

“LIVING WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE”

Acts 23:1-11

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INTRODUCTION

How good it is to live with a good conscience before God! When that is the case we can expect His hand of blessing and can expect His comforting presence and encouragement during our times of need. We can also expect that He will guide us in order that we might fulfill His plan for our lives—and the ministry He has given us to perform.

Now God does not promise us a life free from stress and struggles; but He does promise to guide us through all of those and to bring us safely to glory!

In this passage we find Paul in a predicament. He had been unjustly attacked by a Jewish mob, forcefully rescued by a Roman tribune and his soldiers, given an opportunity to share his testimony before the unruly mob, nearly scourged unjustly by the Roman soldiers, and now placed before the Jewish high court in order that he might defend himself against an unfounded and unfair attack by the Sanhedrin consisting of both Sadducees and Pharisees.

Paul had the earnest desire to continue his ministry of earnestly preaching the gospel of Christ even as far as Rome; this desire was not selfish—it was for the Glory of God and for the good of lost souls. But these present circumstances seemed to put that goal in dire jeopardy.

But, God is so good! And He is also so good in your life and mine! Surely, “all things do work together for good” to those who live before God with a “perfectly good conscience.”

YOU MUST LIVE BEFORE GOD WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

I. DISRESPECT TOWARD AUTHORITY (23:1-5)

Sometimes what may seem like “righteous indignation” is simply an expression of our “hurt pride.” Luke gives us a fair assessment of Paul—even a few “warts” and “blemishes.”

- A. Defense of his ministry and activities in Jerusalem—“lived with a perfectly good conscience before God.”
 - Explanation of a “good conscience”
 - Idea of “before God”
- B. Deliberate antagonism by the current high priest, Ananias (a real scoundrel; 2)
- C. Defiant response from Paul (3)
 - What is a “whitewashed wall”?
 - Was this a prophecy or a statement of fact?
 - Hypocrisy in the legal action taken by the high priest
 - Compare the smiting on the face received by Jesus in Jn. 18:22-23 and His response
- D. Defense of the High Priest by the others (4)—abusive language must not be so used
- E. Humble apology by Paul (v. 5)
 - How could Paul not “know” that this was the high priest?

- Ex. 22:28 clearly speaks on this issue, and Paul lived by a high standard (Rom. 13:1ff).

Now, at this point we must assume that some conversation ensued that Luke does not see fit to record for us. At the strategic moment when confusion was rising, Paul noted the natural barrier between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and used a significant truth to stir further dissension among the Council members.

II. DIVISION AMONG THE COUNCIL MEMBERS (6-10)

- A. Appropriateness of Paul's claim as a Pharisee
- B. Accuracy of the point concerning which the trial was being held—the “hope of the resurrection of the dead” (cf. 24:15, 21)
- C. Existing differences among council members become exaggerated (7-9)
 1. Division of the Council between Pharisees and Sadducees
 2. Belief system of the two groups (8)
 - Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection, nor in angels, nor in spirits.
 - Pharisees accept all of these beliefs.
 3. Defense of Paul by some of the Pharisaic scribes—the argument became very “heated”.
 - Paul has done nothing wrong
 - Possibly a spirit (human-like his claim about Jesus—but not acknowledging that Jesus is alive) or an angel has spoken to him (Paul had mentioned a couple of visions that he had experienced).
- D. The Tribune put a stop to the chaotic deliberations (10)
 1. He feared for Paul's safety—torn to pieces like by a wild animal.
 2. Troops swooped down from the fort to take him back into custody.
 3. Paul taken “by force”—same word as used for the “rapture” in I Thes 4:17.
 4. Paul brought back into the barracks.

This had been quite an experience for Paul—very overwhelming. He was in poor condition physically, and was likely in a fragile state emotionally! He needed help and divine assurance.

III. DIVINE ASSURANCE OF PROTECTION AND FUTURE MINISTRY (11)

- A. The Lord stood by his side
- B. The Lord spoke words of “good cheer.”
 - Compare the words spoken to those about to be healed.
 - Compare the words spoken to the disciples in the boat during the storm.
 - Compare the words spoken to the disciples on the eve before His arrest and trial.
- C. The Lord gave him assurance of continued witness
 1. Paul had solemnly witnessed in Jerusalem (showing divine approval of Paul being there)
 2. Paul would likewise bear witness at Rome—but how Paul got there was not the way that he had planned!

CONCLUSION

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