong and you **should** do what is right, but conscience alone cannot tell you what **is** right and what **is** wrong. Our conscience can become seared and hardened to what is right.

Before Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was doing wrong but he thought he was right. After Paul's conversion, he did right because the Holy Spirit had taken up residence in Paul and Paul didn't have to rely on his conscience anymore. He relied on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The old adage "let your conscience be your guide" isn't really a very good one!

Well, when the high priest heard Paul say this, he had Paul struck across the mouth.

## Verses 3-5...

Let me ask you...have you ever called someone a "whitewashed wall"? Probably not... Have you ever said someone was a hypocrite? **SAME THING!**

A whitewashed wall...this is the same term Jesus used when He called the Pharisees "whitewashed tombs which appear on the outside to be beautiful but on the inside are full of dead men's bones." Jesus and Paul were saying, "on the outside you look real good...you're acceptable to society, you might even be held in high esteem...but on the inside you're dead before God."

That's what Paul said, and when he said that, some of the Pharisees said, "Paul do you dare speak that way to the high priest?"

Apparently Paul didn't know he was speaking to the high priest. Several reasons have been suggested for this...

- 1) perhaps because the meeting was hastily called, the high priest hadn't had the time to put on his high priestly robes...
- 2) perhaps even by this time, Paul's vision was failing badly...
- 3) perhaps all this took place in the early morning hours and the light was not good...

Ananias certainly wasn't acting like the high priest. The high priest was supposed to be the godliest man in town...it was against the Law to have struck Paul without his being convicted of a crime.

So, whatever the reason, Paul didn't offer an excuse...he admitted his error and accepted responsibility for his words. He had no respect for the man, but he showed respect for his office.

By the way, sometimes it looks as though God's people get the short end of the stick, doesn't it? But, God always has the last word. Ananias may have thought he was in control of this situation,

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and God may have allowed him to be at that moment, but the time came when Ananais reaped what he had sown...

In 66 A.D. there would be a Jewish revolt against the Roman government and because of this revolt. Ananais had shown "pro Roman" tendencies and he became fearful and fled from Jerusalem and hid out in an aqueduct. A band of Jewish soldiers found him hiding and put him to death.

So...when Paul said that God would strike him, Paul knew what he was talking about, didn't he?

The Sanhedrin was made up of two main religious factions...the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

**Verses 6-10** tell us that Paul appealed to the Pharisees. Paul told them he was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. Paul told them he was on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead. Paul knew the Pharisees believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection so the two factions began to argue... (**Jesus had addressed the Sadducees on their belief in no resurrection**)

## **Verses 9-10...**

I believe this must have been one of the darkest nights of Paul's life. For years he had hoped to be able to share Christ in Jerusalem. He had even said that he could wish himself accursed...separated from Christ...if his fellow Jews could come to know Christ.

But when he arrived in Jerusalem, as we saw last week, he found a compromising church full of legalistic believers who found fault with how he had conducted his ministry among the Gentiles and among the Jews in the Gentile areas.

Paul's spirit must have been low...not only because he couldn't convince the Jewish unbelievers of the power of the Gospel...but also because he couldn't count on any help or moral support from the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

So, I believe as Paul was led away to the barracks...he went with an aching heart. I believe Paul was physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted.

## **Verse 11...**

This is God's assurance to Paul, and to us as well. This is the same assurance He gave to Abraham in **Genesis 15:1...** "**Fear not, Abram, for I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.**" Paul had been falsely accused. Paul had been beaten. Paul had been lied about. He'd been insulted and slapped across the mouth. He'd been arrested without cause.

As he sat in that prison he must have felt **dejected, defeated**, and maybe even **abandoned...**

But, Jesus had promised "**I will never leave you nor forsake you**"...

## **...and Jesus came to Paul.**

Was this a physical presence of the Lord Jesus? I don't know. This verse doesn't say it was a vision. It doesn't say Paul was in a trance. However Jesus manifested Himself, He stood at Paul's side and He said, "**Take courage.**"

I want to ask you...has Jesus ever done this for you?

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Have you ever been so low and so down and so depressed and you sensed the presence of Jesus and you sensed His saying to you "Take courage...don't be afraid...I'm right here with you, My child."

I believe we could all tell of times when we've felt the sweet presence of our Savior...calming our fears and ministering peace to our spirits.

Then, the Lord Jesus tells Paul that just as he has solemnly witnessed in Jerusalem, he would witness at Rome also.

We discussed last week whether or not Paul was wrong to go to Jerusalem. Well, Jesus didn't say to Paul, "**Paul, if you had only listened to the Holy Spirit you wouldn't be in this mess, you know.**"

We've seen in the last few weeks how Paul had been warned repeatedly by his friends not to go to Jerusalem. But, I believe these folks had heard from the Holy Spirit about the affliction that awaited Paul and they interjected their own warning...**they allowed their human desire to protect Paul to creep in and instead of encouraging Paul...they tried to discouraged him.**

What I'm trying to say is we don't see anywhere that Jesus or the Holy Spirit admonished Paul for being in Jerusalem. Jesus simply encouraged and exhorted Paul...

"Paul, you're not going to die in this prison cell.  
you're going on to Rome...and when you get there,  
you're going to witness to My cause there just as  
you've done **here.**"

(Paul, unlike Moses, **wanted** to serve God. Moses tried to get God to send someone else. How do we react to the Holy Spirit when He encourages us to accomplish something?)

I want to say this to you...

When you think life is out of control...when you think tragedy has struck and things can't get much worse...remember that there is a purpose for all things.

**God had a job for Paul to do and no one or no thing could thwart God's plans. God has a job for you to do and for me to do and we need to remember when we're going through our own fires of affliction that Jesus is in that fire with us. Nothing happens to us without God's permission. Nothing touches us unless God allows it. Nothing takes the God we serve by surprise.**

And if He allows bad things to happen to us, it's because He has a reason and a purpose for those bad things...

Just like Jesus came to Paul and just like there was a fourth man in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

Jesus is there for you...even in the midst of doubt  
and heartache and affliction and pain and despair.

These words of Jesus greatly encouraged Paul and he never wavered again...despite many hardships and perils that later came upon him.

Christ's presence beside him gave him courage. Christ's promise of Paul's further ministry gave him hope.

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What difference did it make that the Roman government had mistreated him **if the Lord stood by his side?**

What difference did it make that he's on his way to Rome where eventually his life will be taken **if the Lord stood by his side?**

Paul had a place of security and we do, too.

***“There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.  
A place where sin cannot molest,  
Near to the heart of God.”***

The song writer said,

***“Just when I need Him most, just when I need Him most...  
Jesus is here to comfort and cheer...  
Just when I need Him most.”***

I doubt that Paul ever needed Jesus more than he needed Him that night. Isn't it good to know that Jesus knows where we are...

John Bunyan, the author of PILGRIM'S PROGRESS was a tremendous Christian and he spent much of his life in prison for the cause of Christ.

One day, a man came into the prison where John Bunyan was and he said, “John, the Lord has sent me to you. I've been looking for you for years in prison after prison.”

John Bunyan said, “The Lord didn't send you. The Lord knew where I was. If the Lord had sent you, you would have come here first.”

Well, let's see one instance where God preserved Paul's life before he left Jerusalem.

## **Verses 12-22...**

Did you know Paul had a sister? We don't know anything about her except that she had a son. We don't know how old he was, but I believe he was a young boy because the Roman commander **“took him by the hand”...Verse 19.**

These Jews were determined to kill Paul, but God intervened. Not only did God save Paul's life, but He had him escorted out of town by 470 soldiers, with a “letter of introduction” from the Roman commander in Jerusalem.

Eventually Paul arrived in Caesarea for a hearing before the governor. And, we'll see that next Sunday.

How many times have we studied and seen where God has protected His servants? Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern. Joseph was protected when his brothers tried to kill him. All through Scripture we see God's protection of His servants...and God still protects His servants today.

What I'd like for us to take with us today is this...

**1) The Best Place for the Child of God is in the Will of God...**

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Forty Jews banded together and vowed they would kill Paul...but because Paul was in the will of God, God sent 470 Romans to help him escape their plot. And even if they hadn't, and there would come the time when Paul would not escape...Paul was still in the very best place he could be ...in the will of God.

I think we need to remember that God is in control. Nothing happens to His servants outside His divine permission. Even when things look bad...He's still in control.

## 2) The Most Dangerous Place on Earth for the Child of God is Outside the Will of God...

It doesn't matter how secure we feel...if we're outside the will of God, we are probably outside the umbrella of His protection. Jude tells us to keep ourselves in the love of God. I believe we see Paul doing that all his Christian life.

(Paul said in **1 Cor. 5:5...** "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.")

## 3) The Child of God is Never Forsaken by the Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ came to Paul and encouraged him and gave him hope and I believe He does the same for you and me. I believe it delights the Lord Jesus to come to us and encourage us.

(God encouraged **Elijah** when he was running from Jezebel. **Nehemiah** was encouraged to build the fallen wall, even though his enemies wanted to kill him. **Daniel**, always faithful, was encouraged by God through visions and angels.)

I want to close today with a story I read this week.

Paderewski, (Pad e **ref** ski) the famous Polish pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. It was an evening to remember...a black-tux, long-evening-dress, high-society kind of production.

In the audience that evening was a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son. The little boy didn't really want to be there, but his mother had brought him to hear the great composer, hoping he would be encouraged to practice the piano more once he heard the great music.

Before the performance began, the mother had turned to chat with some friends, and the impatient little boy could stay seated no longer. He slipped away from his mother, and went up to the stage, strangely drawn to the ebony concert grand Steinway and he climbed up on its leather-tufted stool.

Most of the folks in the hall hadn't even noticed what he had done, until he placed his small, trembling fingers on the right keys and began to play "Chopsticks." The chatter of the crowd quickly stopped and hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. They began to shout in anger for the little boy to get off the stage.

Backstage the master, overhearing the sounds, hurriedly grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage, where he stood behind the boy and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance "Chopsticks." As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ear, "**Keep going. Don't quit, son. Keep on playing. You're doing great. Don't stop. Don't quit.**" **WHAT A GRACIOUS GENIUS!!**

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We've been called to play a spiritual tune for Christ. Although we usually want to do our best, we've slipped many times and we've said the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time. Many times we haven't lived up to our own expectations, not to mention God's standards of service. Many times our best service is more like "Chopsticks" than Handel's *Messiah*. Maybe some in the galleries are trying to yell us off the stage. We know we have a heavenly calling, and we want to keep playing for God, but we desperately need encouragement.

At times like these, the Lord Jesus Christ stands beside us, and He says, **"Have courage, My child. I have work for you to do. Keep playing...Keep going...Don't stop...You're doing great...Don't quit!"**

Jesus adds His amazing and superior countermelody to ours, making the result of our service to Him something that honors Him and is beautiful.

May we find our courage in Him. May we be reminded often of His presence that comforts and exhorts and equips us!! May we know His hands are upon us and alongside us!!