

Hope and the Resurrection

Acts 21-23

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Overview: Paul continues his journey to Jerusalem despite warnings from others that he will face arrest and imprisonment. Upon his arrival, Paul attempts to demonstrate that Christianity is compatible with Jewish cultural norms, which in turn leads to his removal from the temple by an angry mob. His life is spared by a Roman official who places Paul under arrest while giving him the opportunity to address those who sought to kill him. The following day, Paul stands before the Sanhedrin to provide a defense of his life's direction which leads to further disruption and initiates a plot to take his life. Paul's life is spared once more when the plot is discovered and he is transported to Caesarea for his protection and further examination. The totality of these events in which Paul presses through his life in danger, confirms his hope in the resurrection and reminds us of God's providential care.

01. Christian hope is not wishful religious thinking; rather it is rooted in the fact of Christ's resurrection and is confirmed by the Word of God.

02. Christian hope relieves us from reliving our guilty past; empowers us to confront our ongoing difficulties; and assures us of a better life to come.

03. Christian hope motivates us to work towards justice in this life while enabling us to live with injustice in light of the life to come.

This Promise is for You and for All

1. Acts 20:36 and 21:5 describe Paul and others kneeling to pray. Though we recognize that everyone who prays cannot kneel down and we understand that various contexts prevent us from kneeling when we pray, what can we learn from this text regarding the sacredness of prayer? How does our posture in prayer reflect our understanding of speaking to Almighty God?

2. Paul was led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23) but the disciples in 21:4 tried to convince him not to go to Jerusalem. What accounts for their different responses to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Have you ever tried to convince someone of God's will (as you understood it) but realized that the time has come to acknowledge differences and say instead, "Let the will of the Lord be done" (21:14)?

3. Read Paul's account of his conversion in Acts 22:1-16. What differences can you find regarding his pre- and post-conversion life? Do you ever revisit your conversion and thank God for how He transformed your life? Have you ever shared your conversion story with your small group or with your family?

4. Given the fact that Paul lived most of his life as a faithful Jew and was personally acquainted with Jewish leaders, what accounts for his inability to recognize the high priest in Acts 23:5? More importantly, how did Paul correct his behavior in light of the scriptural prohibition against speaking evil of those in authority? How careful are you to model your impulsive behavior after Scripture?

5. Do you ever consider the resurrection of the dead as a means of hope in this life? How does this hope bring comfort to us now? How does the reality of the resurrection provide hope for a better life to come? See 1 Corinthians 15 for further insight.

For Further Reading: Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004).

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