

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=

Lesson 22

Resources for the Troubled Days - Acts 22, 23

AIM: to teach my pupils the kind of life that can withstand the hours of trouble.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the pupils to share with you the darkest days of their lives. If they have had none, ask them to share with you the darkest days of their family's life. Exchange a few thoughts concerning the dark days that come in every home.

INTRODUCTION: Someone has said the true test of character is how it stands up when the hard times come. Paul is facing some hard times in Acts 22 and 23. Both of these chapters will be taken together. They compose a continued story. The situation in which Paul finds himself in chapter 22 carries over into chapter 23. These two chapters overlap each other and deal with a time of crisis in Paul's life. Paul stood the test in this crisis. He stood the test, not because of something that happened to him during the crisis, but because of the resources he had built up in his past life that prepared him for the test that would come. Explain very carefully, especially to children, the fact that when the tests of life come, we will pass or fail according to the foundation that has been laid and the resources that we have built up. A rope does not become strong when it is tested; it becomes strong before it is tested. A bridge does not hold up a car because of strength it gains when the car goes over it; it holds up the car because it was planned properly, foundations were laid properly, the structure was raised properly, and the engineering was done properly. The same is true with a life. Let us notice the resources that Paul had laid up for his troubled times.

First, however, look at some of the Scriptures noting his troubles: Acts 21:27, 30, 31; Acts 22:23, 24; Acts 23:12. You will recall Paul had been warned by his friends not to go to Jerusalem. In spite of this warning, he went. However, he was seized almost immediately, and his life was endangered. Noting the above verses, go through the different things they did to him. Some of them are rather humorous, though tragic. Then, teach the following resources Paul had.

- I. THE RESOURCE OF EDUCATION AND STUDY. By education, we do not mean only formal training; we also mean an accumulation of facts, of knowledge, and a broadening of one's own self. Paul had studied in Tarsus until he was age 14. He then went to Jerusalem and studied under the great Gamaliel. He prepared himself for the Sanhedrin and was a learned, educated man. You will notice in Acts 21:37-39 that Paul obviously could speak Greek. You will notice in verse 40 of the same chapter that Paul spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue. If you will notice Acts 22:25 and Acts 23:5, you will find that Paul had a good command of the law. Someone said to Mr. D. L. Moody one time, "God does not need your education." Mr. Moody replied, "God does not need your ignorance either." One who accumulates facts, whether formally or not, will find himself better equipped for the troubled days. This certainly came in handy when the Apostle Paul faced his trouble. Let us stress the importance of Christian education. Challenge the boys and girls to decide now to attend a Christian school and get as much Christian education as they can. Parents should do what they can to see that their children go as far in Christian education as possible.
- II. PAUL'S TESTIMONY. This is found in Acts 22:1-21. Certainly becoming a Christian is a vital part in preparing for the troubled days. The Holy Spirit comes in us to comfort, strengthen and help. We have the Bible as our guide and the Author of the Bible indwelling us. We have Christian friends to help us. We have the church, etc. Then the telling of our testimony strengthens us for the troubled days. The more we say we are saved, the more courage we will have to say it again. Paul was always telling his testimony. Again and again and again he recounted his conversion. Several of these are given to us in the Book of Acts. He was never ashamed of what happened to him on the Damascus Road. He always knew that some would laugh and that some would say he was beside himself. This meant nothing to Paul. He had an experience! He was saved! He wanted folks to know about it! Testifying Christians build up character in reserve for the troubled days.

- III. PAUL'S HERITAGE. See Acts 22:25-28. Paul was a Roman citizen. According to verse 28, he was a Roman citizen because he was born a Roman citizen. He was not born in Rome, but he was born in Tarsus. His father being a Roman citizen therefore made Paul a Roman citizen. None of us can discount our heritage and the help of our parents in making us what we are. Let us as adults realize the importance of influencing our children for the right. The things we teach them now will be the reserves for the troubled days and resources for the hard times. Let us constantly be implanting in our children and young people truths that will help them in the dark hours. The dark hours will come. There are many things they can learn only from us. Let us teach them while they are young. Let us implant in them spiritual truths and facts of character, integrity, etc.
- IV. A CLEAN LIFE. Read Acts 23:1. Though Paul had been a hater of Christians and persecutor of Christians, he was nevertheless a man who was moral. He could say, "I have lived in all good conscience." There are few things that will help a person in the day of trouble like a clean life. We all know preachers who lived wicked lives before they were saved. Though their testimonies were thrilling and interesting, their past often caught up with them. The best testimony is one of God's keeping from deep sin rather than God's deliverance out of deep sin. Let us stress over and over again to our classes, and especially to our young people and children, the importance of a clean life. Few things will undergird us for the future as will a conscience that is clear and a life that is clean.
- V. RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY. Notice Acts 23:2-5. Here is a most interesting portion of Scripture. Paul has said some strong words to the high priest, not knowing who he was. After he found out, Paul did not change his convictions, but he did apologize. In Exodus 22:28, God had commanded that we not speak evil against rulers. Actually, what He said was that we are not to curse rulers. We can speak our convictions, but even then, these should be tempered with respect. We may not agree with our leaders, but we ought to teach our children to respect them. Teach the young people respect for authority. Teach them that the days will come when the right kind of respect will pay off. This is why we encourage our boys and girls to say, "Yes, sir," "No, sir" and "Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am." They ought to be taught to respect their parents, their Christian leaders, their religious leaders—in fact, all older people should be respected. When we get back to teaching this kind of respect, they will respect the law.
- VI. WISDOM. Read Acts 23:6-10. This is an interesting story. The Sadducees and the Pharisees had finally come together on something, and that was that they wanted to kill Paul. God gave Paul wisdom to know exactly what to say. He cried out that he believed in the resurrection from the dead. This divided them, for the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, but the Sadducees did not! What an act of wisdom this was! Where did Paul get this wisdom? He got it from walking with God. Wisdom comes from God. It is something so lacking in most of our lives today. When the dark days come, we will be glad if we have developed God-given wisdom. Somebody has said, "Wisdom is the sense to use knowledge aright."
- VII. GOD'S PRESENCE. In Acts 23:11a, notice the words, "the Lord stood by him." Ah, what an encouragement this was to Paul! In spite of his troubles, God was there. Now, there is a reason for this. Paul had been in God's presence on the mountain; now God would be with him in the valley. Paul had walked with God in good days; now God would walk with Paul in bad days. If we walk with God, live in His presence and realize and reckon His being with us, it is a reserve and a resource that will be treasured when the dark hours come.
- VIII. GOD'S WILL. In Acts 23:11b, we learn that God was not through with Paul. Paul was one who sought the will of God, even though some of us doubt that he was in the will of God being in Jerusalem. If he was not in the will of God in Jerusalem, nevertheless his motives were right. He was not there to make money or to become worldly. He was there because of a burdened heart. The safest place in the world is God's will. The happiest place in the world is God's will. The only place in the world where we can reach our highest usefulness is in God's will. If a person lives in the will of God, when the dark days come, he will find a strength and a resource about which the world knows nothing!
- IX. THE LOYALTY AND LOVE OF FAMILY. Read Acts 23:16. Paul's nephew was a tremendous help to him in this case. No doubt, his sister had a part also. We should develop the kind of family ties in the bright days that will keep us together and bind us during the dark days. There should be a family closeness and a love when things are going well that will undergird us when things are not going well. Here is another resource. Let us develop that kind of loyalty, love and family ties.

MEMORY VERSE: "...the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer...." (Acts 23:11)