

“Be of Good Cheer”

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Our Lord uttered these words at a time of dark despair in the ministry of Paul. This came at the point where he had just been arrested on false charges (Acts 21:29, 38) and narrowly escaped the Jewish people, for whom he once said he would be accursed from Christ if they could be saved (Romans 9:3), as their stated intention was to literally beat him to death—it was in the midst of the beating that the Romans intervened (Acts 21:31-32). His well-placed question to the Roman centurion ordered to “examine him by scourging,” “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:25), yielded the pleasant sight of the examiners departing from him. Next, before the Jewish council the high priest ordered him to be slapped in the face for stating his conviction relative to his own good conscience. And, finally, the chief captain who was “fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them” took him by force from them and incarcerated him in the castle prison. If ever anyone needed encouragement, this man did!

“The Lord, who had appeared to him on the way to Damascus (Acts 9: 5), in the temple (Acts 22: 17, 18), and at Corinth (Acts 18: 9), now appeared to him and comforted him with the promise that he would be able to fulfill his desire to preach the gospel at Rome (Acts 19: 21; Rom. 1: 11-13; 15: 23).”¹ Luke recorded the statement, “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). J.W. McGarvey observed, “Outside the prison he could hope for nothing but death, and inside there was no field of usefulness. In whatever direction he could look, prison walls or a bloody death confronted him, and hedged his way. At this opportune moment he was cheered by the first ray of light in regard to his future; and though it was impossible for him to conjecture as yet how it was to be brought about, he had assurance that in the Lord’s own way and time he should yet escape the present danger, and preach the gospel in Rome.”²

This was the second time Paul’s life was imperiled by trying to preach the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem and he had to be spirited away. (The first time is in Acts 9:26-30). In his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, A.T. Robertson wrote, “Paul never needed Jesus more than now. On a previous occasion the whole church prayed for Peter’s release (12:5), but Paul clearly had no such grip on the church as that, though he had been kindly welcomed (21:18). In every crisis Jesus appears to him (cf. Acts 18:9). It looked dark for Paul till Jesus spoke. Once before in Jerusalem Jesus spoke words of cheer (22:18). Then he was told to leave Jerusalem. Now he is to have ‘cheer’ or ‘courage’ (*tharsei*). Jesus used this very word to others (Matt. 9:2, 22; Mark 10:49). It is a brave word.”³

Paul did indeed go to Jerusalem and preach the gospel. Luke informs, “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31). He would carry the memory of the Lord’s encouragement to “be of good cheer, Paul” to his dying day (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Similarly, our

Lord promised every Christian, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). We conclude with the words of Wayne Jackson in this connection, “When Christ stands by us, what else matters?”⁴

¹H. Leo Boles (1941, reprint ed. 1974), *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Nashville, TN: The Gospel Advocate Company), p. 366.

²J.W. McGarvey (n.d.), *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, vol. 2, (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company), p. 228.

³Arcihbald Thomas Robertson (1930), *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Volume III, Acts of the Apostles (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press), pp. 402-403.

⁴Wayne Jackson (2000), *Acts From Jerusalem to Rome* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications), p. 314.