

Acts 23

Paul's hope and ours

(What was the nature of Paul's hope?)

1. Paul is standing before the hostile Sanhedrin (Jewish Council for civil affairs) where he boldly proclaims his hope in the resurrection that does two things.
 - a. It witnesses to the Gospel.
 - b. It divides his enemies and gives him a chance to find support in the Roman system.
2. Much of this chapter is devoted to details concerning Paul's security within the Roman system as he faces a cunning and hostile Jewish mob.
3. One of the strongest challenges to the Christian faith is the lack of congruity between what Christians claim about the faith and what they actually experience.
 - a. The efficacy of prayer. Why are so few prayers answered as we would expect?
 - b. The care of God for His people. Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - c. Why do Christians seem to have the same emotional, social, and moral problems that characterize the general population?
 - d. The life of Christians and the testimony of the church. Why does the Christian community behave in ways that are no different than the non Christian community?
4. For further study go to **attoteach.org** and see theology files # 302, #312, #314, #315.

Paul's ultimate security - the resurrection of the dead.

"¹ And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." ² And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" ⁴ But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" ⁵ And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, *'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'*" ⁶ But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul {began} crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for **the hope and resurrection of the dead!**" ⁷ And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹ And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and {began} to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" ¹⁰ And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ But on the night {immediately} following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as **you have solemnly witnessed to My cause** at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

Paul's temporal security – natural means (human government).

12 And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. 13 And there were more than forty who formed this plot. 14 And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now, therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near {the place.}" 16 But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 And Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." 18 So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you." 19 And the commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, {began} to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. 21 So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you." 22 Therefore the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things." 23 And he called to him two of the centurions, and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen." 24 {They were} also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor. 25 And he wrote a letter having this form:

26 "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. 27 "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came upon them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; 29 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment. 30 And when I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

31 So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. 33 And when these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 And when he had read it, he asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium."

- We might summarize Paul's teaching and experience with these observations.
 1. God can but does not always intercede dramatically to remove the source of suffering in this life.

Stephen is stoned in **Acts 7**, Peter is delivered from prison by an angel in **Acts 12**, Paul is also delivered from prison in **Acts 16** but not at the end of his ministry where he is killed.

2. God expects us to use resources at our disposal to navigate wisely through the obstacles of life in a fallen world.

Acts 23

3. Our circumstances in this life are not to be viewed as an indication of God's love for His people.

Rom.8 “²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose. . . . ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, “*For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*” ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- We can be assured of God's loving providence. Rom.8:28
- God's purposes have more to do with His kingdom and righteousness than our kingdom and happiness. Rom.8:33-34
- This providence does not assure us of our dreams and worldly hopes in that it may even involve our suffering and death. Rom.8:38

4. Our response to the injustices of life in a fallen world is more important than escaping its suffering.

Phil.3 “¹⁰ that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Rom.8 “¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of god and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”

5. The true hope of the Christian awaits our union with Christ in the age to come.

Rom.8 “¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

I Cor.15 “¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ I this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

The problem of evil

1. **Evil is a necessary accompaniment of the creation of humankind with freedom of choice.**
 - a. Moral choices are not possible without evil being an option.
 - b. We would not be human without the option of moral choice.
2. **We must reevaluate what constitutes good and evil.**
 - a. It is not the short-range comfort but the long-range welfare of all humanity as determined by the superior knowledge and wisdom of God that is at stake.
 - b. “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” Rom.8:28
 - c. It is the long-range perspective that must be kept in view. How important will this seem to me a year from now? five years? a million years?

- d. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Rom.8:18 (II Cor.4:17, Heb.2:12, I Pet.1:6-7)
 - e. What appears to be evil for us may be a part of the overall good of mankind.
3. **Evil in general is a result of sin in general.** God did not create sin but he provided the option necessary for human freedom. This same option, which provided for human freedom could also result in sin.
 4. **Specific Evil can be the result of specific sins.**
 5. **God is the victim of evil in that His Son was crucified.**
 6. **The life hereafter promises justice.**