



09/29/2019
Acts 23:1-11

BIG IDEA

A clear conscience will help you confront with courage.

LOOKING BACK

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Invite members to share any questions or points that came up in their family discussions regarding last week's study. Invite them to share ways God continued to speak to them as they sought to apply those truths throughout the week.

- Do you typically speak up and say what needs to be said in group settings or are most more likely to remain silent? Why?
- What is a group or context in which you feel confident to speak difficult truth? What is a group or context in which you are (or would be) afraid to speak difficult truth?

One reason why many of us are often afraid to speak truth to others is that we understand our own faults and feel it would be hypocritical to call attention to any fault in others. We keep quiet, thinking, "Who are we to say anything?" However, the Bible lets us know that while none of us are sinless, an honest and faithful relationship with Christ makes our consciences clear. With consciences made clear by Jesus, the Holy Spirit then equips, empowers, and enables us to speak up and confront wrong with courage.

LOOKING IN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| **Ask a volunteer to read Acts 23:1-5.**

Paul had been arrested as one who had incited a riot. Those rioters would likely have killed Paul had he not been arrested and carried away from the crowd. It was this same crowd that Paul asked the tribune to speak to in Acts 21:37-40.

- Do Paul's words in verse 1 seem to you like he was being arrogant and prideful? Why do you think he felt the need to say he had a clean conscience before God?
- What would it look like to live in such a way that we can honestly say we have fulfilled our duty to God in all good conscience?
- How does verse 3 help you know why Paul had courage to speak truth in this difficult and dangerous situation?
- If it were illegal to tell people about Christ, do you think you would be put on trial for what you have said about Jesus? How do you think you might respond when you were questioned?

Paul was struck in the mouth because his comment to the council was out of order. Some argue whether Paul, who had poor vision, could see he was speaking to the high priest. Others argue that he did not recognize Ananias as a valid high priest because he was not in the line of Aaron. Paul responded to being struck by referring to Ananias as a white washed tomb. The tombs in Israel were limestone and were washed white so that the Jews could recognize them and not touch them, remaining ceremonially clean. The tombs were clean and attractive from the outside, but the contents on the inside were dead.

- As Christians, we don't take courage in our circumstances...we take courage in God. What is the difference between the two? Why is it unhealthy to trust in circumstances?

| *Ask a volunteer to read Acts 23:6-11.*

- How did Paul change his approach in verse 6? Why?
- Why might Paul have wanted the Pharisees and Sadducees to argue?
- Reread verse 11. How has God providentially worked the circumstances of your life for your spiritual good?

Ephesians 1:11 says that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will." This reminds us that God is always at work in our lives, even when we don't sense His power or understand His plan. In the midst of being unjustly arrested and beaten, Paul certainly would have been tempted to lose hope. Acts 23:11 tells us that the Lord "stood by him" and encouraged Paul with His words.

- How has the Lord stood by you in the past? How might remembering this give you courage to face your present circumstances?

Our circumstances change. God, however, "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). This gives us courage because while we may face circumstances that are too big for us, we will never face circumstances too big for the God who loves us and has called us to Himself.

LOOKING FORWARD

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- What if you don't believe you have fulfilled your duty to God in all good conscience? Does that mean you shouldn't confront wrong with courage? Explain.
- In what situations or relationships do you struggle to act and speak as though God is standing by you to work according to His good purposes?
- How is God speaking to you about that today?

FAMILIES

Use the following questions and truths to disciple your children throughout the week.

- Who is the most courageous person you know?
- What about that person do you think gives him or her such courage?
- In what situation do you need confidence and courage from God to do or say the right thing?

PRAY

Thank God for standing by you at all times. Ask Him to help you trust in His providence and believe in His Word so that you might live out your calling and confront wrong with courage when necessary.

COMMENTARY**| Acts 23**

23:1 We already know Paul has been brought to the Sanhedrin by Claudius Lysias. We are as surprised as they when, rather than waiting for some invitation, Paul immediately begins speaking. He used the common formal address for assembled Jews and affirmed his commitment to godly duty as a Jew (Rom. 15:19b; Phil. 3:6b; 2 Tim. 1:4–7). As innocent as this line may seem, we must understand it in light of what the Sanhedrin knew full well about this man from Tarsus: an outspoken Christian, totally convinced of the messiahship of Jesus.

23:2 Ananias, son of Nedebeaus, was appointed priest in A.D. 48 and held that office for approximately ten years. Famous for bribery and plunder of temple offerings, he was assassinated by Jewish guerrillas in A.D. 66. His order to strike Paul on the mouth was illegal since, before the Sanhedrin as before our own western courts of law, the prisoner was innocent until proven guilty.

23:3 Paul's response astonishes us as much as Ananias' order. We look for Paul to act like Jesus: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats" (1 Pet. 2:23). Instead, Paul spoke the truth prophetically (though probably not consciously on this occasion), for God did smite Ananias. The phrase whitewashed wall accused Ananias of hypocrisy (Matt. 23:27).

23:4-5 We can infer from Luke's remark about those who were standing near Paul that the high priest sat some distance away. Seventy-one people in addition to Paul would have occupied the room if all the Council showed up for this hastily-called meeting. Upon being challenged regarding his words, Paul retreats to his opening line and calls the Council, Brothers, once again. He explains his behavior by saying, I did not realize that he was the high priest. The question of why Paul did not know Ananias was high priest is much debated.

23:6-8 Time to change tactics. Exchanging ill behavior with the high priest would achieve nothing in the Sanhedrin. Paul knew the group's makeup, since he had once been part of it. The controlling Sadducees (including Ananias) were constantly besieged by the Pharisees, particularly on the issue of the resurrection. If Paul could create a doctrinal civil war, he might divert attention away from himself to an ongoing internal debate. For the third time Paul addresses the group as brothers. This time he states his sterling religious credentials: I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. Then he cuts to the bottom line—the resurrection. Some argue that Paul could no longer have called himself a Pharisee because he spent his life spreading the gospel to Gentiles.

23:9-10 A minority group of the Sanhedrin argued vigorously for Paul's release. In the latter part of verse 9 we find out why Luke raised the point of angels and spirits in verse 8. Either he has not given us a full account of the discussion up to this point, or these Pharisees have already heard the story of Paul's Damascus Road experience. In the spirit of Gamaliel (Acts 5:39), they warn of the possibility that a spirit or an angel has spoken to him. Obviously, that enraged the Sadducees even more, and the meeting became complete bedlam. In the typical pattern of the Sanhedrin, they could not contain their arguments in words alone and apparently pulled at Paul from two sides until Lysias intervened and had him taken back to the barracks.

23:11 Not that night, but the night following the next day Paul experienced the fourth of five visions he received in Acts (16:9; 18:9–10; 22:17–21; 27:23–24). This message emphasized God's control over all these events and offered courage. Mainly, Jesus informed Paul that these trial appearances have not been defenses for his life, but rather witness of the truth. Furthermore, this witness would continue all the way to Rome.