

When God Encourages His Children **Acts 23:1-11**

Introduction:

1. While in Jerusalem, the apostle Paul was beaten by an angry mob and then arrested by the Roman authorities. The people of Jerusalem were chanting in the background, "*Away with him.*"
2. The Roman chief captain had no definitive charges against Paul, so he decided to convene the Sanhedrin to examine Paul.
 - This was the most powerful ruling council of the Jews.
 - It was composed of about 70 elders of Israel, and presided over by the high priest.
3. The chief captain thought that this would be a sure way to discover the charges against Paul, and that he could rely on the Sanhedrin to provide a sober, deliberate, and just examination of Paul.
4. It didn't take long for things to get very tense (vs. 1-5). After this, emotions escalated even further until Paul had to be removed for fear of being ripped into pieces. vs. 6-10
5. Paul had been through a rough couple of days. He had been falsely accused, beaten by a frenzied mob, arrested, his testimony rejected by his fellow countrymen, and practically ripped in two by the religious leaders of Israel.
6. He probably lay there that night very discouraged and wondering if God was through with him. In that moment of despair, the Lord came to Paul and encouraged his heart. vs. 11
7. Maybe today you are battling discouragement or even utter despair. Please know that every believer's heart can be encouraged by the Lord. God will encourage you as he did Paul. How does God encourage His children?

God encourages us:

First, by reassuring us of His continued presence

1. Verse 11 declares, "*The Lord stood by him...*" This was the Lord's way of reminding Paul, "I'm with you and I haven't forgotten you." What an encouragement the Lord's presence must have been to Paul! cf. 2 Timothy 4:16-17
2. When God is with us, we can endure anything. Take God away from us, and the slightest trial will overcome us.
3. When we go through severe trials and deep valleys, Satan tempts us to doubt God's presence, which leads to feelings of hopelessness and total despair.
4. But, just as God reassured Paul of His presence, the Lord does the same for us in His Word. Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:35-39; Ephesians 4:30
 - Have you ever been discouraged, but you sat down to read the Bible and pray, and you were reassured of God's presence with you? Isn't that precious?

5. Christian, God is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. He lives inside your spirit forever. Through the valleys, the bumps, the curves, and the mountains, be encouraged because you have His continued presence. God never bails ship!
6. You may not have much in this world in terms of possessions, position, or luxuries, but if you have the Lord with you, you're in good shape!

Second, by providing an inner joy (despite circumstances)

1. Get the picture – Paul has hit rock bottom. He is laying there in his prison cell, when all of a sudden the Lord comes to him and says, “*Be of good cheer* – be happy Paul!”
2. Did you know that joy is part of our spiritual birthright as a child of God? John 16:22
3. Did you know that joy is a genuine, real possibility, even in the midst of tribulation and suffering? 2 Corinthians 7:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 1 Peter 4:13, 14, 16
4. The reason for this is because joy has nothing to do with our circumstances, but rather our attitude in circumstances. Paul had learned to keep the right perspective, no matter the circumstance. Philippians 4:11-13; Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18
5. In your present situation, how is your perspective? How is your attitude? Circumstances may change, but our attitude makes or breaks our ability to cope and have a positive impact on those around us.
6. Do you see your circumstances through the lens of God's faithfulness, or do you see God's faithfulness through the lens of your circumstances? Remember, joy comes from within and is therefore available to us every day of our lives.

Third, by always remembering the work we have done for Him

1. The Lord declared to Paul that He was fully aware of how he had testified for Him in Jerusalem.
2. Paul could probably see nothing but failure. He had failed to reach the Jews with the gospel of Christ, yet Christ came and reminded Paul that he **had** testified of Him. What an encouragement this must have been for Paul.
3. Nobody else in Jerusalem appreciated his testimony for Christ, but Jesus came to him and said, “I saw it, and I appreciate it!”
4. Sometimes, when life's circumstances are bad, we are tempted to think that God has forgotten the work we have done for Him. But God never forgets. Hebrews 6:10; Matthew 25:35-40; Ephesians 6:7-8

Fourth, by providing future opportunities to serve Him (despite past failures)

1. In his present circumstances, it looked as though Paul's disobedience to the Spirit's instructions was ending Paul's opportunity to preach the gospel. He was now in bonds, no longer able to preach and move about on his own.

2. Several months earlier, he had purposed in his heart to preach Christ in Rome. His present circumstances would not encourage him to think he had any prospect of doing that.
3. But now, God comes and tells Paul that he will indeed have opportunity to preach Christ in Rome. God wasn't done with Paul after all.
4. Satan can tempt us to concentrate on our past failures and sins to the point that he convinces us that we are no longer useable by God. This is a lie from Satan.
5. No matter what we've done in our past, God can take us where we are and use us for His glory. Our mistakes and disobedience always carry consequences (Paul learned this), but God's grace is greater than our sin.
6. God's grace can restore us to useful service for His glory! Just because you may have failed, it does not make you a failure. Your identity is not tied to your actions, but to whom God has made you in Christ!