

Series: "Finishing What was Started"

C.R. 4-21-23

"A Light in the Dark"

Text: Acts 23: 1-22

Intro: The roller coaster ride for Paul continues. He is a wanted man, and they prefer dead more than alive. In the Jews mind he was a traitor. In Paul's mind he loved them and their soul more than his very own. The Romans are curious about him, because he seems to cause a riot every where he goes. Today we are going to see Paul get an incredible opportunity and then see the result of that.

1) Paul's Opening Remark. (v.1)

- a. According to William Barclay, this address meant that Paul was bold in speaking to the council, setting himself on an equal footing with them. The normal style of address was to say, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel."
- b. The day prior to this Paul had an incredible opportunity that did not go very well. He now has been given an even greater opportunity. He gets to address the Sanhedrin (Congress if you will).
- c. Notice that Paul said "Men and Brethren". By doing this he set himself on equal footing with them.
- d. I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day: Paul probably thought this was an innocent enough way to begin his preaching. He didn't mean that he was sinlessly perfect and that his conscience had never told him he was wrong. Rather, he meant that he had responded to conscience when he had done wrong and had set things right.

2) Ananias Response (v.2).

- a. Punch him in the mouth.
- b. Paul's claim of a good conscience offended the high priest. He thought that someone accused of such serious crimes should never claim a clear conscience

- c. This order was illegal, for the Jewish law said, 'He who strikes the cheek of one Israelite, strikes as it were the glory of God,' and 'He that strikes a man strikes the Holy One.'" (Hughes)
- d. He did not scruple to use violence and assassination to further his interests" (Bruce). Later, because of his pro-Roman politics, Ananias was brutally killed by Jewish nationalists.

3) Paul's Rebuke (v.3-5)

- a. These verses are a lot like today's texts. We just don't know what tone of voice he said these things in.
- b. I know what my tone of voice would have been like if I had just been punched in the mouth.
- c. Not matter the tone the words were true. They looked good on the outside and they were rotten on the inside.
- d. *God will strike you: "Paul's words, however, were more prophetic than he realized. Ananias' final days — despite all his scheming and bribes — were lived as a hunted animal and ended at the hands of his own people."* (Longenecker)
- e. Note: Lots of debate on verse 5. Again because we do not know the tone of voice that was used by Paul. Eyesight, sarcasm, a serious apology are all possible.
- f. This isn't unreasonable, since Paul had been away from the council and the high circles of Jewish authority in Jerusalem for more than 20 years. Probably, he simply didn't recognize the man who gave the command to strike him as the high priest. However, some think he did not know because Paul's eyesight was bad.

4) Paul's Realization (v. 6-10)

- a. As Paul read the room, he realized they are not going to hear me out. They only want blood.
- b. At this point he made a brilliant move. He turned them against one another.
- c. **Illustrate:** It would be like standing in Congress and bringing up gun rights, or abortion.
- d. Note: The Pharisees come to the aid of Paul now. (v. 9)
- e. Usually, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were bitter enemies, but they were able to unite in opposition against Jesus (Matthew 16:1, John 11:47-53) and Paul. It's strange how people with nothing in common will come together as friends to oppose God or His work.

5) Jesus Reassurance (v.11)

- a. This was a very low point in his life. Paul may be at the lowest point of his ministry.
- b. Perhaps with tears, Paul mourned these lost opportunities for God and how he might have spoiled them. At moments like these, one is often tormented with a deep sense of unworthiness and un-useableness before God. Perhaps this was his end of ministry.
- c. "Bold, courageous, fearless during the day, the night of loneliness finds the strength spent, and the enemy is never slow to take advantage of that fact." (Morgan)
- d. It was in the darkness of that night when the fears came upon Paul; when his trust in God seemed to falter; when he worried about what God was going to do and if he was going to make it. It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him.
- e. Paul was alone, but he wasn't alone; if everyone else forsook him, Jesus was enough. Better to be in jail with the Lord than to be in heaven without him.
- f. **Illustrate:** *Jesus knew where Paul was; He had not lost sight of Paul because he was in jail. When John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, was in jail, a man visited him and said, "Friend, the Lord sent me to you, and I have been looking in half the prisons in England for you." John Bunyan replied, "I don't think the Lord sent you to me, because if He had, you would have come here first. God knows I have been here for years." God knows where you are today; even if you are hiding it from everyone else, God knows where you are.*
- g. **Guzik:** *Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell. We often demand that Jesus deliver us out of our circumstances, when He wants to meet us right in them. We sometimes think we are surrendering to Jesus when we are really only demanding an escape. God wants to meet us in whatever we face at the moment.*