

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 23:11-35

Topic

A band of forty zealous Jews takes a vow not to eat
Again until they have murdered the apostle Paul

Title

The Fast of the Furious

Acts 23:11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, **"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."**

Acts 23:12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.

Acts 23:14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.

Acts 23:15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Acts 23:16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Acts 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him."

Acts 23:18 So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you."

Acts 23:19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"

Acts 23:20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him.

Acts 23:21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."

Acts 23:22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me."

Acts 23:23 And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night;

Acts 23:24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor."

Acts 23:25 He wrote a letter in the following manner:

Acts 23:26 Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings.

Acts 23:27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

Acts 23:28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council.

Acts 23:29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.

Acts 23:30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Acts 23:31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

Acts 23:32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

Acts 23:33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

Acts 23:34 And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia,

Acts 23:35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

Introduction

Discouragement is reaching epidemic proportions among Christian leaders. It's typically called burn-out. The popular treatment for it is withdrawal from ministry for a period of time if not permanently.

Withdrawal sets a bad example. Here's why. **Everyone** suffers from discouragement from time-to-time and some more than others. You

can be discouraged in your marriage, or at church, or at work, or with school. You can be discouraged with people, places, and things. **In most of those cases you can't simply withdraw!** So for leaders to simply withdraw seems counterproductive.

What should you do when discouraged? The opposite of discouragement is encouragement, not escape.

The apostle Paul received just such an encouragement. Jesus appeared to him and said, **Be of good cheer**. The phrase is a translation of one word in Greek which means to *take courage*, or be encouraged.

Immediately you think, "I'd be encouraged, too, if Jesus appeared to me!" But He doesn't have to. He's already told you that He'll never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). After His resurrection from the dead Jesus promised, **I am with you always, even to the end of the age** (Matthew 28:20).

You are probably discouraged about something. *Take courage!* I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Can Take Courage In The Lord's Assessment, and #2 You Can Take Courage In The Lord's Assignment.

#1 You Can Take Courage In The Lord's Assessment (v11)

Paul was having what we might call a bad couple of days. An angry Jewish mob had tried to tear him limb-from-limb. Taken into protective custody, he had almost been flogged by the Roman officials. Then he had been nearly torn apart again during his interrogation by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

He didn't know it yet but centuries later most Bible commentators would accuse him of making several errors along the way:

1. They say his going to Jerusalem was a mistake.
2. They say his participating in a Jewish vow in the Temple was a mistake.

3. They say he lost his temper when when being questioned by the Sanhedrin.

Paul was discouraged! We know he was discouraged because of what Jesus said in verse eleven.

Acts 23:11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

Jesus wouldn't say, "*Take courage!*", unless Paul was discouraged.

In your case, in my case, the Lord doesn't need to appear because He's promised to never leave or forsake. We can trust His presence. He appeared to Paul as a model of what He is trying to say to us whenever we are discouraged.

First of all we can identify some prerequisites for being encouraged. Two are suggested by the phrase itself, **Be of good cheer**. This wasn't the first time Jesus used that phrase:

1. In the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter nine, just before He healed the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof, He told him to **be of good cheer** because his sins were forgiven.
2. In the Upper Room on the night He was crucified He told His disciples that in the world they would have tribulation but to **be of good cheer** because He had overcome the world (John 16:33).

If you are a Christian your greatest encouragement comes from knowing your sins are forgiven. You are on your way to Heaven and to the place Jesus is building and preparing for you.

On your way home you will have tribulation. But it is working for you, not against you, to make you better and not bitter. Jesus began a good work in you and has promised to complete it.

Notice, too, that Jesus called **Paul** by name. It's an amazing thing to realize that Jesus knows your name. It's more wonderful still that He would use it in an informal, intimate way. Jesus is on a first-name basis with you if you are a Christian!

Jesus has forgiven your sins; He knows you intimately; He's familiar with all your earthly tribulations while He's building your Heavenly home. You should be encouraged already!

But there's more. He went on in His appearance to Paul to assess Paul's ministry. He said, **you have testified for Me in Jerusalem**. He didn't say, "Paul, didn't I warn you to stay out of Jerusalem?" He didn't say, "Paul, what were you thinking by participating in a Jewish vow?" He didn't say, "Paul, you blew it by losing your temper and insulting the high priest."

Instead the Lord found something to commend. Paul had testified about Jesus. Jesus was excited about it!

I'd love to hear the Lord someday say, "Gene, you have testified for Me in Hanford." It would be enough!

The Lord wants to assess **your** testimony. He's looking for something to commend, not condemn. If you're discouraged about your testimony then take some advice from the apostle Paul. He would write (in Philippians 3:13-14), **forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

- being changed to bring change -

In other words, start from scratch. Look at your private devotions, your home, your church, your work, your school, your involvement in the world, and determine to give a testimony about Jesus. Even with all your flaws and failures the Lord can empower you and say to you, **you have testified for Me.**

#2 You Can Take Courage In The Lord's Assignment (v12-35)

The end of verse eleven sets up the rest of the Book of Acts. Jesus said to Paul, **so you must also bear witness at Rome**. No matter what followed, Paul knew his assignment. He was going to Rome to share the Lord!

You and I have many specific assignments. They may not seem as glamorous as being a missionary to Rome but they are just as glorious. Think of who you are: A man, a woman, a husband, a wife, a father, a mother, a child, a church member, an employer or employee. Each of these is an assignment you've been given by God with clear direction in His Word for carrying it out.

We're going to quickly overview the remainder of the chapter with an eye towards being encouraged in our assignment(s).

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It seemed as though Paul would never even begin the journey to Rome, let alone testify about Jesus there. The Lord, however, knew Paul's path and was going to go before him along it.

Your assignments take you along paths unknown to you. There will be difficulties and dangers. The Lord has scouted out ahead and made every provision for you. When you are tempted to grow discouraged you can take courage in His adequate provision.

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We know almost nothing about Paul's family other than his father was a Roman citizen and he had a sister who was in Jerusalem at the time of this incident with her young son, Paul's nephew.

One of the things we learn here is that there are no coincidences, only God's providence. We might define providence using Ephesians 1:11 which says in part, [God] **works all things according to the counsel of His will**. You can take courage in your assignment knowing God's providence is working all things according to the counsel of His will.

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Acts 23:24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor."

It was an all-expenses paid trip to Rome through the countryside on horseback! Forty furious fasting assassins were no match for over four hundred armed and mounted Roman soldiers. We'd call this God's protection. You can be encouraged in your assignment that God will protect you.

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Claudius Lysias paints himself in a very positive light. He omits the part where he illegally bound Paul and almost had him whipped.

People can be fickle – even those closest to you. The encouragement here is to look beyond the people who cause discouragement and instead look to the Lord. Our lives are lived as unto Him.

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Acts 23:35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

Paul was on his way to Rome. *But (as we'll see) it would take the Romans about two years to get him there!*

The lesson here is patience. Growing impatient is a major source of discouragement. The Lord is using your various assignments to teach you patience.

You are on assignment(s) for God! You have clear principles and precepts to guide you in you assignment(s). People will be a major source of discouragement but you can look beyond them and live as unto Jesus. Along the way home to Heaven you'll be taught patience but you can always count on God's providence, His provisions, and His protection.

Discouragement is a cruel but common tool of the enemy of your soul. It can rot you and ruin you. At the very least it can halt your progress in the Christian life.

The remedy is to hear Jesus say to you, **Be of good cheer**. Start from scratch today to give a testimony in all your assignments then listen for the Lord to assess you with His commendation.