



39 | ACTS 22:12-23:11

STANDING ALONE FOR JESUS

*Let us be active, serving the Lord, knowing that even when we stand alone,
we are never alone, for the Lord is standing with us!*

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Call to Worship

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! **2** Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! **3** Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. **4** Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! **5** For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. —Psalm 100

Songs

Behold Our God
Before the Throne of God Above
In Christ Alone / The Solid Rock
How Great Thou Art
Give Me Jesus

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

We are all called to stand alone as Christians. We are crucified with Christ. We must put aside our reputation, what people think of us—and freely testify of Christ no matter what the consequences.

The night I came to know Christ, the preacher said, “**If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything,**” and I was falling for everything. I was willing to stand for Christ that night, even if it meant losing my friends. I did end up losing my friends, but everything and everyone I lost, God gave me a hundred-fold more friends and forever family.

Paul in Acts 22 has to stand alone, but he’s never really alone because the Lord is standing with him. **We can stand alone because we believe God is omnipotent and sovereign** over all events, lovingly guiding our life to be conformed to the image of Christ. We have nothing to fear.

Paul gives his testimony, and as a result, experiences maltreatment. He becomes a prisoner. In the Christian life, there is always spiritual attack, and there is not always a clear way out. While we can always escape temptation to sin, we cannot always escape persecution and maltreatment. Yet Paul is serving God and never feels alone because God is with him, baptizing him with his Spirit continually. He can stand alone because he is never alone.

Key Thought: We cannot be growing in the Christian life, unless we are serving Christ daily, filled with the fullness of God’s presence. The moment we stop experiencing his presence, we stop standing, and we can compromise. Let us be active, serving the Lord, knowing that even when we stand alone, we are never alone, for the Lord is standing with us!

Paul was constantly growing, and because he wouldn’t compromise. He was willing to stand alone. Paul was an evangelist, as we all ought to be, ready to give his testimony and the way to Christ at any time. This costs him. It seems like he’s alone, but he’s never alone. The Lord is with him.

Paul the apostle becomes “**Paul the prisoner**” (Acts 23:18). This was the name the Roman soldiers used for the apostle, a designation he himself often used (Eph 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim 1:8; Phm 1, 9). Paul was under “military custody,” which meant he was bound to a Roman soldier who was responsible for him. Prisoners under “public custody” were put in the common jail, a horrible place for any human being to suffer (Acts 16:19–24). This was Paul’s new home for now.

Paul’s friends could visit him and help meet his personal needs. It is sad that we don’t read, “And prayer was made fervently by the church for Paul” (*cf* Acts 12:5). There is no record that the Jerusalem church took any steps to assist him, either in Jerusalem or during his two years in Caesarea.¹ Of course Paul often asked for prayer for himself as a “prisoner in chains.” It seems that Paul was entering a phase in his ministry where he was utterly alone at times.

¹ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 493.

So how is one to act when the whole world is against you? He has the Gentiles against him. The Jews against him. We find out in this chapter that only the Lord is for him. And when the Lord is for you, that is enough.

1. TELL GOD'S STORY (22:10-21)

Paul is always telling his story of how God saved him. Paul is willing to stand alone and give his testimony, **calling the people of Israel once again to repentance on the Day of Pentecost**. He's on the steps of the Antonia Fortress where the Lord Jesus was mocked with purple robe and crown of thorns. He's protected by a thousand Roman soldiers. Remember from Paul's testimony he gave.

PAUL'S MOMENT OF SALVATION

One of the most effective things Paul does is tells the story of his own salvation. They all knew who Paul was.

Paul's Reputation

Paul had been a zealous Pharisee, persecuting Christians relentlessly.

Acts 22:3-5a | "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus ... being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

Paul's Revelation

Remember what happened?

Acts 22:6-9 | As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

It was the Lord of the Old Testament, the pillar of glory appearing to him, and he identified himself as the Lord of glory, Jesus of Nazareth.

As the Lord Jesus called Paul to salvation, Paul asked the Lord to identify himself. He said he was "Jesus the Nazarene who you have been persecuting." This was said to bring Paul to repentance. When we repent, we bring our sin into the light and see it in all its ugliness. Paul's next response is "What shall I do, Lord?" There is a surrender, a turning to Christ—a complete submission to him.

Paul's Response

Paul responded by asking what to do!

Acts 22:10-11 | I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' ¹¹And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

He's to go to Damascus and meet a man named Ananias. **Paul obeyed. Theologians call this "irresistible grace."** Paul, who was once unwilling and opposed to Christ became "**willing in the day of God's power**" (Psa 110:3). Not all of us get a Damascus Road experience, but we all are drawn to the Father and given eyes to see. Though Paul was blinded by the light, he had surrendered by faith to Jesus. After all Paul's persecution of Christians, **Jesus pursued Paul and softened his heart.**

PAUL'S CALL FOR SANCTIFICATION

Ananias, a faithful brother in Damascus, met Paul and restored his sight. At that moment Paul was given a commission to evangelize and a command to be baptized.

A New Friend

Acts 22:12 | And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there.

Ananias was a devout disciple of Christ from Damascus, but he was known by the Jews as someone who was **faithful to the law**. Even the Jews in Jerusalem seem to know that Ananias is a good and blameless man. When God saves us, he puts us in his "forever family" in the Body of Christ. This **life-changing salvation** is guided by God's people that surround us **like parents surround and hold on to their baby**.

A New Sight

Acts 22:13-15 | And one Ananias ... came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

It is touching that this godly man Ananias had a gift of healing of sorts. He says, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." He was able to restore Saul of Tarsus' sight back to him. This is a true, **physical healing**, but it is also representative of what was happening in Paul's life. **He is given spiritual sight**. With John Newton, Paul could say, "**I once was lost but not I'm found, was blind but now I see**." This a beautiful picture of repentant faith, which is a brand-new worldview. Paul is seeing through new eyes. It's also an appropriate picture of regeneration, for Paul could see because he had a new heart and a **new nature by the Holy Spirit**, now indwelling him.

A New Family

Acts 22:16 | And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Paul had been circumcised on the eighth day to be assimilated into the people of Israel, but now he was told to seek a new induction and **assimilate into the church of the living God through baptism**. Baptism is a picture of our conversion, where God washes us clean of all our idols (Eze 36:25ff). Baptism is a way to testify to the world and God and to angels that you are not ashamed of the gospel. It is an outward sign of the inward reality that God has “washed away all your sins.” Paul was indeed baptized, calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. Let’s give glory to God for giving us a true salvation. Listen to Jesus’ call to each of us:

John 3:3 | Ye must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let us be patient and look for our children, our friends, and neighbors to truly come to Christ and see with new eyes and a new wonder. So many make false professions because they have not been born again.

PAUL’S COMMISSION FOR SERVICE

Paul now turns to the reality of what God has done. The majority of the Jews had rejected the gospel. Paul had fallen into a trance while he was in the temple. There God gave him a vision that the Jews had rejected the Messiah, and that Paul’s ministry was to be far away from the Jews in the distant lands of the Gentiles.

Acts 22:17-21 | “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ ²¹ And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

The first time he was in Jerusalem, **Paul went into a trance**, and he was told to go far away to the Gentiles. Paul obeyed this commission, and planted churches in every place throughout the ancient world.

Now, Paul, **back in Jerusalem will not be able to flee Jerusalem this time**, but will instead go **“far away to the Gentiles”** with an escort of Roman soldiers. He’ll be **witnessing to them all along the way**. He will indeed make his way to Rome eventually, and then he will be free for a time and possibly even preach in Spain before he is imprisoned again, this time at the Mamertine prison in Rome, being cellmates with the apostle Peter. Church tradition states that they died on the same day around October 67 A.D.

Paul was willing to **bypass his comfort zone** and reach the world for Christ. We must do the same. We must have the calling and vision of Paul in our own lives. We are called to bring people to Christ, but **we often bypass our calling and become distracted by comfort**. It reminds me of a sad story I read recently in an Ethics book about a tragedy here in Chicago.

ILLUSTRATION: Christopher Sercye was playing basketball with his friends on May 16, 1998, when he was shot in the chest, and a stray bullet perforated his aorta. His friends helped him get to within **forty feet of the entrance to Ravenswood Hospital** and then went inside and asked for help. The **hospital staff shockingly**

refused to help Christopher saying that it was against the hospital's policies to **administer aid** to those outside the hospital. Eventually a policeman was able to get a wheelchair and **wheeled Christopher into the hospital** where he was helped by the hospital staff. It was **too late, however, and Christopher died** about an hour later.²

We who have the gospel are called to preach it "to every creature," and the consequence of our disobedience is not just that our loved ones will physically die, but they will suffer eternally. We are called to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" to everyone. Paul asks, "**How shall they hear without a preacher?**" (Rom 10:14).

Many times, it seems that churches are surrounded by people that desperately need to hear the gospel, yet Christians are content to share it **only with those that manage to come inside their church**. Let's never forget the gospel's power! Bring your loved ones to Christ!

Romans 1:16 | I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

JOHN PATON: I think of John Paton, who was willing to give his life to the gospel no matter what the cost. He was headed to the **Hebrides Islands off the Northwest coast of Scotland** where there had been those who had already lost their lives due to the people who were cannibals. When Paton said he was headed there, a Mr. Dickson exploded, "**The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!**" But to this John Paton responded:

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.³

God protected John Paton, and he **claimed the little island of Aniwa for Christ**, and the entire island of several hundred formerly cannibal islanders came to Christ and stopped practicing cannibalism. Paton said:

I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Savior's feet.⁴

God rewards our courage to witness to our loved ones. Paul loved his own people and was willing to be accursed for them. What a joy for Paul to give his testimony to the great crowd on the day of Pentecost.

But God's plan was to remove Paul from Jerusalem and **set him on his way to Rome**. In order to get there, he's thrust into a dangerous situation when the crowd rejects his message.

2. TRUST GOD'S PLAN (22:22-30)

² Robert T. Hall, *An Introduction to Healthcare Organizational Ethics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000), 151.

³ Ralph Bell, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (Butler, IN: The Highley Press, 1957), 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.

GOD'S PLAN SOMETIMES INCLUDES DANGER

Paul's just tells his story to the people of Israel gathered for Pentecost, but **they are not happy. A riot was brewing over Paul announcing** to the crowd of Jews at Pentecost that they had rejected their Messiah, and now Paul was commanded by the Lord to go "far away to the Gentiles." This was an insult to the Jews, and Paul was saying that it came from the Lord himself. They now want to kill Paul.

Acts 22:22-24 | Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For **he should not be allowed to live.**"²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

This was nothing like that first Pentecost of the church when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This time the people were under the control of the wicked one. They believed he was guilty of the death penalty. If a person brought a Gentile into the inner court of Israel at the temple, that was considered a capital crime. **They showed their disapproval** in the traditional way by shouting and **waving their garments and throwing up dust in the air.**⁵

The Jews may have removed their cloaks in preparation to stone Paul, torn them in an expression of horror at his "blasphemy," or thrown them and the dust into the air as an expression of outrage.⁶ **Sometimes when we do what is right, bad things happen. But the Lord is with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.**

A riot begins to brew. The tribune must act swiftly. Paul is removed from the crowd and brought to the tribune. He is **about to get the flogging** and most brutal beating of his life. He is brought before the Gentiles and now before the Sanhedrin council of the Jews. A riot nearly starts again, but this time it is among the Sanhedrin, Israel's Supreme Court (seventy men of Israel plus the high priest). Finally, Paul is brought before the Lord where he is comforted. What we learn in this chapter is this.

The Roman officer decided to interrogate Paul and ordered him into the barracks of the Antonia Fortress to be flogged with the dreaded **flagellum, a cat-o-nine tails, as our Lord was.** This was to extract information from him. I've been in the Antonia Fortress, in the torture chamber where they flogged people.

TORTURE COMING: The sunlight faded, and the noise died as they marched Paul to the lower floor of the Antonia Fortress, into vaulted cellars lit by flickering torches, and into the torture chamber. **They removed his chains, stripped him, then bound his ankles to a bar and secured his wrists** above him. His arms were stretched high above his head and his whole body was hung taut and tight. **The position was painful in itself and every blow would fall on tightened nerves and muscles.** By now Paul knew what was intended. He was to be given the dreaded flagellum, a **murderous whip of heavy rawhide loaded with jagged bits of zinc, iron, and bone.**⁷ It could turn the body into hamburger meat, leaving muscles hanging and bones exposed. Paul

⁵ Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 191.

⁶ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 2, 271.

⁷ Pollock, *The Apostle*, 247.

may live through this, but he would be handicapped after this and may never preach again.

Paul knew he would live since he had been given a vision that he would make his way to Rome to preach the gospel. But he needed wisdom to know what to do. He could be **permanently injured** from such a flogging. Yet, Paul *trusted God's plan*. Do you trust God's plan in fearful situations? **God calls us to trust him in the most fearful situations, believing** in his plan, that **he will use all things to conform** us to Christ's image.

Romans 8:28-29 | We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ ... predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Trust the plan of God for your life, even if pain and danger are looming! He's conforming you to Christ through your hard circumstances.

GOD'S PLAN OFTEN BRINGS DELIVERANCE

Paul was stretched out to be tortured. The centurion attending Paul had made sure this would be the most painful experience for the apostle. Before the beating began **Paul had a question for the centurion. God gave Paul great wisdom in his moment of trial.**

Acts 22:25-26 | But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" ²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."

The centurion, discovering that Paul is a Roman citizen goes directly to his general, the Roman tribune and lets him know of Paul's Roman citizenship. This changed everything. They could not lawfully torture a Roman citizen.

It was not that Paul feared the pain. He had suffered without protest at Philippi (16:22). The kind of scourging he was facing was probably with an instrument that could cripple a person for life.

GOD'S PLAN ALWAYS HAS A SOVEREIGN PURPOSE

The Roman tribune, who was a very high commander interviews Paul.

Acts 22:27-29 | So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." ²⁸ The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." ²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

The tribune, one of the **highest Roman officers**, was afraid. Alarmed at how close he had come to scourging a Roman citizen, **Lysias the tribune immediately ordered his subordinates to release Paul. He was also afraid** because he was guilty of

putting a Roman citizen in chains without a preliminary hearing which was illegal.⁸ Commander Lysias did not want to be reprimanded or even **be demoted from his high post** for something like this.

Paul's Roman citizenship forces Lysias to take an entirely different approach, so he **decides to have Paul appear before the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin** (22:30), in hopes of getting at the root of the matter.⁹

Paul was not just trying to save his own life. He knew he would be **on his way to Rome to preach the gospel**. God's sovereign purpose is often far beyond what the present circumstances seem to indicate. Though it looked like Paul's life and well-being were in danger, God had greater purposes. He had just been **able to witness to a great crowd at the Feast of Pentecost**. Now he was on his way to appear before the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin.

GOD'S PLAN IS THE ONLY ONE THAT MATTERS

When you have to stand alone, trust God's plan. Paul's captors had just been informed by the apostle that he was a Roman citizen. This changed matters instantaneously. Commander Lysias (24:22) wanted to know what Paul's real story was, so he unbound him and released him for a hearing before the great Jewish council of seventy, the Sanhedrin.

Acts 22:30 | But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council [**the Jewish Sanhedrin**] to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

The Romans' Plan. Paul had been a free ambassador of Jesus Christ for nearly twenty years, but in Acts 22 he passes from being a free man to being a prisoner of the Roman state. We would think that being in Roman hands would be worse than being in Jewish hands. But we soon discover that Paul was better off in the hands of the secular authorities than he would have been in the hands of his own people.

The Jews' Plan. The Jews were trying to kill Paul.¹⁰ The Romans, on the other hand, were willing to give him a fair trial, after which they would eventually set him free for a time. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and was now in chains. Standing on the steps that led to the Roman barracks at the Antonia Fortress where Jesus had been tried, he gave an impromptu defense of his actions there during the Feast of Pentecost. When the Roman commander Lysias had ordered that Paul be flogged, the apostle told a centurion standing near him that he was a Roman citizen. Roman citizens were not to be flogged.¹¹ The Jews were the ones who wanted Paul executed. They trumped up a false charge of bringing a Gentile into the inner court of the temple. Paul had testified in Aramaic before the crowd, that he was devoted to the law, and would never do such a thing. Now he's brought to the Jewish Supreme Court, but this does not fare well either.

The Lord's Plan. What was the Lord's plan for Paul? We find out in verse 11 of the next chapter. The Lord later tells Paul, **"Take courage, for as you have testified to the**

⁸ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol. 2, 272.

⁹ Baker, "Acts," in *Evangelical Commentary*, 916-917.

¹⁰ Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*, 371.

¹¹ Thomas, *Acts*, 637.

facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (23:11). God’s ways are greater than our ways!

Isaiah 55:8-9 | For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Paul had no control over his circumstances, but he was trusting the Lord with all his heart.

3. WALK IN GOD’S WISDOM (23:1-10)

When you have to stand alone, you need to remember to walk in God’s wisdom. Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, the Lord is with you. This realization of God’s presence is a concept in the Bible called “the fear of the Lord.” We become wise through what the Puritans called “practicing the presence of God.” Remember the words of King Solomon.

Proverbs 9:10 | The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

WISDOM IN THE WORD

Paul did not choose to see the world through his own physical eyes, but through the eyes of his heart where he treasured God’s word. When bad things happened, he reached in to where he had treasured God’s word. **He was not a slave to his circumstances, but a slave of Jesus.**

What we find out with Paul is that he’s interrogated and slapped by command of the high priest, and what comes out of him is God’s word. Paul testifies that **he has a clean conscience** and has not lived in violation of God’s law.

Acts 23:1-5 | And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.” ²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” ⁴Those who stood by said, “**Would you revile God's high priest?**” ⁵And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Paul responds in righteous anger toward the high priest, but he didn’t know he was the high priest. Yet the high priest himself was indeed in violation of God’s law. **Paul could see he, like his Savior, was in a kangaroo court.** Like our Lord, he called out God’s enemies as “whitewashed walls.” Remember the Lord had called the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs.”

Despite the wrong of the high priest, Paul knew the word of God and realized he also was wrong to speak out against the high priest. **Paul apologized, quoting from Exodus 22:28 as his reason for doing so. The man who held the office of high**

priest should not have commanded Paul to be struck. His actions were despicable, but the office was venerable.¹² When pressed, and even when mistaken, Paul was always guided by the word of God.

Saints, **we must prepare ourselves with the word of God.** Not everything we learn is for this moment, but we treasure God's word in our heart that at the right moment, the Lord will bring it to mind. Paul walked in the wisdom of God's word and was ready when tested.

WISDOM IN THE SITUATION

Now that Paul had apologized to the high priest, he made a move that was brilliant. Remember Jesus told us to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Mt 10:16). He **knew the Sanhedrin was divided between Pharisees, who believed in a resurrection at the Last Day and in the existence of angels** and spiritual beings, and the party of the **Sadducees**, who held rationalist, materialist views. They denied the supernatural. Paul was sure that many of the Pharisees would believe in Jesus if only they saw him as he, a Pharisee, had seen him on the Damascus Road. Belief in the risen Jesus was the only honest conclusion for a true Pharisee. Perhaps if he awakened the Pharisees to the resurrection of Jesus, they would believe.

Acts 23:6-9 | Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.⁹ Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"

Instead of the Pharisees inquiring more into the resurrection of Jesus, they started a riot with the Sadducees. Paul was in the midst of them, and it was judged that he was about to be "torn to pieces" (23:10). Paul understood the situation and was able to walk in the wisdom God gave him. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that we should never lean to our own understanding but trust in the Lord in every situation.

WISDOM IN THE WILL OF GOD

Theologians call the way God directs our lives "providence." God is all wise, and we have to trust that he directs all events in our lives. If we fuss and fret over everything, we will be no good for God. Paul trusted the wisdom of God's guidance in his life. God certainly came through.

Acts 23:10 | And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down

¹² J. Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, Ac 23:4-5.

and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

When the Sadducees on the Sanhedrin decided Paul was worthy of death, they about tore Paul “to pieces.” So again, the **Roman soldiers had to rescue Paul and brought him back to the barracks of the Antonia Fortress** in Jerusalem.

We need to remember that God is watching over us as his children, just as he was Paul. He can even use worldly entities to rescue us from harm.

I recall when the office of **homeland security wanted to ship my dear friend Ahmed Joktan back to Saudi Arabia**, God used a United States Senator, Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Chicago, to step in and sponsor Dr. Ahmed for asylum. God can use the most unlikely people for our protection!¹³ Don't be so concerned about your own wisdom or how you can get yourself out of a situation. Trust in God's wisdom and his will for your life.

Proverbs 16:9 | The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps.

You are God's workmanship, and your steps are **predetermined to walk in each day** (Eph 2:10).

4. EXPERIENCE GOD'S COMFORT (23:11)

When you have to stand alone, experience God's comfort. Notice that the Christian life is not one where we grow in relationship with pages in a book, but through the word, we grow in relation with the living Lord. This is the Lord who stood by Paul.

COMFORT IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Acts 23:11a | The following night the Lord stood by him.

The Lord stood by Paul after his encounter with the Sanhedrin. This was a group of men that at one time he loved and had deep relationships with. When a person comes to know Christ, it changes our earthly relationships. Sometimes we can feel so alone. But when we feel forsaken, we must always avail ourselves of the Lord's presence. Instead of being controlled by worries and what ifs, we have to cast our care on Jesus, who abides in us by the Holy Spirit. We are his temple. Our hearts are his home!

1 Peter 5:7 | Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

You may not often find great joy in your circumstances, but you must always find joy in the presence of Jesus!

Psalms 16:11 | In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

¹³ To read the entire story, see Ahmed Joktan, *From Mecca to Christ: The True Story of the Son of the Meccan Mufti* (Wenatchee, WA: Proclaim Publishers, 2020), 171-173.

COMFORT IN GOD'S PRAISE

Paul also must have been deeply encouraged by what the Lord told him. He had given a good testimony in Jerusalem.

Acts 23:11b | And said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

We cannot assess our success just by looking at the earthly circumstances. God's ways are higher than our ways. God is pleased with what Paul has said and done and praises him for it. "Good job in Jerusalem! Now let's get you to Rome!"

Our deepest desire is to hear **God's "well done"** when we see him face to face.

COMFORT IN GOD'S PLAN

Acts 23:11c | "So you must testify also in Rome."

Paul has sincerely spoken for Christ and tried to be as wise as possible. At the end of the day, though it looks like a total disaster, with the Jews and the Sanhedrin rejecting him, Paul's faithfulness sets him up to preach the gospel to kings and to soldiers and officers of Caesar's household.

Conclusion

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), the famous Polish composer-pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. He once famously said, "The mere fact of knowing that a great audience waits on your labor is enough to shake all your nerves to pieces."¹⁴

It would be an evening to remember—a black-tux-long-evening-dress, high-society extravaganza. **In the audience that evening sat a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son.** Weary of waiting for the concert to begin, the lad squirmed constantly in his seat. His mother hoped her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano once he heard the immortal Paderewski. That is why, against his wishes, he was there.

When the little boy's mother turned to talk with some friends, the impatient boy could stay seated no longer. He slipped away from her side, strangely drawn to the ebony concert grand **Steinway and its leather-tufted stool** on the huge stage flooded with brilliant lights. Largely ignored by the sophisticated audience, the boy sat down at the stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys. He placed his small, trembling fingers in the right location and began to play "**Chopsticks.**" The roar of the crowd quickly ceased as hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. **Irritated and embarrassed,** they began to shout at the bold youngster.

Backstage the master, overhearing the sounds, hurriedly grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage, where **he stood behind the boy and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance "Chopsticks."** As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ears, "**Keep going. Don't quit, son. Keep on playing. Do not stop. Do not quit.**" What a gracious genius!

In the kingdom of God, we have been called to play a spiritual tune for Christ.¹⁵ And though we may at times be flooded with difficult and confusing circumstances in life, God tells us, "Don't quit! Keep going! I'm with you! I'll never leave you or forsake you!"

¹⁴ Paderewski in Charles Phillips, *The Story of a Modern Immortal* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 130.

¹⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 308.

You may be as competent for ministry as that little boy. You feel weak, but the Lord says, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” You’ve got to get your eyes on Christ and live for him, standing alone if you must, doing what God has called you to do.