

Acts 23:12-35

"God's Got His Eye On You"

Believer; I want you to take heart today. As a child of God, you – are – never – alone. No matter how dark it may seem, how despondent you may feel or how downhearted you may be. You are not alone.

That was the life lesson Paul the apostle was being reminded of when we last left off. No doubt he would describe his last 2 days in Jerusalem as one catastrophic failure after another. This man who had enjoyed such enormous success in evangelizing the *Gentiles* simply could not win the *Jews* to Christ. He wanted *nothing more*, & they would hear *nothing more* from him. So there he was, *alone* inside the prison walls of the Antonia fortress.

& By the way the text lays out we get the impression that he was really/genuinely struggling w/the way everything transpired & the end result of it all. He's thinking, "I went into the temple to try & appease James & the elders -- & a riot broke out. I shared the story of my conversion & my commission on the stairs & the people wanted to kill me. I tried to share w/the rulers of the nation... & it only came to confusion, chaos & disorder... I failed, there's no fruit, no ground gained, or headway made for the kingdom at all..."

It was one of the lowest ebbs, one of the sincerest times of struggle (emotionally, inwardly) that he had faced. We might call it his darkest hour; & that's exactly when Jesus somehow & in some way manifested Himself to Paul & assured Paul that He was *with* him. He didn't *rebuke* him, didn't *discourage* him, He *encouraged* him, *strengthened* him & stood *by* Him.

Listen, the Lord knows where you're at. He sees what you're going through inwardly, He understands the struggles you're facing emotionally, circumstantially, spiritually & He is with you, always, even to the end of the age. He will never leave you, never forsake you.

We wonder (w/all the believers in Jerusalem) where *any* of them were during this Paul's time of need? Look, people will fail you, they will fall down & not be there for you when you think you need them the most. But the Lord will *never* fail you, He will *always* be w/you & that's why we look *to*, trust *in* & derive our strength *from* Him. Look at **Vs 11**.

I told you last week that there was more in this Vs that I wanted to share w/you so we're going to spend some time here, we don't want to rush through the encouragement of the word of God.

Jesus says to him, "Be of good cheer, Paul."

Listen; you're not told to take heart, or to cheer up unless you're down. The Lord comes to him & says to him, "Hey, chin up". I love this. The Lord doesn't say, "Wow, Paul, you really blew it there didn't ya?" Listen to me; there is therefore now *no* condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now; *conviction* comes from the Lord, *condemnation* is of the devil. We *receive* conviction (it draws us near to the Lord), we *reject* condemnation (it drives us away from the Lord).

Maybe you feel like you've really blown it, like there's no fruit in your life, like maybe God's finished w/you. Jesus has a word for you; "be of good cheer". He's the lifter of your head, the One who encourages your heart to stay strong, to not faint (or grow weary of doing good).

As I was reading & thinking through this section of scripture, I couldn't help but be reminded of the 3rd Psalm in which David wrote, "*Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.'* (Selah) *But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head.*"¹

I don't know. Maybe Paul was discouraged by the apparent lack of results. The Lord says, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have *"testified"* of Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." Here's what I'm wanting you to see. Jesus wasn't worried *about* or even drawing attention *to* how people *responded* to the message. Merely Paul's faithfulness to *proclaim* the message.

In essence He says, "Paul, don't be discouraged, you didn't *fail*, you remained *faithful* to testify of *Me*." & *That* (ladies & gentlemen) is what we've been called to do, nothing more, & definitely nothing less. Do you remember the words of Jesus to His disciples in the 8th Vs, of the 1st Ch, of the book of Acts when He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them? He said, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"²

Guys this is so huge for you & me! God's not keeping track of how many people we lead to Jesus as if the more we persuade, the greater the reward. The results of the message are between the hearer & God; what's critical is that we're faithful to share the truth of J.C. & Him crucified for the sin of the world.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 3:1-3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 1:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

As we say around here from time to time. Jesus never said, “Well done good & famous servant.” He said, “*Well done, good and faithful servant;*”³ Paul was faithful to testify of J.C. & Jesus commended him for that very thing. The question for you & me is “How faithful are we?”

Few more things here & we’ll shift gears (I told you there was a lot in this Vs ☺). I don’t know if this thought crossed your mind, but it did mine. Paul was in prison. Jesus appeared to him. If I’m Paul I’m thinking, “Woohoo, & He came to set the captives free! I’m out of here!” But (this is important to see); Jesus didn’t deliver him *out of* his situation, but rather He stood with him & strengthened him *in* the situation. He wasn’t there to take him *out*, to deliver him *from*, but to see him *through*. Are you following me?

Now; there are times when the Lord will deliver us *from* our time of trouble, *from* the trial (Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; back in Philippi), but this time Jesus wasn’t there to take him from the trial, but to strengthen him for the trial.

Listen, truth be told, there are times when we’re in the midst of a struggle (whatever it may be) & we think, “Lord, I’m surrendering to You.” But truth be told what we’re really doing is saying, “Ok, God, You’ve got my attention, now You can get me out of this.” Can I tell you, God doesn’t always want to get you out of it... Sometimes He wants to meet us *in whatever we’re facing at that time*. Remember these words? “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;*”⁴ & Again, “*Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*”⁵

So be encouraged, whatever you’re going through, the Lord is *with* you, He will *strengthen you, help you, & uphold you* w/His righteous right hand...

What else is happening here? Jesus got Paul’s eyes off the past & set his focus on the future. “As you’ve testified of Me in Jerusalem (the past), so you must also do in Rome (future).” Now; if you’re a lazy servant & the Lord says, “I have something more for you” it might grieve you. But if you’re a faithful servant & God gives you a job you’re like, “Yes! Bring it Lord, let’s do this!” This was something Paul *longed* for, read the book of Acts, read the book of Romans, he *wanted* to minister, to preach/teach God’s word in Rome.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 25:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 43:2-3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 41:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus says, “You’re going to Rome.” Listen, don’t get bogged down by the past, set your sights on what lies ahead. You can’t change the past, but you can certainly learn from it & use it to excel in the future. To the Philippians Paul put it this way, *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*⁶

If you’re a child of God, He has more people for you to love *on*, to share the gospel *with*, more saints to serve in His name, more people to encourage w/a word in due season. Let me challenge you; bring Jesus to someone this week. I didn’t say, “Lead someone to Jesus” they may or may not respond to the message, that’s between them & God. But ours is to testify of Him.

What does that look like in a social quarantine? Pray it through & ask God to show you. One thing that comes to *my* mind is that I see a *lot* of memes these days 😊. Silly, goofy, funny memes that people put out (& that’s great). But what if, say, 1 out of ever 5 or so silly things we share or put out, we throw out 1 thing that points people to Christ? That shares w/them the love of Christ, the truth of the gospel? What they do w/that is between them & the Lord, ours is to be the light of the world, so shine bright for J.C. Bring hope to the hopeless (those who are w/out God being w/out hope in the world).

See this too... Jesus just gave Paul a promise, “You’re going to Rome.” Do you know what that means? He essentially just gave him a “superman suit” 😊. Nothing can touch him, no life-threatening harm can come to him, he’s essentially bullet proof (maybe I should say “sword proof” or “arrow proof”) until he gets to Rome. Now; once he reaches Rome all bets are off. But Jesus just gave him a guarantee, think about that! Paul wasn’t sure he’d make it out of *Jerusalem* alive, now Jesus promises him *Rome*! So in more ways than one, as we turn our attention to Vs 12, a new day dawns on Paul the apostle.

Vs 12-15

Well good morning Paul! Isn’t this interesting? Last night Paul knew he was in a bad situation, but he didn’t know the ½ of it! The next day, over 40 Jewish assassins made a vow that they wouldn’t eat or drink anything until they had murdered Paul the apostle! Now, think this through, did Paul know this was going to happen? No. Did Jesus? Yes! Yet He still told Paul, “Be of good cheer.”

Here's where I'm going w/this. You may think you're in a bad way right now. But truth be told you may not even know the ½ of it! Things may be *way worse* than you even think they are! But Jesus knows; & He *still* says to you, be of good cheer. Why? Because everything is peachy? No, but because God is still on the throne & Rom 8:28 is still in effect. All things are working together for good to those who love God & are called according to His purpose. We may not see it initially, but ultimately, eternally we'll see & give God glory.

Now listen, these men didn't lack in zeal, but their zeal wasn't based in an appropriate understanding of the word of God. Zeal & devotion in & of themselves aren't any kind of proof that someone is right w/God... But Jesus warned His disciples, *"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."*⁷ These guys think they're serving God commendably by murdering Paul the apostle. So they hatch a plan together w/the chief priests to have Paul brought to them the next day for further inquiry & interrogation & they'll ambush him & kill him before he ever gets there.

Now; Jesus told Paul, he's going to Rome. They say they're going to kill Paul, who's counsel do you suppose will stand? Write these down & look them up later, Pr +21:30 & Is 8:10.
Vs 16-22

Is it just me or is the 1st thing you think when you read this section of scripture, "Wait, Paul had a sister?" We know virtually nothing about Paul's family. He never mentions them in his letters. We do know that his father was a Pharisee before he was, now we learn that he had a sister & a nephew... what else don't we know? We don't know ☺. We don't know if she lived in Jerusalem, or perhaps he was in school in Jerusalem down from Tarsus as Paul when he was young... we just don't know. Were they believers? We don't know.

But because Paul (& his sister's) dad had been a Pharisee, we know what she (& in some form or fashion he as well) was privy to these kinds of circles. However he heard, overheard or whatever, what's really in play is what we refer to as the "providence" of God. His providing, protecting oversight of Paul. God's got His eye on Paul. It wasn't by *accident* that he overheard what was going to happen, it was how God was protecting him!

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [In 16:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& I love the balance that the bible brings to us because what's happening here is the harmony between God's providence & what we might call the sanctified common sense of the believer.

Think this through. Jesus had given Paul His word, had made him a promise. "You're going to Rome." But when this talk of ambush & assassination came to Paul's attention, he wasn't like, "Listen nephew, I appreciate your concern but Jesus made me a promise so don't worry about it." That's not the way this works. The bible is clear that we're not to tempt the Lord our God. In other words, God loves you, He cares for you, He will provide for you & protect you, but that doesn't give you a license to go play in the street because you'll get hit by a car! God's promised to provide, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't get a job. The way He provides most generally is through us getting a job! Are you w/me?

When Satan had Jesus upon the pinnacle of the temple, he said to Him, *"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"* (he even had scripture to validate his statement! **How many of you realize that we can make the bible say whatever we want it to? We can validate & substantiate anything we want by twisting scripture. That's why [Listen], that's why context is key when making observations, interpretations & applications of God's word.**) Jesus said to him, *"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*⁸

Yes, God was going to protect Paul, but not through Paul's passivity, but rather through His *proactivity*. & So often this is how it works, God provides & God protects, not through our being passive, but proactive. Using that "sanctified common sense" that He's given us.

When you're sick, seek the Lord to heal you & then go to the doctor! Be it through miraculous or medical means, either way, the glory goes to God. So often He moves supernaturally in very (seemingly) natural/practical ways. It was no accident that Paul's nephew heard what was about to happen. Paul recognized that & acted accordingly. Prov 22:3 *"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, (takes appropriate measures) But the simple pass on and are punished."*⁹

Vs 23-24

This is God's way of saying, "I got you Paul." ☺ "How about an armed motorcade & all the power of the secret service to give you personal escort out of the city?"

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 4:6-7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 22:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

470 soldiers to escort 1 man overnight safely out of the city. Family, here's what I want you to see. God was affirming to Paul that He saw him, he had his eye on him & was watching over him.

I want you to know that God's got His eye on *you*, He cares about *you*, & He will provide for & protect *you*. He has a plan for you. It doesn't mean trials & tough times won't visit you, let's not forget Paul is a prisoner. & He will remain a prisoner throughout the remainder of the book of Acts. Words like "God's provision/protection" don't imply primrose, problem free existence. It means, God has a plan for you, & until His purposes are fulfilled through you, you'll be here. When He's through using our lives, He'll call us home. Some are called home young, some live to be old, some go in peaceful ways, others through seeming tragedy. The point remains, God loves you & He will be w/you every step of the way.

Vs 25-30

This letter's a little misleading. He didn't find out that he was a Roman until *after* he was rescued & he left out the little, "I nearly had him scourged illegally" part. But ultimately Luke wants us to see here that as far as Rome was concerned, he was innocent of any wrong doing. He has a "not guilty" verdict in the eyes of this commander.

Vs 31-32

The Road to Antipatris was the most dangerous & liable to be ambushed. After that things flattened out & they could go the rest the way w/out the soldiers... The plot of the 40 assassins foiled! Did they starve? No. There were all kinds of loopholes they'd formed in the law. One of which the Rabbis would absolve you if you couldn't fulfill your vow due to unforeseen circumstances. So I'm sure they had a hearty meal the next day...

Vs 33-35

Some 20 yrs earlier Jesus had told Paul that he would testify of Him before kings. Up to this point that hasn't happened. Soon it will. I would imagine that word from the Lord probably flashed through his mind when all this was happening.

We're going to wrap up here but I want to encourage you w/a final word of application. Jesus made Paul some promises (both 20 yrs ago, & the night before last) both of which he needed to believe & receive by faith, that they might encourage him in how he thought & how he felt. You & me, we're to do the same.

Jesus has made you promises, He's promised to forgive you of all your sin, if you'll just trust in Him & His work for you upon the cross.

To make your life new, to give you joy, to give you peace, “peace I leave with you, My peace. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Power to overcome sin & to walk in righteousness. Promise after promise, believe it, receive it today.

Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved... for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Let's pray

God we thank You for the timely encouragement of Your word. May we not focus on failures in the past, but to press toward the mark of Your upward call in Christ Jesus... To focus on what lies ahead. To believe, receive, & walk in Your promises for us, thank You for Your faithfulness, pour Your Spirit out *on* us, & be glorified *in* us.