

## **The Resurrection: God's Best Apologetic & Humanity's Great Comfort**

### **Acts 23:1-11**

**Main Idea:** *The resurrection is the believers best apologetic and their greatest source of spiritual comfort.*

**Introduction:** Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 23. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 23 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)...

#### **Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story**

Since its been a couple of weeks since our last time in Acts, I want to remind you where we left off before our Easter break. In Acts 19, we are informed that Paul hopes to make it to Rome, the center of the empire. This confirms what we find in the book of Romans, Paul's last letter before imprisonment, probably written during the time period described in Acts 20. His ultimate desire was to get to Spain and wanted to use Rome as a staging point. However, the first place we find Paul going is Jerusalem. His reason for going to Jerusalem is to bring a collection to help the suffering believers there, and as a sign of the unity between the Jewish/Gentile factions of the church. It also was a chance for him to clear up any misconceptions about his reputation and message.

However, Paul was warned ahead of time that if he went to Jerusalem, trouble awaited him. Yet he follows the leading of the Spirit to go. Shortly after arriving, the predicted trouble comes, and Paul is arrested on trumped up charges in the temple-courts. He offers a defense of himself and shares his testimony about encountering the risen Jesus. However, a riot ensues, and they prepare Paul for a public flogging. However, Paul tells the soldier with him that he is a Roman citizen, and therefore deserves a fair trial before he receives any punishment. How does Paul respond to these accusations? Today we are going to see that Easter – the resurrection of Jesus, provides Paul with all the defense that he needs, and at the same time, provides him with all the comfort he needs as well.

#### **Exposition of Acts 23:1-11**

*Paul's defense - Acts 23:1*

Paul reaffirms his commitment to his Jewish heritage; but also hints that in becoming a Christian, the follower of the one true Messiah, he is still acting in good conscience in light of Jesus, the Messiah who fulfills Judaism. However, look what happens next...

*The hostile reaction of Ananias, the High Priest - Acts 23:2*

There is a rebuke from the High Priest, Annanias. Now, interestingly enough according to Josephus, this particular High Priest had a reputation for being a hot-head and aggressive behavior. By today's standards, we would probably say he had a "toxic work environment"...

*Paul's rebuke - Acts 23:3-5*

However, look how Paul responds! Now, scholars debate how to interpret this reaction. Some say it was evidence that Paul still did not have control over his temper. Possible, but remember this isn't Paul's first rodeo; he would have been quite used to beatings and ill treatment. Yet something about the action of the High Priest evokes in him a strong response! Well, in my opinion, what Paul is doing here might be called "prophetic speech" (a very Jewish kind of response).

*White-washed wall: Ezek. 13:8-15*

Now, the only problem is that he's talking to a High Priest. Some say it's not possible that Paul could have not known who he was talking to; but given that he's been out of Jerusalem for several years, it's entirely possible Paul did not know that Annanias had taken office yet. Either way, he offers a form of apology by still using scripture: Deuteronomy 28:22. So we see Paul acting in accordance with scripture, both in rebuke but also in humility. However, watch what he does next...

*Paul redirects the focus on the resurrection of Jesus - Acts 23:6*

Paul refocuses the issue away from wrangling over the law, to the real question looming in front of them, the “elephant in the room” if you will: *the resurrection of Jesus*.

*Division between Sadducees and Pharisees - Acts 23:7-10*

Now, this redirection by Paul actually starts another riot. You see the Pharisees and Sadducees differed on this issue. The Sadducees typically took the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, to be their scripture. Consequently, they did not believe in a literal resurrection at the end of the age. The Pharisees on the other hand, who took all of scripture (law and the prophets), did believe in a resurrection. There were significant political divisions between the two groups which also played a role in their division.

And so, with neither group wanting to lose face with the other, they fall into a dispute. Now, it's entirely possible that Paul knew this would happen and made this move on purpose. I think he knew he would never get a fair trial in a place like Jerusalem. At the same time, however, in doing this, Paul is in effect raising the issue that was the ISSUE: the resurrection of Jesus.

*Jesus reassures Paul - Acts 24:11*

And yet Jesus makes more clear to Paul what the future plan going forward is to be: his destiny to witness in Rome. The imperative here can be translated, “Keep up your courage!” The plan of Jesus, and the ambition of Paul, come together here: what is the goal? The gospel going to Rome. The message of Jesus and His glorious resurrection given through His servant Paul, becoming known to all people everywhere.

Here is where the resurrection becomes practical and personal for Paul. If Christ is risen, then and gone back to the Father, then He will most assuredly come again. But, that also means that He has sent the Spirit to be with us, right? And if the Spirit's main job is to point us to Christ, then that must mean that the Spirit within us means that Christ is with us in the Spirit. Which is why the New Testament occasionally refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of Jesus, as well as the Spirit of God. This is why in John 16 Jesus said it would be better for Him to go away, because He could send the Spirit to them. Because the Spirit would be able to do what He could not do in His earthly body, which is be with us all the time in every place. So, the resurrection provides Paul with apologetic ammunition and ongoing spiritual comfort.

**Main Idea:** *The resurrection is the believers best apologetic and their greatest source of spiritual comfort.*

**Application: Resurrection: Our Best Apologetic and Greatest Comfort**

*Luke wrongly focuses on the resurrection?*

There are some modern scholars who say that Luke's Paul is not historically accurate, as he does not put emphasis on the cross of Jesus. According to their view, Luke's Paul downplays the cross and in favor of the resurrection. I would disagree. I think Luke's focus on the resurrection is perfectly in line with Paul's own teaching.

*Resurrection: our best apologetic*

For example, Paul himself says that the resurrection is of first importance for believers:

1 Cor. 15:1-4 - Why does the resurrection need to be of first importance? Later in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives us an answer: if there is no resurrection, then we are to be pitied above all people.

1 Cor. 15:16-19 - Without the resurrection, everything is in vain. Yet it's interesting how little we hear about the resurrection in a lot of evangelical teaching. For Paul (and Luke), it is the determining issue for understanding faith and comfort.

*Resurrection: our best comfort in this life*

But the resurrection for Paul and Luke is not just about an apologetic and proof of God's promises and existence, but it is also a source of great comfort and encouragement. For as the resurrected Lord on high, Jesus now provides for all of our needs by mediating His presence to us through the Spirit. Christ, the risen ascended and resurrected Lord of all, is also our life, and dwells with us. Colossians 3:1-4

*Jesus is STRONG: Jesus possesses the highest authority, His rule is supreme – heaven and earth have been made through Him and for Him, and through His death and resurrection, are being reconciled to Him. All things will be summed up and have their place in Him. He is the king of the earth and the king of heaven. Angels adore Him, demons fear Him. Even Satan is ultimately subject to Him, and will one day be annihilated by Him. He has purchased His church with His blood, and He will have His church worshipping before Him through all eternity. The church Jesus purchased by His blood will be made up of people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. There is no government, no system, no group, no ideology, no religion that can withstand the power of His name and the gospel which He sends His church to proclaim. In the end, every knee will bow to King Jesus – whether willingly or unwillingly. To Him shall be the glory and dominion forever and ever amen.*

*Jesus is KIND: Jesus does not manipulate, abuse, use, deceive, coerce, slander, or betray any of His followers. Anyone who willingly devotes themselves to King Jesus by will receive a hundred-fold back of His good rewards – both in this life and the life to come. He promises to never leave, never abandon, never forsake. And there is no one alive in heaven today who, if their voices could be heard, who can tell us different. Even among the living (us!), anyone who has devoted themselves to following Jesus will tell you that they have never experienced Him to be an unkind or unfit savior, companion, or friend. Mysterious yes. Challenging, yes. Sometimes hard to understand, yes. But unfaithful? Untrue? Uncommitted to our eternal good? No. He is completely and totally trustworthy.*