



October 1, 2023

“Take Courage!”

Acts 23:1-11

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In Acts 23, Paul was put in prison for protection from an angry mob that was trying to kill him. While there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and said, “Be of good cheer,” or literally, “Take courage!” Jesus knew exactly what Paul needed to hear amid his discouragement. Our Lord is the dispenser of encouragement, and He knows when we need it too. There are five separate occasions recorded in the Bible when Jesus spoke encouragement to individuals, and every time He did, it was to address their fear, worry, or discouragement. Do you need to hear Jesus say, “Take courage” today? Is there someone in your life you could encourage? In this teaching from Acts 23, we will discuss encouragement from Jesus in the life of the Believer.

1. [Acts 23:1-11](#) - *“Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’ And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?’ And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’ Then Paul said, ‘I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.”’ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.’ Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from*

among them, and bring him into the barracks. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.'"

2. Paul before the Sanhedrin

- a. An angry mob attacked Paul
 - i. The Jews viewed Paul as a traitor for preaching that salvation is through belief in Jesus rather than through works
- b. Paul was rescued from the mob by Roman soldiers
 - i. The Roman commander realized the confrontation was regarding a religious dispute and took Paul to face the Jewish ruling council, known as the Sanhedrin
- c. The Sanhedrin was in agreement with the mob
- d. The council consisted of Sadducees and Pharisees
 - i. The two sects had the same basic beliefs with some doctrinal differences
 1. The Sadducees rejected the concept of resurrection from the dead and did not believe in heaven, hell, angels, or demons
- e. Paul knew he would not get a fair trial and asserted his heritage as a Pharisee (v. 6)
 - i. He used the doctrinal differences to pit the two sects against one another instead of against him (v. 7)
 1. The Pharisees briefly came to his defense, but the two sides erupted into chaos

3. Paul in prison

- a. The Roman commander once again recognized Paul was in danger and placed him in prison for his safety
- b. Jesus appeared to Paul while he was in prison and stated, *"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."*
 - i. *"Be of good cheer"* is translated in other versions as *"be encouraged"* or *"take courage"*
 1. The Greek word for *"be of good cheer"* is **tharseō**, which means "to be confident and take courage"
- c. Paul would remain in prison or under house arrest for years as he attempted to get a fair trial
 - i. God used Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to place him before the highest government officials in the land so that he could share the Gospel with them
 1. **Acts 9:15** - "...[Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."
 2. Paul presented his defense and testified of Jesus to:
 - a. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 23)

- b. Governor Felix in Caesarea (Acts 24)
- c. Governor Festus (Acts 25)
- d. King Agrippa (Acts 26)
- e. Emperor Nero (Caesar) in Rome

4. Take courage

a. Jesus used the word **tharseō** five times in the New Testament:

- i. When He healed a paralytic
 - 1. **Matthew 9:2** - *“Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, **be of good cheer**; your sins are forgiven you.’”*
- ii. When He walked on water
 - 1. **Mark 6:50** - *“For they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, ‘**Be of good cheer!** It is I; do not be afraid.’”*
- iii. When He healed a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years
 - 1. **Luke 8:48** - *“And He said to her, ‘Daughter, **be of good cheer**; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.’”*
- iv. When telling His disciples of the tribulations they would face
 - 1. **John 16:33** - *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but **be of good cheer**, I have overcome the world.”*
- v. When Paul was placed in prison
 - 1. **Acts 23:11** - *“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “**Be of good cheer**, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”*

5. Success in God’s eyes is measured by faithfulness, not results

- a. There is no record of any of the government officials that Paul spoke with accepting Christ as Savior, but there is evidence that members of Caesar’s household became Christians
 - i. **Philippians 4:22** - *“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.”*
- b. Jesus gives us courage and calls us to impart that courage to others
 - i. **Hebrews 3:13** - *“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (1984 NIV)*
 - ii. **Hebrews 10:25** - *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (1984 NIV)*
 - iii. **Psalm 27** -
*“The LORD is my light and my salvation;
 Whom shall I fear?”*

*The LORD is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh,
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.
Though an army may encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I will be confident.
One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.
For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in His pavilion;
In the secret place of His tabernacle
He shall hide me;
He shall set me high upon a rock.
And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies
all around me;
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.
Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice!
Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
When You said, 'Seek My face,'
My heart said to You, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek.'
Do not hide Your face from me;
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;
Do not leave me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation.
When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then the LORD will take care of me.
Teach me Your way, O LORD,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.*

*Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 23:1-11](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Why was Paul taken before the Sanhedrin? Why was he ultimately placed in prison? (See #2 and #3a above)
3. Discuss the significance of Jesus' appearance to Paul. Why did Jesus choose that time in Paul's life to appear with a word of encouragement? (See #3 above)
4. Read [Matthew 9:2](#), [Mark 6:50](#), [Luke 8:48](#), and [John 16:33](#). Discuss the circumstances under which Jesus spoke encouragement to people. Are there specific times in your life when God spoke encouragement to you? (See #4 above)
5. How does God measure success? (See #5 above)
6. Read [Philippians 4:22](#). Why did God allow Paul to endure prison, for the purpose of placing him in a position to share the Gospel with government officials, when there is no record that those officials ever accepted Christ as Savior? What can we learn from Paul's experience? (See #5 above)
7. Read [Hebrews 3:13](#) and [Hebrews 10:25](#). Why is both receiving and giving encouragement important? How can we encourage others? (See #5b above)
8. Read [Psalm 27](#). What verses do you find most encouraging in this chapter? Why? (See #5b-iii above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)