Acts Chapter 23 Verse 1

* Now that’s an ***interesting*** statement. This is the same Paul that consented to the stoning of Stephen. The same Paul that persecuted the church. The same Paul that *barked at Barnabas* causing them to part ways. Surely, he doesn’t mean that he has lived a perfect life. ***Definitely not.*** But yet he makes this statement that his conscience is all clear, how? First and primarily, he understands what Jesus has accomplished…the ***ultra-ultimate final defeat of sin!*** (Jesus, the Ultimate Warrior!! Yes!!) Second, having a clear conscience with the Lord is not about being perfect or that your conscience has never told you you’re in the wrong…***it’s not about perfection, it’s about responding to perfection with awareness, acknowledgement, repentance and replacement.***
* Are you even aware of the things you *feel, think, do, say*…the issues of your heart that are not of the light but rooted in the flesh? There’s a real danger here because if you **don’t respond** to the heart of God…over time…**you’ll stop hearing.** Jeremiah 6:10 says (NIV), *“To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to Me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear.”*
* Awareness is big, man! A HUGE problem and one that **we** can shut down with our fleshly free will. Careful!! If you’re aware…***acknowledge!*** Don’t suppress…deal with it and you deal with it rightly by ***agreeing with God!*** That’s repentance…and then, **your** part of repentance…because God does the heart work…actively replace whatever it is that is not of God with effort towards God! Then, just as Paul says today, you will be able to say the same…

Acts Chapter 23 Verse 2

* It could be that the high priest was reacting to a condemned criminal making this statement causing him to give this command…or…it could be that his heart is ***enviously and ridiculously convicted!*** Perhaps the high priest himself was burdened by his own conscience and couldn’t bear to ***believe*** and ***see*** a man with a clear one. Josephus writes about this high priest and details how he was greedy and stole from the tithes of the temple…even being later assassinated by his own people…
* Something to think on and remember when folks are *weights on your soul*, man. It could be that they are simply hurting within themselves and can’t *believe, understand or bear* to see you free from the bondage of sin. Cut through that junk with grace, endurance and love…and by all means, do not sink with the weight…**life/lift theirs…**

Acts Chapter 23 Verses 3 – 5

* This interaction perhaps hints at the thorn in the flesh that Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 12:7-9. We can couple this with what he wrote to the churches in Galatia in Galatians 6:11 and how he commended the church in Galatians 4:15 saying, *“I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me!”* Here, it appears that even though these men are **right in front of him**, not far from him at all, he is not able to see clearly that one of them is the high priest.

Acts Chapter 23 Verse 6

* There exists all kinds of swirl from great Bible expositors about what Paul is doing here…why he took this route… Some believe he is making a play for freedom. The entire council being against him he knows that this would be a way to gain advocacy, *split the group* perhaps (which is what is about to happen) and be set free. Others believe he perceived that the Gospel message was not going to be received so he dropped back to the message of the resurrection.
* In the midst of many great teachers and thoughts and angles, I tend to agree completely with only one…**ME**….HA!! (You know, if someone doesn’t appreciate your humor, invite them to the gym and then don’t show up…***they’ll hopefully understand that together, you’re not working out!*** HA!!) Paul was **trying a door**, man! He had given the gospel on the stairs of the Antonia Fortress, plain and clear…the seeds were already sewn…and now, the very ***pivotal, essential, critical, the very center of the Gospel message***…**that** was his play. And what is that? The Resurrection!
* Man, without the resurrection, what do we have? **No HOPE!** Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:14-17, *“If Christ is not risen, then faith is empty! If Christ is not risen, faith is futile, and we are all still* ***stuck*** *in our sins!”* But Jesus said to these same men who were asking for proof that Jesus was the Son of God…there in the temple on the Passover, some 20 years before in John 2:19, He said, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days, I WILL RAISE IT UP!”* Jesus alone ever said words like John 10:18, *“I lay my own life down for the people. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again.”*
* The resurrection **proves** these and so many more promises made by the Lord and was the ***indicator***, ***the signal***…that this Man, Jesus…unlike any other Man *ever anywhere at anytime* ***has the power to command life to appear and death to set a soul free.*** So…I believe Paul was pushing on a door and trying a different avenue…knowing the Pharisees would receive the teaching of the resurrection…hoping to get a second shot at the full gospel message…but he doesn’t…the Sanhedrin begin arguing now amongst themselves…

Acts Chapter 23 Verses 7 – 11

* That’s awesome! Just when Paul is no doubt **entirely discouraged!!!** I mean, twice he has *airballed* in his **big shot opportunity!!** He must have been crushed…and Jesus comes to him straight up physically! Now, this has never happened to me, but I know it has happened to some…and the Lord says to him, Paul…***it’s alright.*** Isn’t that great?! I mean, ***God has jurisdiction over my heart, over my thoughts, over my emotions***…no one else has that kind of power because no one else is God. Perfect, Holy and eternally good…and so when Jesus says this…***every bit of pain takes a hike!***
* He says, *“Be of good cheer”* which can also be translated, *“Be of good courage!”* He finds Paul right where he is at and He strengthens him…**Anyone** can be of *good cheer and courage* when things are great…but ***only the Christian, only the one stayed and focused and filled with Holy Spirit can be of good cheer and good courage when things are terrible!***

Acts Chapter 23 Verses 12 – 14

* This is crazy! I have had rough emails, ***evil-filled harsh critical reviews online***, HA!...but I’ve never had 40 men form gang because they hate me that much! Thank the Lord that He had appeared to Paul because I’m not sure how much more a man can take!?
* We don’t read of forty men dying of hunger! ***Starving to death.*** They weren’t successful! ***But they bury their disappointment in the breaking of their own vow.*** The *vows and the oaths and promises* of men are weak…and it shouldn’t be this way. ***Are there at all anymore men and women of their word?*** Drives me crazy. All forty of these men should be dead of their own evil. (Wow that sounds harsh…they should actually be saved!) But the point is that the oath of a carnal man is worth *bubkiss*…whatever that means.
* But, the oath of the Lord, the promise of God…***never once has He shown Himself unfaithful***…isn’t that amazing!! You know He has made a great promise to you…that He loves you. That’s a great promise because He is a great God. And the only love that He is capable of is entirely ***holy, perfect, eternal and faithful…***