

An Encouraging Promise From Christ

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 22. Acts chapter 22. We're going to begin reading in verse 30 through chapter 23.

! Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God and all good conscience to this day.

At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck.

Those who were standing near Paul said, You dare to insult God's high priest? Paul replied, Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest, for it is written, Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

[1:29] When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. We find nothing wrong with this man, they said. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?

The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

The following night, the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage, as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.

The next morning, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than 40 men were involved in this plot.

[2:37] They went to the chief priests and elders and said, We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case.

We are ready to kill him before he gets here. But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, Take this young man to the commander. He has something to tell him. And so he took him to the commander. The centurion said, Paul, the prisoner sent for me.

And ask me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you. The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, What is what is it you want to tell me? He said, The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him.

[4:01] Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me. Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, Get ready a detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight.

Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix. He wrote a letter as follows, Claudius Lysicius to His Excellency Governor Felix.

Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin.

I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him and that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once.

I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him. So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris.

[5:08] The next day, they let the cavalry go on with him while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.

The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will hear your case when your accusers get here.

Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace. Don't you love a good story? The best storyteller of all is our God, isn't he?

The best stories are found in the Bible. I'm so thankful that the Bible is not just all poetry or all commands. But it's a mixture, isn't it?

You have some poetry, you have some commands, but you also have some stories, historical narrative. And God is teaching us through all these different forms.

[6:14] It's all the inspired word of God. It's the stuff we need. And this is a wonderful story that Luke is telling us in the book of Acts of Jesus building his church.

I wonder if you're learning to live consciously upon the promises of God. In our text today, the Lord Jesus came to encourage his servant Paul and his words of encouragement came in the form of a promise.

And Paul lived upon that promise for several years. That one promise carried him through great dangers and trials. We'll get to see that this morning.

Now, four times in the book of Acts, we read about the Lord Jesus coming to Paul and speaking to him. The first and most notable was on the road to Damascus, where the living, risen Christ met Paul.

He confronted him, he converted him, and he called him to proclaim the gospel of God's grace. The second time he appeared to him was three years later in Jerusalem.

[7:22] We read it last week. While Paul was praying at the temple, the Lord told him to leave Jerusalem because the Jews there would not pay attention to his message. And instead, Paul, I want you to go far away to the Gentiles.

That was the second time the Lord came to him in Acts. The third time was at Corinth, where he had found a great door of opportunity was open to him, but there were also many who opposed him.

And some even became abusive. And so the Lord came and spoke to Paul one night in a vision. Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking.

Do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in that city. And on the strength of that promise, Paul stayed put for another year and a half and preached the word in Corinth.

And then the fourth time in the book of Acts that he appeared to Paul is here in Jerusalem, as we see in verse 11, and we'll study this morning. Now, each time, these words of Christ came at a critical point in the life and ministry of Paul.

[8:37] And those words came to direct him, to steer him. And they came with life-changing implications for Paul. And that's surely the case with this last appearance that Jesus makes to Paul in verse 11.

We read it. The following night, the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage, as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.

Now, we're going to see today that that promise becomes the unifying theme for the rest of the book. What happens between now and the end of Acts? Well, it all is revolving around that promise from the Lord.

This word will direct and control what we see happening in the last six chapters of Acts. So we're going to look this morning at this encouraging promise from the Lord.

We're going to see first of... We're going to see a threat to that promise and then the upholding of that promise. But before we get to the promise itself, we have a prelude to the promise.

[9:46] So that's our first point, the prelude to the promise. Now, a prelude is that which leads up to something. Kelly played a piano prelude for us, didn't she, before the joint worship service.

It led up to our corporate worship. It was a prelude. It came before. Well, the first ten verses recount the prelude, the events that lead up to the promise that Jesus gives to Paul.

And so we see we've got this Roman commander. Now we're told in this book his name, or in this chapter his name, Claudius Lysias. Now this man has already saved Paul's life twice from the juice. And he's still anxious to know why they're trying to kill this guy named Paul. What had he done that was so bad? He'd already asked the crowd, but they gave him conflicting ideas.

He was about to torture and interrogate Paul to get to the bottom of what he had done wrong, only to learn to his horror that he almost flogged a Roman citizen without a fair trial.

[10:55] So he had released Paul and ordered the Sanhedrin. This is the Supreme Court of the Jews ordered them to meet that they might file their formal complaint against Paul and thereby he would learn and finally get to the bottom of what's this guy Paul done?

That's so bad. So Paul is standing before the high court and he looks them straight in the eyes and he says, my brothers. Now remember, one of the charges is he speaks against our people, the Jews.

And you see again, Paul is saying, no, no, my brothers. He's identifying with them as one of them. I too am a Jew. My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.

Now one's duty to God is revealed in God's law. What is your duty to God? You'll find it here. So

what is Paul saying? He's saying, I have obeyed God's law in all good conscience to this day.

Again, the accusation against him was that he speaks against our law. And he's saying, no, I've kept this law, not spoken against it. And for that, Paul does not receive an argument to the contrary, but is smacked on the mouth ordered by none other than the high priest Ananias.

[12:14] He strikes, he says, strike him on the mouth to those near him. In other words, he's shutting Paul up. He's prematurely judging him before Paul has even had a chance to make his defense, isn't he?

He's unworthy to listen to. Ananias clearly hates Paul for preaching salvation through Jesus of Nazareth. And he's offended by his offering the kingdom of God to Gentiles without requiring them to become Jews and keep the law of Moses.

But none of that justified the high priest's actions toward Paul. The Old Testament Jewish law required the court to treat the defendant as innocent until proven guilty.

Paul has not been proven guilty, but he says, strike him on the mouth. So Paul says to him, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall.

You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck. Now, your wife probably hasn't called you a whitewashed wall for a while, so what does he mean there?

[13:29] Well, that's another term, a common term for a hypocrite, a whitewashed wall. The Bible speaks of a retaining wall that's holding back the dirt.

Perhaps there's a house there and the dirt is held back by this retaining wall. But there's a crack, serious cracks in the wall.

And rather than fixing the wall properly, they just get some lime and mix it with some water and just smear a thin veneer of whitewash across the wall and now doesn't the wall look safe and sound?

Oh, yes, it does. But it's everything but safe and sound. It's not at all what it looks like. It looks like one thing, safe and sound. It is another.

It's dangerous. It's a lie. And so is Ananias. He's a hypocrite. He's not what he appears to be. What does he look like? He looks like the high priest of God.

[14:36] What is he? He's a wicked lawbreaker. Oh, that's what Paul means by whitewashed wall. He's judging Paul by the law and yet he himself breaks the law.

And so his true character of hypocrite shows him to be deserving of the prophetic word that Paul now utters against him. We must never think that Paul is responding out of personal revenge, that Paul is just in a fit of rage for having been smacked in the mouth, that he now lashes out on his own against this high priest, so-called high priest, Ananias.

No, Paul speaks as a spokesman for God. I'm not saying that everything, that Paul was sinless, but we must not forget he speaks as a spokesman for God.

And this was a judgment from God. Notice his word, God will strike you. This is not something Paul would or could do himself.

And it reminds us of another time that Paul spoke a word of judgment from God. Do you remember on the island of Crete, early on in his first missionary journey, Paul was witnessing to the pro-council, the leading man of the city.

[16:00] And he was teaching him of Christ. And there by his side was one Elemus, a sorcerer. And he was trying to pervert Paul's words and twist them and to turn the pro-council away from the faith in Jesus.

Do you remember what Paul did? He announced a judgment of God that he would become temporarily blind. And it happened immediately. Now you say, Paul, why did you do? Paul couldn't do that. No man can do that. It was God's judgment upon him. And this judgment here is no less a judgment from God as that was. So the judgment is from God and that can be seen in its fulfillment as recorded by the historian Josephus.

We're told by Josephus, the historian, that a few years later in the Roman Jewish, the Jewish-Roman war, that this same Ananias took a pro-Roman policy and that angered the Jewish nationalist party and they were livid with Ananias.

Well, Ananias went into hiding. Where do you hide when you're being sought out? Well, he hid in an aqueduct and a group of Jewish assassins called the Sicarii found him and drug him out of the aqueduct and killed him.

[17:22] God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. Well, those standing near Paul said, how dare you speak that way to God's high priest and insult him?

And Paul responds, I did not know that he was the high priest. Now, that's been debated. What did Paul mean when he said that? I believe this is what he meant.

How could anyone acting so unjustly ever be God's high priest? I didn't know he was God's... God's high priest doesn't act that way. And yet he's showing his regard for the law for he quotes Exodus 22, 28.

For it is written, do not speak evil about the ruler of your people. Paul is again defending the law. He's not speaking against it. He's living according to it. But he is challenging the claim that Ananias is God's high priest.

[18:21] He doesn't believe it for a moment. He's denying that wicked Ananias, whitewashed wall Ananias was God's high priest.

Now, let's remember, this is some close to 20 years after 25 years after Jesus has been crowned priestly king on the throne of Melchizedek in heaven.

In other words, the whole Levitical priesthood had been superseded by the Lord Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews will show that, won't it? Very plainly. Jesus is the only high priest and he doesn't need to be replaced by other priests like Levi's line because they died and need to be replaced because Jesus has an indestructible life and he remains the high priest.

And that could be behind Paul's words to him. You're only a high priest of God in name. And the high priesthood would soon be dismantled when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed just 10 years or so later.

Well, Paul changes his tactics. He was ready to give his defense. But as he sizes up the situation, this early fist in the mouth convinced Paul that he's got a hostile court in front of him and he's not going to get anywhere with this prejudiced high priest.

[20:00] So he abandons his line of reasoning and he chooses a strategy to keep him from being condemned as one who is forsaking the religion of the Jews.

Remember, that's the charge. He speaks against our religion, our people, our laws. And Paul wants to at least defend the sake that Christianity is not against Old Testament Judaism.

It is rather the fulfillment. Everything that the Old Testament talked about is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. And it would bring great disrepute upon Jesus of Nazareth if he would somehow be accused of not believing the law and the prophets.

So he takes this tactic to show that, no, he is acting in line with the law and the prophets and what they have taught. He has this amazing ability to think on his feet.

I wish I had that. Now, of course, the Holy Spirit was helping him as the Spirit had been promised to do for those who were brought to trial and that it would be given to you in that moment what to say.

[21:14] And so he knows that this Supreme Court is made up of two different religious parties. You've got the Sadducees. They were the liberal party. And they included Ananias and most of the priests.

Probably the majority. And then they had the Pharisees, the conservative party that were all concerned about the secularizing that was going on by the Sadducees and the way they're cozying up to the Romans and all of that.

And they want, the Pharisees want to return back to the law of Moses. So you have these two parties on the high court and they were often at each other's throats as much as the Democrats and Republicans are in our country.

The Sadducees, many of their beliefs clashed with each other. The Sadducees say that there's no resurrection. So when you're dead, you're dead. There's no resurrection. And they also don't believe in angels or spirits.

And as my father used to like to say, and that's why they're sad, you see. No resurrection. No spirits. No angels. No spirits. Whereas the Pharisees believed in all three.

[22:25] There is a resurrection. There are angels. There are spirits. And indeed, the Bible teaches all three. The Old Testament taught all three. And Paul believed all three. So on that point, Paul finds himself in agreement with the Pharisees, doesn't he?

So Paul knows all about these deep divisions on the Supreme Court. And he presents his defense in terms that will bring these differences up to the surface in a big way.

I was once in a meeting where things got a bit hot, to put it mildly. And afterwards, a dear old brother from Tennessee said with his draw that I can't imitate. He shook his head and he said, that was like throwing raw meat into a pack of dogs.

No wonder the fur flew. Paul now lobs a raw T-bone steak into the court. My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection from the dead.

Well, that's all it took. This court that had been united against Paul is suddenly divided against one another with no lack of fur flying.

[23:43] Now, what Paul said was true. He did believe in the final resurrection. He wasn't just throwing something out to be troublesome. He really believed in the final resurrection of the body at the end of time just as the Pharisees did.

Now, Paul believed more than the Pharisees did about the resurrection because for Paul, the thing that guarantees the final resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

Well, the Pharisees didn't believe Jesus rose from the dead. Paul hadn't either until he met him on the road to Damascus and then he became a believer. He is alive.

He is risen. And it changed everything. It was one of the strongest tenets of his belief besides the death of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, was the resurrection of Jesus.

And he preached that. We have a Savior who's been physically raised from the dead. And because he arose, we too will rise. You see, our resurrection follows his.

[24:47] Now, you remember, Paul has said in his letters to the Corinthians, if Christ has been raised from the dead, then how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Some of you, you Sadducees, how can you say that? If Christ is risen, it proves that the dead rise. And if he's not been raised, well then we have no hope of resurrection.

We're to be pitied more than all men if only in this life we have hope. So Paul's telling the truth when he lobs this bomb into the court. I am on trial for my hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Can you see how Paul is aligning himself with the Old Testament law that he's accused of not believing? Now, the Old Testament taught the resurrection from the dead.

And Paul is taking his stand and saying, I'm a Pharisee and I believe these things just like these other Pharisees do. Well, immediately the court split and the fur flew.

[25:53] The Pharisees rallied to Paul's defense. not because they were fond of Paul. We see something of what they think of Paul in other places. They weren't.

But they're glad to use the situation to score some points against their enemies, the Sadducees. And so Paul's able to get this civil war going within the court and now they're fighting against each other.

A great uproar is what Luke says with the Pharisees arguing vigorously. Well, we find nothing wrong with this man. Now, they surely did. But on this score, surely not.

And so now they're supporting Paul. We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him? That's how they interpret his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Well, you must have seen a spirit or an angel. And we believe in those things. So what if an angel or a spirit has met him and talked to him? Or perhaps they're speaking of the time that the Lord Jesus did speak to Paul in Jerusalem.

[26 : 56] But in any case, they're supporting him. So what have we seen? Paul knows how to use his Roman citizenship for the sake of the gospel and he also knows how to use his party of the Pharisees for the sake of the gospel.

Belonging, being a Pharisee. Well, this dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. So you sense something of the violence among the Supreme Court supposed to be interested in curbing violence and justice.

So again, the commander rescues Paul third time. He orders his troops to go down and take him away from them by force and to bring him back into the barracks for his own protection.

Poor commander Claudius. He proves unsuccessful once again trying to get to the bottom of what has Paul done. This tribunal of the high court didn't solve his problem.

Well, all this is prelude to the promise and that's the main point and I'm sorry I've spent so much time in the prelude. Now comes the encouraging promise itself. Secondly, now it's been a tough two days for Paul in Jerusalem.

[28 : 18] He was almost beaten to death by the Jews. He's barely escaped flogging by the Romans. He received a knuckle sandwich from the Sanhedrin and two times his defense was rejected with hatred and worst of all he had nothing to show for his evangelism in Jerusalem.

This isn't what he was hoping to receive. Now he was ready to die for the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem but he had hopes of living on. You can find that in his letters.

He had hopes of living on that he might testify to the gospel of God's grace in new places that he had never been to before and now here he is and these last two days have been pathetic.

Could this now be the end of it all and to end on such a note of failure? It must have weighed heavily upon him for the following night the Lord stood near Paul and said take courage.

Now again the Lord doesn't do that every night with Paul. We see four times in Acts that he comes to him with a word. So there must have been good reason to come with this word.

[29 : 27] Paul's spirit was down. He was discouraged. And Jesus comes and says take courage. Take courage. Be of good here.

And the timing of it all shows that the Lord Jesus knows just when his servants need encouragement. That means he not only knows what you are up against but he knows the very emotional state of your heart and how you are dealing with what you're up against.

Are you discouraged? He says take courage. And notice his encouragement comes in the form of a promise. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem so you must testify in Rome.

Now the first thing I want you to notice is that the Lord first speaks approvingly of Paul's defense given at Jerusalem. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem.

This testimony of his at Jerusalem. When did that happen? In his defense. that didn't get on so well. It seemed like failure after failure. Seems like every time I opened my mouth and giving my defense I only stirred up greater hostility.

[30 : 44] Did I botch things? Did I say the wrong thing? They didn't seek the Savior. They hardened their hearts in greater unbelief and anger.

Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus comes to Paul and he says, Paul, you did well. You did well. If men reject you, I approve. For in your defense here in Jerusalem, you have testified about me.

You have. And you did so well here in Jerusalem that I'm going to have you do the same thing in Rome. Now the Lord Jesus often has a different view from ours on what we do for him.

What we do for him. We see our failures. What we could have and should have done better. What we could have said. Oh, but Jesus sees our hearts.

And he's pleased with our efforts and often he is doing far more than we realize through our efforts. And he delights in our testifying about him.

[31 : 52] What an encouragement this was to a man who made it his goal to please the Lord. He woke up with a goal. I want to please the Lord today. And the last two days have been worth it all just to hear his well done.

What are the fists and frowns of men if my Jesus smiles? And one approving word of Christ is enough to take heart and to keep going. But you say the Lord Jesus doesn't come and talk to me that way.

Oh, but he does dear ones. He speaks in his word. His written word. He tells you what he will say to you.

His faithful ones when at last you see him face to face. So come away for a while from these scenes of discouragement down below and come with me up to heaven.

And let us look at our glorified Lord and King Jesus. And let's listen to what he is going to say to us in that day. Well done, good and faithful servant.

[33:03] Enter into the joy of your Lord. Don't you live for that approval from Christ? Hearing his well done, is that enough to keep you going and serving him even when others are after you?

the Lord comes with encouragement, approving word of his service in Jerusalem. But then there was also the encouragement in that the Lord promises that Paul will also testify at Rome.

As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, you must testify in Rome. Now Paul had never been to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Oh, but he wanted to go there and to testify about the Lord Jesus there.

Indeed, he had incorporated Rome into his plans for the future. He was already planning to go to Rome. On this last trip to Jerusalem in chapter 19 and verse 21, Paul had said, after I have been there, Jerusalem, I must visit Rome also.

Paul was not, he was ready to die at Jerusalem, but he wasn't planning to die there. He had Rome on his itinerary after Jerusalem. And from Corinth, he had written to the saints in Rome, that epistle that we have, and he told them he was longing to see them and praying that now at last, by God's will, the way may be open for me to come.

[34:24] He's planning a fourth missionary journey when he will go as far away as Spain and stop by and see the Romans then. So he's planning to go to Rome.

And now here he is at Jerusalem and the Lord Jesus comes near and assures him that he is going to Rome. You must testify about me in Rome.

It won't be exactly as Paul had planned. It won't be a fourth missionary journey. He'll go as a prisoner, but he'll go nonetheless. As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.

What an encouragement after a rough two days in Jerusalem. But this promise was not only to encourage him for present difficulties and discouragement. this was medicine for the future.

The Lord is fortifying his servant in advance for all the discouraging trials that yet lay before him.

There was rougher sledding ahead for the apostle Paul because from chapter 23 to the end of the book of Acts it reads like a suspense novel.

[35:29] Looks like Paul's going to be killed on every page or every other page. Things happen that make it look like Paul will never live to see Rome. One thing after another a Jewish plot on his life, these legal trials, two years of imprisonment, horrific storm at sea, shipwreck, a further plot of the soldiers to kill all the prisoners, a deadly poisonous snake on the island of Malta that the islanders said he's going to fall over dead anytime now, we know that snake.

All these things would threaten Paul never getting to Rome. But when these things would happen Paul had a promise to stand on.

And that promise was like a piece of candy that sweetened the trial. And it was not like our candy. It lasted for years. This one promise, he had it.

And you see it ensured the fact that none of these things come wind or weather or demon of hell, nothing will keep me from Rome.

Because Jesus had said, as you've testified about me in Jerusalem, you must testify about me in Rome. Can I just tell you how the book of Acts ends?

[36:45] Most of you have already read the ending before. But it ends in chapter 28 with Paul arriving in Rome where he testified to the gospel of Jesus Christ for two years unhindered.

It all happened just as Jesus said it would that night that he drew near and encouraged Paul with that promise. And that's Jesus' hallmark.

His word always comes true without exception. How can the truth lie? He can't. Heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never pass away.

It will never return empty. The promise that I send out will never come back unfulfilled. It will always accomplish the thing for which I sent it.

And this promise of Paul reaching Rome now becomes a gauntlet that is thrown down by the Lord Jesus. Whose word reigns? Mine or man's?

[37 : 44] And what we see is that God's word determines history. History unfolds. The next five, six chapters will unfold according to this word from King Jesus.

Paul's going to Rome. God's And he's immortal until he gets there. He can't die short of Rome. You see the encouragement to Paul?

See how he's being prepared in advance for all the discouraging things that are coming. You say, well, I haven't received such a promise like that. I haven't received the promise that Simeon got that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ or that Paul got that he would not die until he at least arrived in Rome.

But believer, you have many great and precious promises. What more can he say than to you he has said, you who to Jesus for refuge have fled.

God's not told you everything you want to know, but he's told you everything you need to know. Everything you need to know for life and godliness. Everything you need to know to be encouraged in your present circumstances.

[38 : 54] Everything you need to live a holy and a happy life. It's all here for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

The encouragement of the scriptures. It's all here. So get a promise and start walking on it. Start living on it. Start expecting it. Start praying it.

And once you do that, find another one and live on that one and another one and live on that one. Christ's encouragement comes in the form of promise.

Well, that's the promise itself and it shapes the rest of the book. Very briefly, the first threat to the promise. It was the first obstacle that Paul meets to arriving in Rome and it's a Jewish plot to kill him.

The very next morning after receiving the promise, the very next morning, over 40 Jews got together and hatched a conspiracy to kill Paul and they weren't playing around.

[39 : 56] They were determined to have him dead and to prove their dedication to the conspiracy, they bound themselves with an oath. They swore in God's holy name that they would not eat or drink until Paul was dead.

So as long as Paul is alive, we'll not be eating or drinking. You see, they're putting their money where their mouth is and they mean business. And then they went to the chief priest and the elders and they included them on their conspiracy.

You're getting the picture of the religion in Israel at this day. Chief priests and elders are doing what? They're brought in on the plan to assassinate Paul. So you guys in the Sanhedrin, you go and petition the commander to have him brought to stand before you under the pretext that pretending that you need more information from him and we need to question him again and then we'll ambush Paul as he's on his way to the court and we'll kill him before he gets here.

Well, they couldn't be happier, these Jewish leaders. Forty men sworn to carry out the dirty business of murder for the apostle. Well, not only did they threaten Paul's life, you see, unbeknownst to them, they threatened to overturn the promise of Jesus, didn't they?

They didn't know it, but Jesus had said, Paul's going to Rome. And they're threatening that promise, aren't they? At least they think what they're doing is to stop it from happening.

[41 : 30] So what's the odds of their conspiracy succeeding? Well, it's less than zero, isn't it? So these boys, they better be ready to be hungry. A long time. A starvation diet.

But notice this plot arose the very day after the encouraging promise. You can count on God's promises being tested. You just find a promise to say, OK, I like this one. I'm going to start living on. All things work together for good.

And the next day, be challenged with something that doesn't look good, doesn't taste good, doesn't feel good. And you begin to wonder, can he work this for good in my life? Paul received a precious promise.

And immediately, the next day, it's tested. They're going to kill him. And he's not anywhere near Rome. Well, that's the threat of the promise.

Lastly, the upholding of the promise. You know, the Lord Jesus is not lacking for instruments when it comes to carrying out his own promises. He has everything in heaven and earth at his beck and call.

[42:30] He can work without instruments. Here he uses them. The first instrument is Paul's nephew, who somehow got wind of the plot and tells his uncle Paul about it, who told the centurion that this boy has something to tell the commander.

And once again, the Lord uses, secondly, this confused Roman commander to deliver Paul. It's the fourth time he's going to use Claudius Lysias to deliver Paul.

He's not about to let an assassination take place on his watch. So he flies into action and prepares a small army. That's the next instrument Christ uses. 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen to escort Paul safely out of Jerusalem to Caesarea, some 62 miles away that he might stand a fair trial under Governor Felix.

Now this might seem and look like overkill. You got 40 men threatening the life of one man. And here he's on a horse and he's surrounded by 70 other horsemen and 200 spearmen and 200 soldiers.

But can you not see what Jesus is doing? Can you not see his encouragement to Paul? Paul, I told you you're going to testify at Rome. And yes, I know all about this threat.

[43:54] Look around you and just see this small army that I've stirred up just to protect you, to get you there. Jesus is wanting to encourage his servant to keep trusting his word.

It will happen, Paul. You're going to get to Rome. And then the next day he's handed over to the governor Felix at Caesarea. So governor Felix is now the next instrument that Jesus uses to protect Paul and get him to Rome.

For Felix kept him in military custody within the very palace compound until his case could be tried once his accusers arrived. So Paul's nephew, the commander Claudius, a small army, governor Felix and the palace guard, all instruments in the Redeemer's hand as he watches over his promise to Paul.

This word is not going to come back empty, Paul. He's upholding his promise to get him to Rome with the gospel. The Lord knows how to deliver his people out of trouble.

Well, we've got to leave Paul here at Caesarea and the palace of Herod under the palace protection of the palace guard because we have at least two weeks to preach a message on Christmas Day and on a New Year theme.

[45:10] So it will be some three weeks, Lord willing, before we come back. So here's Paul. He's there kept and protected by the Lord Jesus through his instruments. And we've also got to leave these 40 hungry Jews sitting there for three weeks who woke up the next morning horrified to find out that Paul had slipped through their fingers, that during the night he had been escorted out of town with 470 militia.

But the doubly bad news that it might be a while before they see anything for breakfast, lunch, or supper. So we'll leave them, too, with their stomachs growling and no end in sight to their diet. Actually, you need not go looking for skinny Jews, 40 skinny Jews, in the rest of the book of Acts because I'm sure they never starve to death.

I'm sure they found some way to get around, some loophole to rescind their solemn oath sworn before the Lord and were soon eating again, showing again the hypocrisy of the whole Jewish religion at that time.

But let's not miss the main lesson for us here that God's word determines history. Paul, you must. Day, it is a divine necessity. You must testify about me in Rome.

[46:36] Well, that's it. We know the end of the book right now. Paul's going to make it to Rome. And so what a blessing to know that our king speaks and history unfolds.

Jesus personally watches over his words, his promises to you. He's watching all the threats to those promises in your life. And you don't see how anything good can come.

But you're holding on to the promise, the naked promise. There's nothing to be seen that would be stirring up greater faith because you don't see any circumstances that look good.

But fix your eyes on the promiser. The promiser who watches over his word that does not let it fall to the ground unfulfilled. And so stand on the promise.

Lost person, if you still haven't come to Christ, you need to know that Jesus' word is going to happen. And one day you're going to see it all happen just as Jesus said it would.

[47 : 36] And you're going to stand before that great white throne and you're going to see humanity divided in two and you're going to see those on his right. And who are they? They're the ones that trusted in Jesus. And Jesus said that whoever believes on him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

And they took him at his word. He said come to me and I will give you rest. And they came to him and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. And there they are. They're there.

And he welcomes them. Come you blessed into the kingdom that God has prepared for you. And you're going to see another group. And they're on the left hand of Jesus.

And who are these? Well he said that unless you repent you will all likewise perish. And these people oh they didn't repent. They ignored Jesus.

They neglected Jesus. They had other things to do and they procrastinated. And now they're here.

And he will say depart from me into everlasting torments. I never knew you.

[48 : 39] It will all happen when Jesus word goes out. He watches over it to see that it comes true. Now which group will you be in? Oh get into the saved.

Come and trust in Christ. Come and turn from your way. Repudiate the way you've lived. And come to Jesus Christ and receive everlasting life. And then stand on that promise.

Until we see them all fulfilled. When we see Jesus face to face. Let's pray. Thank you Lord for this story of the life of Paul and his ministry.

Thank you that it shows us the heart of Jesus Christ for every one of his servants. That he knows our hearts. Thank you Jesus. You've been here. You know our weakness.

You know that we are dust. You know our feeble frame. And you know how we're feeling. And you're able to sympathize with us.

[49 : 39] And to bring a sweet promise from your word to our hearts. Teach us to stand upon your promise. Teach us to take you at your word. Thank you for being so concerned about us when we consider the heavens the work of your fingers.

What are we? That you are mindful of us. That you would send your son to live and die. To save us.

Thank you. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.