



A just weight
and balance

are the
LORD'S:

Thus saith the Lord...

- Acts Chapter 23
- Here we find Paul before the council
 - And yet he is not rattled.
- He rises to the occasion, and, “looking steadfastly on the council,” begins his defense.

- Paul is like his Master,
the only quiet man in all the tumult.
(**Isaiah 53:7**)
- Paul had himself once
been a member of the council
which he now addressed as a prisoner!
- This advantage
gives him his first sentence
"Men and brethren."
- Think of the criminal
addressing the judge
as a brother!

- Paul felt at home in this meeting, having been an active Pharisee himself.
 - He immediately spoke in his own defense,
 - Stating that his public life had been blameless and his conscience clear.
- This infuriated the high priest, Ananias, who ordered one of the men near Paul to hit him on the mouth.
(**Acts 23:2**)
 - Christ suffered similar treatment
(**John 18:22**).

- Paul spoke out of an honest conviction.
 - “I have lived before God in all good conscience.”
(Acts 23:1)
 - The apostle refers not so much as to character as to purpose.
 - Calling himself the “chief of sinners.”
(1 Timothy 1:15)
 - He simply asserts that he is motivated by a supreme desire to do right in the sight of God.

- The men of mark in history have been men of **strong convictions.**
- **Napoleon** devoutly believed in what he called his “**star,**”
- And his faith in it made him **the great soldier of Europe.**
- More especially is it true that, in advancing the gospel, its defenders need **definite convictions.**

- He earnestly beheld the council.
(Acts 23:1)
 - When Stephen was brought before them, they thought to have faced him down, but could not,
 - Such was his holy confidence;
 - **They looked stedfastly on him, and his face was as that of an angel,**
(Acts 6:15).

- He earnestly beheld the council.

- In Paul was fulfilled what God had promised to Ezekiel.

3:8 Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads.

3:9 ... fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks,

- But goodness always awakens wickedness.
- Hearing a man claim a good conscience, the high priest was reminded of his own evil ways.
- And "**commanded them that stood by Paul to smite him on the mouth.**"
 - But darkness cannot extinguish the light.
 - It is the other way around.
 - Light extinguishes the dark.

- As a scrupulous Pharisee,
who was,
**"touching the righteousness
which is in the Law, blameless,"**
- He would consider himself
without any reason for remorse.
- But **"what things were gain to him,"**
those he
"counted loss for Christ"
(Philippians 3:7).

- Paul was not trying to say he was sinlessly perfect and that his conscience had never told him he was wrong.
 - Rather, he had always responded to conscience when he had done wrong and had set things right.

- Never would Paul consider a clear conscience a way to be justified before God.

- Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4:

For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

- So Paul speaks of three judgments that every man must face. (**1 Corinthians 4:1-4**)
- **# 1** He must face the judgment of his fellow men.
- # 2** He must face the judgment of himself.
- # 3** He must face the judgment of God

- **# 1** He must face the judgment of his fellow men.
- It is quite true that we should never let the judgment of men deflect us from what we believe to be right;
 - It is also true that the judgment of men is often more accurate than we would like to think,

- **# 2** Every man must face the judgment of himself.
- Paul knew very well that a man's judgment of himself can be clouded by self-satisfaction, by pride and by conceit.
- But in a very real sense every man must face his own judgment.
- One of the basic Greek ethical laws was, "Man, know thyself."

**TO
THINE
OWN
SELF
BE
TRUE**

S H A K E S P E A R E

- **# 3** Every man must face the judgment of God
- In the last analysis this is the only real judgment
 - God's is the final judgment for two reasons

- (1) Only God knows all the circumstances.
- He knows the struggles a man has had;
 - He knows the secrets that a man can tell to no one.
- (2) Only God knows all the motives.
 - Man sees the deed but God sees the intention.

- Paul had come to the conclusion that the **"way of peace"** (Luke 1:79) was not by faultlessness, **but by forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ;**
- He had sought and found **"the righteousness which is of God by faith"** (Philippians 3:9).

- Some are blinded, and know not know they are "poor, and blind, and naked" in the sight of absolute purity.

- Comparing our conduct and examining our hearts in the light of God's word we are all under sin.
(Romans 3:10)

- We have all to acknowledge:
 - Positive transgressions,
 - Unfulfilled obligation.

Romans 7:18

For I know that in me
(that is, in my flesh,)

dwells no good thing:

for to will is present with me;
but *how* to perform that
which is good I find not.

7:19 For the good that I would

I do not:

but the evil which I would not,
that I do.

- Even when he persecuted the church of God,
he thought
he ought to do it,
and that he did God service in it.

- Though his conscience
was misinformed,
- Yet he acted according to
the dictates of his heart.

(Acts 26:9)

Whatever you may think of me,

**I have in every thing
approved myself to God,
and lived honestly,"**

(Hebrews 13:18)

- He had aimed at nothing
but to please God.

- **And to his audience:**

- Like you

**"I was very zealous,
as you are this day"**

(Acts 23:3)

Paul had walked
in the steps
of Abraham.

- **Walk before me,
and be thou upright.**
(**Genesis 17:1**)
- **Advise for all!**

- Paul's speech outraged Ananias the high priest.
- *He commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth.*
(Acts 23:2)
 - Our Lord Jesus was despitefully treated in this court,
by one of the servants
(John 18:22),
as was foretold.
(Micah 5:1)

- **Acts 23:2.**

Ananias held
the erroneous idea
**that if a man is conscientious
he is right.**

- To him the
statement of Paul
**meant that he had
never done anything wrong.**

- Such an assertion
from one who had been
opposing Judaism so persistently
was one of arrogance.

- Then said Paul unto him,
“God shall smite thee,
thou whited wall.”

(**Acts 23:3**)

- “Whited wall”
is the reflection of
a stronger figure
used by Christ,
“whited sepulcher.”
(**Matthew 23:27.**)

- To revile
God's high priest
was certainly forbidden
by the law of Moses
- **“You shall not revile God,
nor curse
a ruler of your people”.**
(Exodus 22:28).

- Some commentators have endeavored to discover a flaw in Paul's character.
 - But Paul needs no defense.

- Paul would not have known that Ananias was high priest;
- He had been long absent from Jerusalem for some time;
 - Political changes were frequent;
 - The high priesthood was frequently bought and sold;
- The Romans put down one high priest, and raised up another, as political reasons dictated.

- Paul advances a moral reason for his statement. "For it is written," (Acts 23:5)
- Note his composure,
 - His ability,
 - His bravery.
- Surely someone must be standing at his right hand whom we cannot see. (Matthew 10:19)

- Paul gives his reason for the injustice done to him.
- “**Sittest thou to judge me according to the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law.”**
(**John 7:51**)

- **The spirit of the law of Moses** forbade one to be condemned without first being heard.
 - Paul shows **the inconsistency** between theory and fact;
 - Ananias should have **upheld the dignity of the law by obeying it himself.**
 - His conduct is similar **to mob violence today.**

A Plot to Kill Paul

Acts 23:12 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.

23:13 **And they were more than forty** which had made this conspiracy.

23:14 And they came to the **chief priests** and **elders,** and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

- Paul's own wisdom and ingenuity contributed to his escape.
- Paul's greatest honor was that he was a Christian, and an apostle of Christ;
- And all his other earthly honors he counted but dung, that he might win Christ.
(**Philippians 3:8**)
 - However, those earthly honors did him service.

- **His being a citizen of Rome** saved him in the foregoing chapter from his being scourged by the chief captain.
 - And here his **being a Pharisee** saved him from being condemned by the Sanhedrim.
- The policy Paul used here for his own preservation **was to divide his judges,** and to set them at variance with one another.

- The great council was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, and Paul knew it.
- They differed very much from one another, and yet agreed well enough to do the business together when it suited their cause.

- (1.) The Pharisees were bigots,
zealous for the
ceremonies and traditions
of the elders.
 - Which occasioned
many quarrels
between them
and our Lord Jesus.

- But at the same time they were very orthodox in the faith of the Jewish religion.
- Concerning:
 - the world of spirits,
 - the resurrection of the dead,
 - and the after life.

- (2.) The Sadducees
were deists
(Believing that God created the world and then abandoned it)
- No friends to the scripture,
or divine revelation.
 - The books of Moses they admitted as containing a good history and a good law,
 - But had little regard
to the other books of the Old Testament.
- And it was upon these principles that they said,
 - It is in vain to serve God,
(**Malachi 3:14-15**)

- **Seeing his chance**

Paul cried out, so as to be heard by all,

- **Acts 23:6**

**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.**

- **23:7 And when he had so said, there
arose a dissension between the
Pharisees and the Sadducees:
and the multitude was divided.**

- When Christ was upon earth the **Pharisees** set themselves most against him, because he **witnessed against their traditions.**

- But, after his ascension, the **Sadducees** set themselves against his apostles, because they preached through Jesus **the resurrection of the dead.**

(Acts 4:1-2)

- **Gayle Williams**

was a 34 year-old foreign aid worker serving among the disabled in a country where humanitarian work is both needed and dangerous.

- Williams was killed **as she walked to work in 2008,**

- Targeted by a militant group because they believed **she was spreading Christianity.**

- **The targeting of Christians**
by individuals and terrorist groups
throughout the world
continues to make headlines.
- **Hostage beheadings**
recorded for the world to see
seem to aim at wielding
the maximum amount of terror.

- At Kenya's Garissa University,
April 2, 2015,
147 people were killed,
 - Students were
separated by religion.
 - **Muslims**
were allowed to leave;
 - **Christians**
were reserved
for death.

- For those of us who live in far less hostile environments, news of persecution may seem foreign, frightening, and difficult to fathom.

- Their experiences bring the words of Hebrews 11 to life in a way that many of us have never considered.

- When the apostle Paul wrote that
“nothing will separate us from the love of Christ neither trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword”
(Romans 8:38)

- He was referring to struggles that were **dangerously real to him** and the people to whom he was writing.

- "We are afflicted in every way,
but not crushed;
 - perplexed,
but not driven to despair;
 - persecuted,
but not forsaken;
 - struck down,
but not destroyed;
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

- Peter, too,
encouraged believers
in their troubling situations.
- He urged them
to stand in hope with Christ
regardless of their affliction;
- He reminded them
that discomfort and suffering
was a sacred part
of following the wounded one.

- **"Dear friends,
do not be surprised
at the painful trial
you are suffering,
as though something strange
were happening to you.
But rejoice that you participate
in the sufferings of Christ."
(1 Peter 4:12-13)**

- The apostles' words do not take away the injustice of brutal murder or the offense of terror.

- But they do remove the shock of its occurrence.

- Persecution may be always jarring, unfair, or lamentable,
 - But it is not strange
when it happens
to those who follow Christ.
 - Perhaps it is stranger
when it is not happening.

- Jesus told his followers to expect persecution;
 - In fact, he said they would be blessed by it.
 - "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you"
(**Matthew 5:11**)

- George Herbert, an English poet, said, **“Good words are worth much, and cost little.”**

- **To give a word of encouragement** to someone who is feeling down is to be like our Lord Jesus.

- In our text,

- **He stands by the side of the apostle Paul** in his prison cell and says,

- **“Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”**

- **(Acts 23:11)**

- He is the Lord **who encourages His people.**

- **The Lord knows**
all of our difficult circumstances.
- The Lord didn't need
to send out a team of angels
to find out where Paul was.
- The prison cell
and the guards
didn't hinder the Lord
from finding Paul.
- He knew exactly where
His servant was
and what he needed
at that moment.

- And even though Paul didn't yet know it, and the Lord didn't tell Paul about it in advance,
- The Lord knew of the plot that the Jews were forming against Paul, not to eat or drink until they had killed him.
(Acts 23:12-15)

- The Lord is with us
in all of our difficult circumstances.

- And we may not
understand it
till resurrection day,
do not lose heart.

- **“And, lo, I am with you always,
even to the end of the age”**
(Matthew 28:20).

- So that we confidently say,
**‘The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid.**

What shall man do to me?’
(Hebrews 13:6)

- **The Lord does not waste words.**

- He does not say,
“**Take courage**”
unless He knows that
His servant is discouraged.

- He knows
we are
“**but dust and ashes**”
(**Genesis 18:27**)

- **The Lord did not condemn Paul** for feeling discouraged,
 - But neither did He **let him stay there.**
- He understands our feelings, **because**
 - As **Hebrews 2:16** states,
“**For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.**”

- The Lord gives us a gracious command to encourage us.
- “Take courage!”
- Six out of seven uses these words are on the lips of Jesus.
- To a paralytic, lying on his bed, Jesus said, “Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2).
- To the woman who touched “the hem of His garment” He said, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you whole” (Matthew 9:22).

- To the disciples,
who thought that
Jesus walking on the water
was a ghost,
He said,
“Take courage,
it is I; do not be afraid”
(Matthew 14:27).

- To the disciples
on the night He was betrayed,
Jesus said,
“**These things I have
spoken unto you,
that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you have tribulation,
but take courage;
I have overcome the world”**
(John 16:33).

- take courage
(**John 16:33**).

- Note that
it's a command.

- It's a gentle and gracious command,
but it is a command.

- Implying that
we can choose
to obey it or disobey it.

- **Think on these things**
- **Philippians 4:8**

**The doors of the church
are open.**

**The Spirit and the Bride
Say
“Come”.**

Revelation 22:17



