

Acts 23:1-11

**"The Hope Of The Resurrection"**

We've mentioned before the incredibly dramatic movie or miniseries it would make. Following the perils of the life of the Apostle Paul as he sought to spread the gospel throughout the ancient Roman world. It simply wasn't uncommon at all that wherever this guy went 1 of 2 things was almost guaranteed to take place. *There would either be revival; some great spiritual awakening as people were brought into the revelation & illumination of the good news that Jesus had died for their sins according to the scripture, was buried, & 3 days later rose again that we might find life, true life, everlasting life in His name.*

Having just had our Easter service we talked a little bit about that. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. I don't know how that transaction takes place, how God takes my sin & imputes (or accredits) to me the righteousness of Christ (other than to say that He counts our faith, our belief as righteousness & a conduit through which He pours out His saving grace). *But I'm so glad I don't have to understand it; but believing it I can benefit from it. Listen, I don't know what makes the world spin on its axis either (giving us morning & night, seasons as we journey around the sun) but I sure enjoy the benefits of it. There's a lot we don't understand, but we receive by faith.* Really the gospel is no different, believe it, it'll change your life, your eternal destination, it makes for reconciliation to God... Salvation & all of its fullness finds you in repentance toward God & faith toward J.C. This is the message that Paul brought! & It started revivals!

*It also started riots! People being offended at the idea of God becoming a Man, & being slain in humiliation, or those who refused to believe but hanging on to their own ideologies, philosophies or immoralities, loving their sin more than recognizing their need for a Savior... would often times become hostile toward Paul & his message.*

& That's the context we're entering back into in Acts 23, not *revival* territory, *riot* territory. In the course of 1 day, Paul was pivotal in 2 riots on the temple mount. 1 for simply being there; false allegations & accusations thrown out about him nearly got him killed! The Roman special forces unit had to storm the temple mount & crowd surf Paul up the stairs to the Antonia fortress to keep him from being killed the mob was so violent!

*When he got up there he asked the commander if he could address the people (long story short, by no small miracle the commander actually allowed him to speak to them).*

& It all seemed to be going great, Paul was sharing his story, his past conduct, his conversion & his commission from God. That he met J.C. on the road to Damascus & Jesus had commissioned him to take the gospel to all men. But when Paul told them that Jesus had told him that He was sending him out of Jerusalem to give the message of hope to the *Gentiles*... They exploded!

They weren't about to accept that God would place filthy Gentiles on par w/His chosen people (the Jews) & that salvation would come to them just the same as it was offered to the Jew.

Now; the ambiguous part about it all (as far as the Roman Commander was concerned) is that Paul was speaking to them in Aramaic (the Hebrew tongue of the day). The commander couldn't understand him. All he knew is that everything was going good, then all of the sudden everything exploded & he had to rescue Paul *again* from being killed on the spot... So he decided to have Paul scourged (just as Jesus was) in order to ascertain the facts... One problem, Paul was a Roman citizen & it was illegal for him to scourge a Roman.

So, Ch 22 ends w/the commander deciding to get the story by calling the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme court, including the chief priest) to the fortress the next day to have sort of an unofficial hearing.

No doubt Paul is thinking, "Finally!" He's waited his whole Christian life for the opportunity to share the gospel w/those who lead Israel spiritually. He didn't fare so well on the Temple Mt, but that was a mob, they were on the edge, this is just the "who's who" of the nation, the group of guys that Paul himself belonged to prior to his own conversion & he is chomping at the bit to share w/these guys. (Let's actually begin in **Vs 30** of Ch 22).

In the back of my mind Paul is pumped right now. He's thinking in terms of Rom 8:28, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*<sup>1</sup> He's thinking, "Man, I wasn't sure what you were doing yesterday God, in allowing all that turmoil in my life, but *now I see it!* You were wanting me to have a personal/private audience w/the leaders of Israel..." In the back of my mind he's thinking he's about to lead these men who knew the scriptures to Christ; it's the opportunity of a life time (He's got the legislative, executive & judicial branches in D.C. in the room & he has the floor, that's the shot he's got).

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 8:28-29] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 1-2

Well there's a fine, "How'd ya do" kind of response to your opening statement isn't it? Now don't be confused here, this isn't Annas, the high priest that was serving at Jesus' trial. This is Ananias, the most notoriously horrific high priest that Israel's history has to offer. Known for his greed, his power grubbing, his political interests & allegiance to Rome. He would rob from the temple tithe that was for the priesthood, making them live on scraps while enriching himself.

So despised by the people was he that when war begins to break out in AD 66 between the Jews & Rome, Ananias will try to hide in the aqueducts under Herod's palace (not from the Romans, but from the Jews), but Jewish guerillas, find him, drag him out & put him to death, that's how he'll meet his end.

But here's Paul, standing before this group. & Rather than begin by addressing them as the Rulers & elders of Israel (Which would be typical). He says, "Men & brethren". Why? Because this is the group of guys he himself belonged to before he met Christ! Now; no doubt many of them are different guys now, but as he looks intently at them (in my mind) he's searching for those men whom he may have known.

& He begins in what he probably considered to be an innocent enough way to begin his address. "Guys, I just want you to know from the very beginning here, that I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Truth be told (however) that's an *incredible statement* for *anyone* to be able to say. I can't say that! Can you say that? Now; to be fair he's not saying that he considers himself sinless, or that his conscience had never convicted him. But that whenever his conscience convicted him, he responded in such a way as to set things right. **Again, something I can't say. How many of us have been at a crossroad & you know what you're thinking about doing, or where you're thinking about going, or what you're considering saying is wrong... but you say it, do it, or go there anyway?**

That's what Paul is saying that he hasn't done. But that he's responded to his conscience before God. In 1 Cor he said this, **"For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord."**<sup>2</sup> In other words, even though I can't call to mind some area of sin in my life that needs dealt with, that doesn't mean I'm justified before God. He knew that a clean conscience didn't justify anyone.

<sup>2</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Co 4:4]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Why? Because our conscience isn't always right! It's a good *goad* but not a good *guide*. A criminal feels bad when he rats out other criminals, even though it was the right thing to do! So, our conscience doesn't create our standards, it merely applies those standards. The question to consider is from where/who or what do we derive our standards! At the bottom line here, Paul is essentially saying, "Hey, all that stuff they were accusing me of yesterday on the temple mount, that's not true..."

Be that as it may, Ananias wasn't having any of it. To stand there accused of blasphemy or bringing a Gentile into the temple courts & claim a clear conscience (as far as he was concerned) was offensive in itself. So he interrupts Paul after his 1<sup>st</sup> sentence w/a punch in the face!

Can you imagine that!? Just, "boom!" & you're reeling, adrenaline fills your veins, your heart starts racing & your emotions start flaring...

### Vs 3

Wow! – How do you really feel, Paul? ☺ I'm just gonna tell ya, this is what I believe to be a knee jerk reaction from the apostle that he later regretted. He's all, "Men & brethren, I want you to know that I've lived in all good conscience before God until this day." "Smack that guy in the face!" Boom! "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall, you're gonna sit there and presume to judge *me* according to the law, & command me to be struck *contrary to the law?*" Ladies & Gentlemen, fireworks are flying right now.

He's essentially saying, "You stinking hypocrite, who do you think you are!?" The idea of the whitewashed wall was how they would paint tombs & defiled locations so that they would recognize them & avoid them during feast & festival times so that they wouldn't become ceremonially unclean by accidentally touching something that contained a dead body. The tombs looked all neat & clean on the outside but were full of corruption on the inside.

Paul is saying, "You stand there like you're all high & mighty, but it's all a show, you look good on the outside, but you're full of nothing but corruption on the inside! Violating the very law you're supposedly judging me by."

Now when Jesus was on trial, He was struck as well, but He handled it a little better than Paul did here. ☺ He basically said, "Look, if I've done evil then let's get it on the table, but if I've spoken well, than why do you strike Me?" Paul just went for the jugular... & I think he pretty much instantly regretted it.

But Deut 25 is clear that a man is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

They weren't to beat anyone who hadn't been proven guilty of anything. Yet this man just had Paul smacked in the face over something he simply didn't like the sound of... & How did the Sanhedrin respond? "You know, he makes a good point there."? No

Vs4-5

& Just like that Paul knows that this 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity just flew out the proverbial window... 2 wrongs don't make a right. Paul instantly regathers himself & says, "Guys, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize he was the high priest. For it is written, (Ex 22:8) *"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."*<sup>3</sup> He admitted that what he did was wrong, but wanted them to know it was an innocent reaction, he didn't know who the man was.

2 things here. #1 I want you to see Paul's command of scripture. He *knew* the word of God. You & me, we should study to show ourselves approved unto God, workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth...

#2 I want you to consider these words in regards to those in authority over you, & the ruler of your people (in our case) namely the President of the U.S. It blows my mind how many people (including believers) will smear him, speak evil of him, revile him... & To be honest, I'm not sure what gives people the sense of character assassination entitlement to be that way.

& It really doesn't matter who the person may be. You may like him, love him, or can't stand him, none of that matters. we're to respect the office. Do you think Paul & this high priest saw things in the same light on virtually any level? Yet Paul when Paul realized who he was, he immediately recanted his statement. Why? Because it's wrong to speak evil of a ruler of your people.

Maybe you've blown it in that area. Paul did, but he made it right. He recanted, he repented & he moved on. We're all growing, we're a work in progress, but think it through. We're called to pray for those over us, not slander them. Write it down, read it later Rom 13:7.

Now; why didn't Paul recognize him? Few possibilities. Not the least of which is the fact that Paul hadn't really been around for more than 20 yrs, it was a different guy. Not to mention they weren't on the temple grounds, he wasn't in his priestly regalia, he just didn't know that it was him...

Vs 6

<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ex 22:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What's going on here? Paul began to pick up on the fact (be it through their actions, their attitudes or whatever) that these men weren't open to the message of the gospel. & Through the course of conversation, he began to discern that the room was divided **theologically**. A portion of them were Pharisees & number of them were Sadducees. So rather than continue to preach Jesus directly, he does what he can to preserve his life before the situation gets so out of control that they tear him limb from limb.

Now; essentially what he said was true. He *was* being tried concerning the hope of the resurrection. (His whole message revolved around the resurrection of J.C.). Btw, underline the word, "hope". As many of you have heard me say before, biblical hope isn't a wish/desire for something good w/the possibility that it won't happen. We "hope" the lockdown, the pandemic will be over soon. It's what we desire, but we can't be sure.

That's the not the way the bible uses the word "hope". The word "hope" in your bible is a guaranteed certainty, a concrete irrefutable reality. The "hope" of heaven, the "hope" of the resurrection isn't something we just really wish that it's true, but it might not be. It's a guaranteed certainty, a concrete reality & God has assured us of it through the resurrection of J.C. from the dead.

That's why Paul is standing there, because that's his message! Now the Pharisees believed in the resurrection (not in Jesus, but in the resurrection). The Sadducees didn't believe in miracles, in angels, demons, the resurrection or any of it. The Pharisees were the conservative bible believers (who missed Jesus in it all) & the Sadducees were the religious liberals of the day. & Believe me there's *never* been any lack of arguing between religious conservatives & liberals. Paul, (in sighting the fact that he was a Pharisee) instantly won ½ the room. They were sympathetic to him now, simply to spite the Sadducees.

### Vs 7-10

We can only imagine what this commander must be thinking... Yesterday, they were ready to kill Paul over 1 word, "Gentiles". Today, they're ready to literally pull him apart, they're literally tugging him violently back & forth, some wanting to save him, others wanting to kill him, over 1 word, "Resurrection".

He's thinking, "These people are out of their minds!" But Paul is a Roman citizen, so he has to save him. So he sends the soldiers down, & again the rescue Paul by force.

So, in one way Paul got what he wanted (out of there alive), but in another way he's bumming, hardcore.

He blew his chance in front of the massive crowd yesterday, & he made a mess of his chance today after the very 1<sup>st</sup> words out of his mouth... I mean, read Rom 9. Paul wanted *nothing* more than he wanted the Jews won to Jesus. He got his shot, & blew it... twice!

I have little doubt but that he wept over this, "Why did I have to say the word Gentiles!?" "Whitewashed wall! What was I *thinking*?" "It's over Paul, this is the end of the line, God's probably through w/you." & How the enemy likes to torment you w/what you deem as a failure before God...

### Vs 11

I love the that Lord stood w/him (somehow & in some way, seemingly physically) in the *night*. We might say, in his darkest hour, Jesus was w/him. What a precious promise, "*and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"<sup>4</sup> "*For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*"<sup>5</sup>

The Lord knew where Paul was at (physically, spiritually, emotionally... He knew). He hadn't lost sight of Paul because he was in jail. Paul was alone, but he wasn't alone. & Listen, God knows where you are today; you may be hiding it from everyone else, God knows. & He's w/you. In your darkest hour, He's there. & He loves you & He will be w/you every step of the way. Be of good cheer; God's not finished w/you. He's got more for you to do, more people for you to share *with*, to love *on*, to pray *for*.

There's more to say about this Vs but we'll save it for next time. I want to encourage you to be a person of the word, study it, read it, commit it to your heart & it will serve you & guide you in time of need. & Wherever this may find you, be of good cheer. Dark times may be upon you, but Jesus is w/you & He will strengthen you, He will uphold you by His righteous right hand.

& If you've not received Jesus, I implore you, do so today. We've spoken of the word "hope" but if you don't know the Lord you're w/out hope being w/out God in this world. Uncertainty, anxiety, hopelessness... Jesus is waiting. Come home.

Cry out to Him today, ask Him to make Himself real to you, to save you, to forgive you & fill you w/His Spirit. He'll hear the cry of your heart & make you new.

May the Lord bless you & be w/you, may His word dwell richly w/in you. May His Spirit lead & guide you, may His goodness & mercy follow you, & may you be anchored deeply in the hope of the resurrection. (Prayer Points) Father, we thank You for Your word, for Your love & for Your grace. Thank You for Your forgiveness & that when we fail, You can pick us up, dust us off & restore us. Use us for Your glory...

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 28:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Heb 13:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.