

A Clear Conscience and Comfort

When we last looked at Acts, Paul had made it to Jerusalem. While there he made a visit to the temple and during that time some Jews who had opposed him when he was ministering in Ephesus falsely accuse him of teaching Jews to abandon their culture and the Jewish law. They also accuse him of defiling the temple by bringing a Gentile into an area of the temple forbidden to them. A riot ensues and Paul is arrested. As he is being taken into the barracks, Paul asks for permission to speak to the crowd. He boldly shares his testimony of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. But when Paul communicates that God had sent him to the Gentiles the crowd once again erupts and begins to demand Paul be put to death. Eventually, the Roman commander, recognizing that what is going on has something to do with the Jewish law, orders the Jewish Sanhedrin to assemble to sort out what to do about Paul.

Opening Question: What is the hardest thing you are facing right now?

Read Acts 22:22-23:11

1. Why did the Roman commander order the Sanhedrin to assemble (22:30)?
2. What claim did Paul make about himself (v. 1)? Why did they strike him for it? Was Paul foolish for what he said? Why or why not?
3. That Paul is struck for stating that he had lived his life with a clear conscience before God illustrates a truth repeatedly taught in the Scriptures – *Living a life worth of the Gospel invites opposition* (see John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Is this how you think, or would you say you tend to think living a life worthy of the Gospel should spare you from persecution/opposition? Explain.

Steve said:

We can entrust ourselves to God who judges justly. The high priest is not the final authority at this trial – and neither is the Roman officer. Those who oppose you because you live out a life honoring to God have no power to tell you who you are and what you are worth. There is only One whose opinion matters and so we live for His voice and His voice alone. No matter how badly you are treated, no matter what type of opposition you face, no matter if you lose friends or even employment – you can entrust yourself to the One who judges justly. He sees and knows and one day will make everything right.

4. What does it look like to entrust ourselves to God when we suffer unjustly?

5. Paul changes his tactic from talking about keeping the Law to the hope of the resurrection (v. 6f). Why did he do this?

6. On the night following the appearance before the Sanhedrin, Jesus shows up and encourages Paul (v. 11)? Why do you think Paul might have needed this? What does this reveal about God? What does it reveal about Paul?

Steve said:

Finally, we must look at what the Lord spoke to Paul to comfort him: "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." Paul, deep in his discouragement was told to take heart – to be of good cheer, to take courage – why? Because God wanted him to witness – just as he had in Jerusalem, Paul was to be God's witness in Rome. Think about that for a minute – God was willing to let Paul stay in chains, in suffering, in order for those in Rome who had not heard the Gospel might hear. God loves the lost.

7. What do you think about this idea that at times God is willing to let us suffer in order for there to be a way for the Gospel to be proclaimed or modeled?

8. When you face opposition for your faith, how has God encouraged you in the past?

9. What is your main takeaway from this passage?