

BEING JAILED FOR JESUS CHRIST

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Chapter 23 is a pivotal chapter, for here we find the Apostle Paul first revealed as “Paul the prisoner” (v. 18). In fact, Paul was a prisoner during the rest of the book. We discover the circumstances which led to his imprisonment as well as the atmosphere in which he penned most of his letters. In Ephesians, Paul wrote not only as a “prisoner of the Lord” (4:1) but also as an “ambassador in bonds” (6:20).

Even so, Paul saw his chains as a particular opportunity for “furtherance of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:12). He knew, and stood squarely upon the promise, that the “Word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9). Also, the Lord Jesus graced the Apostle Paul with three specific acts of encouragement to sustain him during his imprisonment. As we follow Paul to prison, let’s allow the outline below to guide us:

- I. The First Encouragement is the Lord Standing by Paul (vv. 1-11a)**
- II. The Second Encouragement is the Lord Speaking to Paul (vv. 11b)**
- III. The Third Encouragement is the Lord Safeguarding Paul (vv. 12-35)**

I. The First Encouragement is the Lord Standing by Paul (vv. 1-11a)

The first impression we get when we think of someone going to prison is the criminal they’ve become. Did you know some of the greatest letters ever written were written by Christians in prison? John Bunyan is a good example. Maybe some of you have read “*Pilgrim’s Progress*.” John Bunyan wrote “*Pilgrim’s Progress*” while he was in prison. Somehow, God takes the circumstances that come to the life of a believer, which may seem to be difficult and unexpected and uses them as an opportunity to produce great Christian fortitude in the lives of God’s people.

Thus, standing by Paul, we find the *sympathetic* Christ. Paul came to Jerusalem in the face of prophetic knowledge from trusted churchmen—he would suffer persecution at the hand of the Romans. His heart conviction insisted it was the will of God. Paul’s friends begged him not to go. Yet there was the deep conviction in his heart that it was God’s plan.

Reflection Connection

Have you ever been counseled to go in one direction and your heart insisted on going in another? How did you handle telling the trusted friends who offered counsel you were going to decline their counsel?

After two days of tension, physical and spiritual strain, Paul found himself in prison. Luke described the scene, “And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.” (v. 10). We can almost imagine the kinds of questions that must have gone through his mind: First, *did I make a mistake?* Have you ever done something, you thought was the will of God when you did it, and yet it didn’t seem to turn out right?

Second, *why was it I was not able to effectively witness to my Jewish friends?* Sometimes the very best plans we make to do the will of God don’t seem to come out the way we want them to come out. Paul must have been a little bit down in the dumps when they arrested him and put him in prison.



Also, standing by Paul was the *sustaining* Christ. Do you know what Paul needed? Paul needed the encouraging presence of the Lord. Note, the Lord's response, "And the night following the Lord stood by him..." (v. 11a). Paul needed the Lord Jesus to be especially real to him in this circumstance. When we're in the deepest need, when we're in the direst distress, the Lord Jesus will come to us. A beloved hymn says, "Have you failed in your plans of your storm-tossed life? Place your life, your hand in the nail-scarred hand." Paul transformed the prison of despair into a palace of praise! Paul turned the prison into a temple of testimony.

Finally, standing by to encourage Paul was the *sufficient* Christ. Assurance from the Lord came to Paul after the tension and stress created by testifying to the Jews (vv. 1-10). The Lord knew exactly what Paul needed and was able to provide it.

Even so, Paul refused to back down from the threats of punishment the religious leaders uttered, "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (vv. 2-3). The phrase, "thou whited wall" is a reference to a tottering wall, a wall in such a bad condition, it is ready to fall down. Hence, it was "whitewashed" to disguise its true condition.

*When we're
in the deepest
need, when
we're in the
direst distress,
the Lord Jesus
will come to us.*

Reflection Connection

How confident do you think the average Christian is today to stand before accusers concerning their faith? What is the source of our confidence and how may we maintain it? Explain.

Paul perceived the mob was split between Sadducees and Pharisees. He cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (v. 6). By appealing to the resurrection, Paul was "siding" with the Pharisees, for the Sadducees rejected miracles, much of the Old Testament and the bodily resurrection. It was this provocative context into which Jesus came and stood by the Apostle Paul and encouraged him.

II. The Second Encouragement is the Lord Speaking to Paul (vv. 11b)

Second, not only did the Lord stand by him, but the Lord spoke to him, "And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (v. 11).

The Lord stood by him and the first word he got was, "Be of good cheer." Now, of course, we know God does speak to people. God through history has spoken to people. He spoke to Moses out of a burning bush (Ex. 3:4) and called him to go for Him. It was very real in his life. The Lord spoke to Isaiah in the temple (Isa. 6:1-6).



Reflection Connection

Are you convinced God speaks to you? Why or why not? Ask your pastor to share a few minutes time with the group on how to know God's voice.

Reflection Connection

Think of a time in your spiritual journey when you believed God's promise to come even though there was no present evidence to expect it other than God's word. Pause and give gratitude to God. If possible, share the victory with the entire group.

In addition, God, who at different times, in a variety of manners, spoke in times past unto the prophets, has in these days spoken unto us in His Son. God has revealed himself to us in the pages of this Bible. God has spoken to us through His Word (Heb. 1:1-4). God continues to speak. What a comfort to hear God's voice speak to us from the pages of His book!

God's voice was an encouragement to Paul. Have you ever asked God to help you be an encourager and not a discourager? Too many times Christians go around discouraging people. When you go to church, do you leave encouraged or discouraged? Some confuse conviction of sin with discouragement and negativism.

Yet when confronted with sin, we are equally confronted with the basic note of the Gospel, a note of good cheer. The Gospel is good news! If you are lost, the bad news is, you are lost in your sins and have no chance of getting to heaven apart from the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, tragically, if you die in your sins without Jesus Christ, you will spend an eternity in hell. The good news is that you do not have to stay in your sins!

The Lord told Paul to cheer up! One can imagine Paul in jail, suffering from the blahs; he'd been going through a lot. All of his plans had been torn to pieces. He was down in the dumps and the Lord stood by him. The Lord spoke to him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul." A Savior like that Who knows when to encourage us, Who knows when we need it, is a Savior who must be loved!

Know we never fail when we witness for the Lord. If you witness for the Lord as best you know how, the Lord in heaven sees it. God is interested in your faithfulness more than He is in your success.

Furthermore, note the words of the Lord, "so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (v. 11b). He witnessed for Christ in Jerusalem, and now he was to witness for Him in Rome. Paul later wrote, "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). If God has made you a promise about a matter you can put it down: that's exactly the way it will be!

The words God spoke to Paul were words of *cheer* and words of *commendation*. Christ's words were also words of certainty. Jesus assured Paul he would get to Rome. This was the Lord's personal promise to him.

III. The Third Encouragement is the Lord Safeguarding Paul (vv. 12-35)

The rest of this chapter is one of the most thrilling accounts of the delivering power of God in all of the Bible. Observe how God brought His promise to pass, "And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul" (vv. 12-13).

Essentially, over forty men entered into a death pact together and said we'll not eat a bite, we'll not take one drink until we have killed Paul. God said you're going to go to Rome; 40 men said we're not going to eat or drink until we kill Paul. The providential deliverance of God is visible in the life of Paul.



Reflection Connection

What do you think of when you hear the term “providence”? Are you aware daily of God’s safeguard over your life even though you may not be able to see His handiwork? Explain.

Observe a lesson all of us must learn: *God is never nearer to you than when His face is unseen.* Did you know that? There is a whole book in the Bible where the name of God is not mentioned one time — the book of Esther. Some scholars used to say the book ought not to be in the Bible because the name of God is not mentioned in the entire book.

God is working behind the scenes. In fact He is the One who moves the scenes and keeps the drama running. Standing somewhere in the shadows you’ll always find Jesus. Hence, God’s protection is *providential*.

God’s protection is also *preferential*. God does special things to take care of His own. And, know the things God does to protect us are not always sensational supernatural interventions. God does little things sometimes to bring deliverance to His people. Luke makes this clear, “And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him” (vv. 16-17).

*Standing
somewhere in
the shadows
you’ll always
find Jesus.*

A little boy who happened to be the nephew of Paul overheard the plot to kill Paul. He ran to Paul at the prison and told him about it. God took a little boy and delivered his Apostle! Sometimes God will use some little thing to bring deliverance in your life.

Consequently, when the chief captain heard what had taken place, he said to the centurion, “Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor” (vv. 23-24). Adding escorts gets the number to approximately 470 men! God’s resources have no limits.

Third, God’s protection is *powerful*. Essentially, forty men said we’re going to kill him; we’re not going to eat or drink until we kill him. God said he’s going to witness for Me in Rome. So, God took 470 men who completely circled the apostle Paul and took him safely to Caesarea.

The Bible says the angels of the Lord encamp round about them who fear Him (Ps. 34:7). The Lord will take care of you. He’ll do so through His providence, His preference, and His power.

Golden Greek Nugget

Luke records Paul’s address to the “council” in verse one. The Greek word translated “council” is “*synedrion*,” which comes from two other words. The first means “a seat” and the other word means “together.” So literally “council” means “a seating together.” Some newer translations have the term “Sanhedrin.” The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish court in their judicial system, equivalent to our Supreme Court.

Wrap Up

Prison can keep a man in bondage; however, prison will never squelch the message of God. God will stand by us and speak to us cheer, commendation, and certainty. Furthermore, obedience to the Lord procures safeguard under the mighty hand of God. He providentially protects us and assures His own promises are fulfilled.

