

Acts 23

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Tape #8112

Pastor Chuck Smith

We continue our journey through the Bible. In the twenty second chapter Paul was allowed by the captain of the guard, Claudius Lysias, to address the crowd. And so he began to speak to them in the Hebrew tongue and they were listening attentively as he was sharing with them his personal testimony of his conversion to Christianity by his personal encounter with Jesus as he was on the road to Damascus, for the express purpose of arresting those in Damascus, bringing them back to Jerusalem, bound, who had embraced Christianity. So he tells about that dramatic conversion. How, when he came back to Jerusalem with the intent of sharing the gospel, Jesus warned him to get out of Jerusalem because, He said, they will not listen to you. And Paul argued with the Lord feeling that surely he could convince them because he knew them so intimately. He said, the Lord told him, "Get Thee far from here for I will send you to the Gentiles." The word Gentiles was an inflammatory word because the Jews felt that *they only* could be saved. It was the belief of the Jews that only as a Jew could one know salvation—that God had designed salvation for the Jews only. And that if you were not a Jew and you wanted to be saved then you had to become a Jew in order to be saved. Now this very idea carried over into Christianity in the early church. There were those in Jerusalem who were teaching that Gentiles could not be saved unless they became Jews, were circumcised and began to follow the law of Moses. And we've already covered the very first church council, which was convened to determine just what relationship the Gentile believer had to the law. And it was determined by the early church council that Gentiles could be saved and remain Gentiles. They did not have to become a Jew. They did not have to keep the traditions of the law of Moses in order to be saved. But with the Jews, the idea of the gospel going to the Gentiles was just really almost reprehensible. So when Paul said that the Lord had called him to the Gentiles, the Jews began to throw dirt in the air. They were tearing their clothes. They began to scream out for his death. And so the captain of the guard had Paul brought into the safety of the Antonio Fortress and commanded that they examine Paul by scourging to find out what he said. Because Paul was talking in Hebrew and they of course did not understand the Hebrew language. All they understood was that there was a riot outside. And what did he say to perpetrate this tremendous uproar? And so Paul there pulled rank in a sense, and questioned the centurion who was tying him with the thongs, preparatory to his being beaten. He said is it lawful for you to beat a Roman citizen who has not been charged? And so he ran in and told the captain, you'd better be careful. He is a Roman citizen. The captain came out and questioned Paul. Are you a Roman citizen? He said yes, I am. He said, I purchased my Roman citizenship. He said, what did it cost you? Paul said, I was free born. And so they untied Paul. The next day they convened a hearing in order that the charges might be levied against Paul. And so the next day the whole religious counsel of Jerusalem, the chief priests and all of their counsel gathered together and they brought Paul and set him in the midst.

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." It's interesting that Paul does not use the formal address for this counsel. As a general rule in addressing the counsel there was that formality, much as there is in addressing an office of the court, "Your honor." Or how they have these, "the most excellent" or whatever. There was that greeting, "The most holy counsel." And Paul, rather than using that formal kind of a greeting, just says, "Men and brethren." Hey I'm your brother. I'm part of you guys. I was in this counsel. I was once a part of this counsel. And so he addresses them in a very informal manner, declaring that he has lived in all good conscience before God until this day. That is quite a claim! That's one that I can't make. Paul was a very unusual person. To be able to say, I have lived in all good conscience before God. But he talks about his zealousness as a Jew in his letter to the Philippians. And he said as concerning the righteousness which is of the law, I was blameless. Paul was indeed a very interesting person, who had a tremendous zeal for the things of God and to live a Godly, holy life. And so I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. *2And the high priest Ananias* (Who was according to history a scoundrel. He was crooked. He was devious. He was an evil man and yet he was the high priest over the people.)

commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. This claim of Paul—he looked at it as impertinent. He said, hit him on the mouth!

³*Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"* In those days, of course, under the law a Jew could not touch a dead body or something that had touched a dead body. So there were these sepulchers, rock hewn sepulchers all over the countryside. And over the years some of them became half hidden. Some of them became sort of buried. And so it was possible to inadvertently stumble across a sepulcher. If you did, if you touched it, you would have to go through purification rites before you could enter the synagogue or the temple because you would be considered unclean. You've touched something that was touching a dead body. And so in order to protect people from touching the sepulchers, they would paint them with whitewash. So that they would stand out. So Jesus used this earlier. He said concerning the Pharisees (Matthew 23:27) that they were whitewashed sepulchers. That is they appeared very nice on the outside. All white and painted, but inside, He said, you are full of dead men's bones. And so Paul picks up this term from the Lord and he says to the high priest. God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Because here you are. You are sitting here as judge of the law and yet you command that I be smitten, contrary to the law. You are breaking the law! You are inconsistent. That was very true then and Paul is pointing it out. You know it's always worse to point out a truth than some fallacy concerning a person. You can say all kinds of lies about them. Yes, that's just a lie, but if I am doing something wrong and you begin to point out the truth, you see then you really begin to get angry and resent it.

⁴*And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"* ⁵*Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"* That's found in Exodus 22:28. And so Paul apologized.

Now there are some who use this Scripture as a part of a proof to the theory that Paul's thorn in the flesh was an eye problem. There are many who believe that as Paul makes reference to his thorn in the flesh that actually it was a problem of vision. That he had some kind of an oriental disease that caused a constant running of the eyes and thus everything was always sort of blurred to him. He seemed to indicate in his letter to the Galatians as he talked of their great love for him and all. He said some of you would have been glad to give me your very eyes, which would again indicate that maybe the problem was his eyesight. Later on at the end of his letter to the Galatians, he said, that you have seen how large a letter I have written to you in my own hand. And they say that that refers to the size of the letters because he wrote it himself. Most of Paul's epistles were dictated. The letter to the Galatians he wrote himself but in writing himself he had to use the large letters because of his poor eyesight. And so this is a further point in that theory that the thorn in the flesh was a problem with his vision.

There are others who say that Paul is using sarcasm here in that this Ananias had such a horrible reputation that Paul is just sort of saying, a man like that I can't believe that he would be the high priest, you know. In other words it's sort of a sardonic kind of a thing that Paul is using here. I personally prefer the poor eyesight because how could he say I've lived in all good conscience if here he is using this kind of sarcasm concerning the high priest? But Paul apologizes, I knew not brethren that he was the high priest. He quotes the law that he is familiar with it that you are not to revile those who rule the people.

⁶*But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"* ⁷*And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.* ⁸*For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.* ⁹*Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."* ¹⁰*Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.* So Paul created another disturbance by declaring himself to be a Pharisee. Because of his hope in the resurrection, he said, I've been arrested and all, which immediately brought all the Pharisees on his side but made the Sadducees all the more indignant against him. But then they began to clash with each other. Now the Sadducees were what we would term today the liberals, the Pharisees would be termed the conservatives. The

Sadducees were the humanists, where the Pharisees believed in spirits. They believed in angels. They believed in life after death. The Sadducees believed only in life. When you are dead you are dead. That's all there is. It's tragic but at this particular time the Sadducees controlled the priesthood. The high priest was a Sadducee. So Paul though, got right to the heart of their argument in declaring his belief in the resurrection. Declaring that this is really what the whole situation is all about because of his belief in the resurrection. So there came this then great dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, Paul right in the middle of it. They're about to tear him apart. So once again, the captain of the guard, Claudius Lysias, intercedes for Paul. The soldiers take him away from the conflict and bring him back into the prison in the safety of the castle.

Now back in the twenty second chapter, the previous chapter, when Paul is recounting his conversion experience, in verse seventeen, "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 'And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' And the Lord said to me, depart. So Paul had this desire to share the gospel with the Jews, in Jerusalem, his former school buddies. Paul had the belief that he could convince them concerning Jesus Christ if only given the opportunity. Now this is some seventeen years later and he has made his way back to Jerusalem. No doubt, holding on to the hope that he might have the opportunity to share Christ with the Jews. The opportunity did come but it ended disastrously even as the Lord said, they will not receive your testimony. They did not receive Paul's testimony! In fact they attempted to kill him. So now this is the following day. He again has an opportunity to share with the leadership, the Pharisees were there. No doubt many of the fellows that he had been to school with. Many of the fellows that he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel with were there. And to hear Paul, they knew him. They knew his zeal as a Pharisee. So when Paul said the heart of the issue is my belief in the resurrection, they stood up for Paul's defense, but the whole thing ended in a big confrontation.

So Paul is back in the prison and is probably at a very low point in the life of the apostle. Because that which he had dreamed for and sought so many years to accomplish, to bear witness of Christ before the Jews. The opportunity came but it was a total disaster and he was a total failure! There in the prison he probably is in his mind, discouraged, depressed, uncertain about the future. What's going to happen to me now? This glorious, illustrious ministry that God had given to Paul. What an inglorious way to end it. As he comes to Jerusalem and he is so completely rejected by his brethren, the Jews, who he had such a deep and intense love for and desire to win to Christ.

And so as Paul is there, despairing, depressed, *II But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer (Paul was despondent. He said cheer up Paul. Be of good cheer.), Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."* The Lord acknowledged that Paul had testified of Him in Jerusalem. Now the Lord knew that they wouldn't receive him. He told him years earlier, they are not going to receive your testimony. Paul argued, Lord, they know me. They know what I have done. So the Lord said, okay, now you've testified of Me in Jerusalem. But that isn't the end Paul. You know it's interesting we often sort of live in the discouragement, past failures. We are prone to just sort of wallow in our discouragement. I really blew it. And you know Satan takes advantage of things like that. He makes you think that you more or less disqualified yourself. It's all over! There is no sense of even hoping for a continuing ministry because you have failed. And so the Lord acknowledges Paul. You have testified of me. But then He takes him out of the doldrums of the past to give to him a calling of the future. In other words, don't look back. Look ahead! Here is what I have for you to do, Paul. You have testified in Jerusalem. It was a total fiasco. But it's all right, you testified! And as we mentioned this morning, the Lord only requires that we testify of Him. What comes of the testimony is not my responsibility. Whether or not a person receives it or whether or not a person believes it, is not really my responsibility.

It's interesting this morning as I was speaking on this. After service a couple came up. The man gave me his card and he happens to pastor the only church in all of Kuwait, the only Christian church. And I don't know if you know it or not, but recently a man accepted Christ there at his church. Of course converts are very rare. They are just there to sort of just nourish the foreigners there in Kuwait to have a church for the foreigners. But a local Kuwaiti accepted Christ and is now being charged by the government with apostasy and chances are that he will

be put to death by the Kuwaiti government for believing in Jesus Christ. They call it apostasy. He is being tried right now in the Kuwaiti court. As we were sharing this morning, we are not really rewarded for the, you know, the people responding. We are only rewarded because we have borne witness. We testify. And that is what the Lord requires. You are witnesses of Me. People may believe the witness. Wonderful! They may not. But you will get rewarded for the witnessing. Not for whether or not they have accepted or rejected your witness. That has nothing to do with your reward, nor your requirement. As we said, God requires that we bring Jesus Christ to men. He doesn't require that we bring men to Jesus Christ! But we are so success oriented, that if a person rejects our testimony, we get discouraged. We get despondent. We get upset! We feel miserable. You know, I testified and they just made fun of me and now they are laughing, and all. We feel all discouraged because our testimony just seemed to flop. But the Lord said, no, you testified. That's all you are required to do, Paul. You testified of Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness of Me in Rome. So shutting back the past. Just shutting that out, He points him towards the future. One of the best ways of getting out of the doldrums from thinking of failures of the past is to get new goals established. To start looking forward. As Paul writing to the Philippians (Philippians 4:14), said, *forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward to mark for the prize of the high calling of God, which is in Christ Jesus*. So he sets the past aside, reaching for what God has in the future. And it's important that we do the same. So many people just get discouraged and get caught up in the past. And they never go beyond the fact that they tried once and it failed. So they just have sort of given up. Not recognizing and realizing that God requires us to just testify and be faithful in our witness. And if we are that, then that is all that God requires.

There are some people that have labored in the mission field for years without seeing a single convert! I have a friend, Jack Anderson, and the church has helped his ministry down in Bolivia, Jack worked among the Saranoia Indians for seven years. He was going out into the jungles, finding these nomadic tribes, talking them into coming back to a village that they had established for these people. Where they taught them how to plant, how to farm, how to get rid of the tuberculosis and I mean, just to improve the lives of them tremendously. Because they were just nomadic savages who wandered the jungles of the green hill country of Bolivia. And so he established this village and would make these forays out into the jungles, finding the Indians and talking them into coming back and living in this village. But he was seven years laboring among them and not a single one had accepted Jesus Christ! Seven years! And finally one of the little native girls accepted Jesus. Through her, God then began to reach the whole tribe. But it's a tremendous story of persevering! Many missionaries have gone their lifetime without seeing a convert. Now does that mean that when they get to heaven, the Lord will say to them, *oh you know that's too bad? You gave your whole life and spent it out there in the jungles and no one accepted. So you know, nothing for you up here*. No not at all! Not at all! You are not rewarded for the number of converts or the people who respond in a positive way to your testimony. You are required by God to testify and you are rewarded for your testimony. And that's where it is.

The Lord said, okay you have testified of Me in Jerusalem. Now you've got to do that also in Rome. Paul's desire was to take the gospel to Rome. When he wrote his epistle to the Romans (Romans 1:13), he said that *I've often times purposed to come to you, but I was hindered up to now. But I desire that I might have some fruit among you also as among the other Gentiles. For I'm a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as is in me, I'm ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also*.

So it was Paul's desire and the Lord is here confirming the fact that this desire will be fulfilled. Now it is interesting that Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, knowing now that he is going to go to Rome because when Paul as we get to the end of the chapter, he is taken to Caesarea. He will be there in Caesarea for a little over two years. So it was while he was in Caesarea, that he wrote to the church in Rome. You know I'm going to be there, I'm looking forward to it. Up until now I've been hindered, but you know, he knows that he is going to get there because the Lord told him. You are also going to bear witness of me in Rome. So Paul never had any qualms about getting there after that. The long court procedures and that whole thing, he realized that, you know, one of these days I'm going to get to Rome. Somehow or other, the Lord has purposed that I am to bear witness in Rome. When he was on the ship and it was hopeless, that it would seem, that they would ever be spared from this storm, he realized that he has got to see Caesar. That's part of God's plan. So Paul knows that he is going to end in Rome.

¹²And when it was day(the next 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. ¹³Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. So there were over forty of them that had taken this vow. They had gotten together. They had pledged to each other. We're not going to eat and we are not going to drink until we have killed Paul. Someone asked me this morning what happened to those forty. I don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. Did they starve to death? I doubt it. I think that they probably broke that vow, but anyhow they put themselves under a curse. We are not going to eat or drink until we have killed him! And there were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

¹⁴They 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. ¹⁵Now 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." So they drew the chief priest into this villainous plot. Of course he was the kind of man that could be persuaded to something as illegal and all as this. He really was not a man of morals. Yet we see God's providential caring as He told Paul, you are going to be in Rome.

¹⁶So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. And so God's providential care for Paul, his sister's son, Paul's nephew. It is interesting, Paul never makes any mention of any of his family, but here Luke makes mention of Paul's sister's son. He heard them talking about this plot, and so he came into the castle and he told his uncle Paul of what he had heard ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." ¹⁸So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, (That is the centurion said to the chief captain.) "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you."

¹⁹Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰And 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. ²¹But 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." ²²So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." So God is preserving Paul from this plot. The fact that his nephew overheard it and has warned now the chief captain. Roman justice is something to be admired. Paul being a Roman citizen is to be protected until he can have a fair trial. So when the chief captain heard of this conspiracy, and no doubt a little later on, the Jews came in and said, you know, would you bring Paul down tomorrow to the counsel? There is a question you know, that we need to find out just what he meant, you know. And so the chief captain realized that it was a true plot indeed.

²³And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen (cavalry), and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night (So four hundred and seventy soldiers accompanying Paul out at the third hour of the night. Getting him out during the darkness. Getting him down to the capital of the Roman province, which was Caesarea, where the Roman governor stayed. And so Paul was taken with these four hundred and seventy at the third hour of the night. And they provided an animal for Paul to ride on. And the order was to bring him safely to Felix, the governor.); ²⁴and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor." ²⁵He wrote a letter in the following manner:

²⁶Claudius Lysias,(the name of the commander or the captain of the guard.)

To the most excellent governor Felix:
Greetings.

²⁷This 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. ²⁸And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. ²⁹I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but

had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. ³⁰And 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.

³¹*Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.* (Now Antipatris was at the base of what they call the Samaritan mountains. The trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea is about sixty miles. Antipatris is about twenty miles from Caesarea, across the Sharon plains. In the forty or thirty five miles or so from Jerusalem to Antipatris is mountainous. It was occupied mainly by Jewish people and thus the full contingency of soldiers, all four hundred and seventy. ³²*The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.* When they arrived at Antipatris, the four hundred, (the two hundred spearmen and the two hundred soldiers) returned. Just the cavalry units continued on with Paul to Caesarea.

³³*When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.* This fellow Felix, an interesting fellow. He was a slave to begin with. His brother Paellas grew up, as he did in Rome. And as kids they just played in the neighborhood with, as kids play—they don't care, you know, pretty much what your dad is, I mean kids just play together. And so as they were playing together, they were playing with a young man whose name was Claudius. And they became good buddies, good friends, as young boys often do who run around together and play together. Though Claudius came from an aristocratic background and these boys were children of slaves. When Claudius later became the emperor of Rome, he remembered his childhood friends. So he freed them from their slavery. They became free men. Then, later on at Paellas' persuasion, he made Felix the ruler over Samaria. And then he broadened it, to over Judea. But Felix was a slave at heart, still. He abused his office. He later, just a couple of years after this, was deposed, as we will get in the next chapter. When Nero took over, there were so many complaints against Felix for his mismanagement and all and corruption. Even with Paul as we get into the next chapter, he was seeking that Paul would give him a bribe so that he would release him. He was a crook. He had married this Drusilla. Drusilla was a very beautiful woman. She was a wife of another leader, but Felix saw her. He fell in love with her. He hired a man who supposedly had magical powers to go and to talk her into marrying him, which they did. And so she became then the wife of Felix. She was the granddaughter of King Agrippa I. The Agrippa who ordered the death of James. She was the sister of King Agrippa II, who we will meet in a couple of chapters as Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa II. He was, of course, the brother of Drusilla. He by the time Paul meets him though, Felix is already out of the picture with Drusilla. A rather immoral relationship. A very immoral man. And we read concerning Paul, that he testified to him of righteousness, of temperance, of the judgment to come. As Paul witnessed to him of the things, righteousness and temperance (he was a very intemperate man), the judgment to come, he would shake. He would tremble. But then he would say, you know, I'll hear you again. And so he kept calling Paul back but finally was recalled by the Roman government. He lost his powers. So a little background on this fellow Felix.

³⁴*And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.* So it brings us to the end of chapter twenty three.

Now Luke is with Paul and during the two years plus that Paul will be in the prison in Caesarea, Luke is with him. It is during this time that Luke wrote his gospel. Which means that no doubt he went back to Jerusalem because in Luke's gospel, he had interviewed many of the major players. Luke interviewed Mary. Luke interviewed many of those major players in the story of the life of Jesus, so that he gives us insights of the birth of Christ, from Mary's standpoint. The visitation of the angel and all. And so Luke's gospel has some interesting insights that are not in the other gospels and especially relating as to the birth of Jesus, the early life. And these he got from talking with Mary the mother of Jesus, who at this time was, no doubt, still alive and in Jerusalem.

Another interesting note, a general type of note, when Paul had come to Jerusalem, you remember how James said, well Paul there are thousands of Jews who believe, but they still keep the law. So we want you, they are going to hear that you are here, and they are going to come and are going to be questioning, so we want you to go

ahead and sponsor these two young men who are going through the purification rites and so forth. When they question us, we can say, no, Paul is still observing the law. He is a good Jew. He is being purified. And he is sponsoring these fellows and all. Which Paul consented to do for peace and for the sake of peace with the brethren. It's interesting that if there were thousands of believers in Jerusalem, how none of them stood up in Paul's defense. When they were trying to beat him to death there in the temple, where were they? You know, Paul, writing later concerning his experience in Rome and having to appear again before Nero, said but no man stood with me. It is sort of interesting to me how that if there were that many believers there why some of them didn't step up to assist Paul and help Paul when he was really in trouble. When Paul wrote concerning his experience in Rome, no many stood with me, he said, but the Lord stood with me. And really, that is all you ever need! Here in Jerusalem there was no man to stand with him. He was there in prison. There was no one there to be with him in defense and all, but the Lord at night came and stood by him and said, Paul, be of good cheer. So the wonderful thing is that when Paul was forsaken by others, he was never forsaken by the Lord.

There may be times in your life when you feel that you have been forsaken by your friends. Maybe even by the body of Christ. God forbid that such should ever be the case. But it could be that there are times when you feel that you have been forsaken. But the Lord will never forsake you. You can be certain of that! And though Paul was indeed forsaken, by the church, he wasn't forsaken by his Lord. The Lord always stood with him in those dark experiences of his life. The Lord stood by! Even as the Lord will always stand by you in those dark nights, that we sometimes have to go through.

Father, we thank You that You have promised never to leave us or forsake us. And Lord in those time of discouragement, fear, uncertainty, You are standing there to encourage, to strengthen, and to help. Thank You Lord for Your presence with us tonight. And we want Lord that You would guide us as to the future. As to what You would have us to do Lord in our service to You. So bless and guide. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.