



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

02-23-2015 @ 0900

**“What Are You Ready to Face?”**

Acts 2:10-13

### GREAT IS THE LORD

Great is the Lord! He is holy and just; by His Power we trust in His Love!  
Great is the Lord! He is faithful and true; by His Mercy He proves He is Love!  
Great is the Lord, and worthy of Glory! Great is the Lord, and worthy of Praise!  
Great is the Lord! Now lift up Your voice! Now lift up your voice!  
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

### Acts 22:10-13

“We had been there for several days, when a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. He came to us, took Paul’s belt, tied up his own feet and hands with it, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: “The owner of this belt will be tied up in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles.”’ When we heard this, we and the others there begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But he answered, ‘What are you doing, crying like this and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be tied up in Jerusalem, but even to die there for the sake of the Lord Jesus!’”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Were you ever “sure you were ready” for some test, project, or mission until you faced the “cold reality” of it? What did you do to “push through” the fear/anxiety/hesitation?
- Did you ever “talk some sense” to a person committed to a “dangerous” or “controversial” course of action? Did they “see the light”, or “stay the course”?
- When faced with the challenge of “testifying for Christ”, how did you do? How many times did you “stand and deliver the Word”? How often did “fear hold you back”?

Life is challenge; the rest is details! Any of us can remember things like looking down off the edge of the high diving board, facing the local bully, telling the boss the truth about why that report wasn’t ready yet, etc... Isn’t it amazing how different the high diving board looks from the relative safety of the ground, compared to how it appears when you’ve climbed the ladder and walked out to the end and looked down? Doesn’t the bully “look smaller” from a distance? Isn’t that report “less urgent” when the boss is away? Suddenly your perspective changes when you’re at the edge of the board, face-to-face with the bully, or standing in front of the boss’s desk. Now let’s “up the ante”...are we really ready to “bring God to a wider world”? It’s easy to “make promises to God” in the relative safety of the church pew, but what happens when we must face a hard world, obsessed with “power-grabbing”, “prestige-building”, and “pleasure-seeking”? It all looked so “easy” and “do-able” when the “holy music” was playing, and people were praying...your emotions were running high, and you just knew you were ready to “take Christ by the hand” and “win the world with your testimony”. This is “poolside, looking up at the diving board”. Then the service ends, and it’s time to go outside, into the world, to face our friends, as well as the sneering, mocking, cynical culture in which we must find our place, new friends, new career, and new way of life. This is looking off the end of the “spiritual high dive board” to the “water of witness” way, way, way down there! Notice how Paul faces this choice; he continues to follow God, and go to Jerusalem. He will not quit, even though he knows what is going to happen. God, grant us the Grace of Steadfast Commitment. As high as the “board” may look, keep our eyes fixed on You. As ominous as it must appear, empower us to “jump”! You who have called us to this Work will see us through! You justified Your Son. You justified Your servant, Paul. We are not likely to have to bear the witness they did. But Your Word is true, and Your Grace is enough! You will justify us according to our faithfulness to the Word we have received!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

02-24-2015 @ 0900

“Will You Testify in the ‘Teeth of Tyranny’?”

Acts 23:1-11

### GREAT IS THE LORD

Great is the Lord! He is holy and just; by His Power we trust in His Love!  
Great is the Lord! He is faithful and true; by His Mercy He proves He is Love!  
Great is the Lord, and worthy of Glory! Great is the Lord, and worthy of Praise!  
Great is the Lord! Now lift up Your voice! Now lift up your voice!  
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

### Acts 23:1-11

“Paul looked straight at the Council, and said, ‘My fellow Israelites! My conscience is perfectly clear about the way in which I have lived before God to this very day.’ The High Priest Ananias ordered those who were standing close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul said to him, ‘God will certainly strike you – you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the Law, yet you break the Law by ordering them to strike me!’”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself forced to choose between “speaking the truth, knowing you’d be harassed” and “staying silent and safe”? Do you remember what you chose?
- If you “spoke the truth”, what did it cost you? If you “stayed silent”, did you find that choice imposed a cost as well? What would you do differently now?
- When your faith in God was challenged, did you find it easier to “back off” and “half-step”, or did you decide to “step up” and “speak out” for the Lord, regardless of the cost?

Testimony’s tough on the testifier! People with an “opposing agenda” will do anything to confuse the issue and discredit the speaker. It’s worse in matters of faith. The individual who truly desires to “know Christ” and “turn a sinful life around” must face mockery and misunderstanding. It seems that the more severe the challenge, the more “watching eyes” and “listening ears” will “tune in” to find if we really “buy into” all that “spiritual stuff”. The answer to that lies in how “real” God is...how personal and present the Lord has become to us. When our prayer is actual conversation with the Savior, and when we sacrifice time and effort to ponder His Word, and serve others in His Name, He is a loving Presence in our lives, and the Power in our witness! That’s when we finally take up our crosses the way Jesus took up His for us! That’s when we really take our faith out of the closet, hoist our hope out of the darkness, and lift our love out of the silence; Jesus empowers us to bring witness into the light with boldness, and testify to His Truth with a voice the world can hear! Though Paul is fully aware that his heartfelt witness to Jesus Christ will land him in serious trouble, he knows the Love of his Lord too well to back down. Even in the midst of the mob screaming for his death, Paul chooses to stand for Christ. When slaps attempt to silence him, Paul redoubles his testimony. That’s how a “real apostle” handles opposition. It’s all in Acts, the “Apostles’ play book”. (Maybe Luke would put it out today as “Discipleship for Dummies”?) God, grant us the Grace of Conscientious Courage! When the world would silence us, help us lift a page from Acts, the “How-To” Book for Believers, and speak boldly for Christ. Best of all, teach us to *live for Christ* in such integrity that even those who will oppose us are forced to admit *we believe* what we proclaim! Though these worldly go “all out” to silence Your Word, strengthen us to go “all-in” for our Savior, in the Power of Your amazing Grace!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

02-25-2015 @ 0900

**"Know Those You Oppose!"**

Acts 23:6-9

### GREAT IS THE LORD!

Great is the Lord! He is holy and just; by His Power we trust in His Love!  
Great is the Lord! He is faithful and true; by His Mercy He proves He is Love!  
Great is the Lord, and worthy of Glory! Great is the Lord, and worthy of Praise!  
Great is the Lord! Now lift up Your voice! Now lift up your voice!  
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

### Acts 23:6-9

"When Paul saw that some of the group were Sadducees, and the others were Pharisees, he called out in the Council, 'Fellow Israelites! I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial here because of the hope I have that the dead will rise to life!' As soon as he said this, the Pharisees and Sadducees started to quarrel, and the group was divided. (For the Sadducees say that people will not rise from death and that there are no angels or spirits; but the Pharisees believe in all three.) The shouting became louder, and some of the teachers of the Law who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and protested strongly: 'We cannot find a thing wrong with this man! Perhaps a spirit or an angel really did speak to him!'"

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a time you were "under attack", when you figured a way to "drive a wedge" between those who opposed you, turning them against each other, giving you a breather?
- What did that "dissension in the ranks" indicate to you about the real natures, philosophies, and goals of your opposition? Did you continue to play these elements to your advantage?
- Have you ever felt everything and everybody was against you, then watched in amazement as God's Providence used human hardheadedness and folly to arrange deliverance?

Witnessing to Jesus Christ can put us in "a lonely corner", especially when "powers-that-be" stand against us in what appears to be a "united front". It's easy to feel like "Public Enemy #1", and wonder where in the world God is in the middle of "mob madness" that threatens to "do you in"! It may be time to consider the real state of your opponents, and use their own conflicting mindsets against them. Notice how cleverly Paul finds "common ground" with one of the groups in the assembly arrayed against him; he recognizes the Pharisees as potential advocates, (since he was a sterling member of their party for years)! He even knows how to "play the family card"... "Fellow Israelites! I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees! I am on trial here because of the hope I have that the dead will rise to life!" He knows that Pharisees hold a much more "open-minded" view of the spiritual realms, so Paul appeals to their convictions concerning "angels", "spirits", and "resurrection of the just". Then it's just a matter of letting their specific differences "boil over" in his favor. This "divide-and-conquer" approach is a most effective strategy, and Paul lives to witness another day. We will face many forms of opposition ourselves in any real "evangelical effort", so it's crucial to consider Paul's clever example. God, grant us the Grace of Prudent Approach. When we face challenge to our witness, help us consider options carefully, find "common ground" where we are able, and use every true opportunity advantageously to share Your Gospel, even in the face of turmoil and danger. As Your Son went "all-out" for us at Your Command, so enable us to go "all-in" for Him...wisely and well!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

02-26-2015 @ 0900

**"Fear Not! God's Plan for You Still Stands!"**

Acts 23:10-11

### GREAT IS THE LORD!

Great is the Lord! He is holy and just; by His Power we trust in His Love!  
Great is the Lord! He is faithful and true; by His Mercy He proves He is Love!  
Great is the Lord, and worthy of Glory! Great is the Lord, and worthy of Praise!  
Great is the Lord! Now lift up Your voice! Now lift up your voice!  
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

### Acts 23:10-11

"The argument became so violent that the commander was afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces. So he ordered his soldiers to go down into the group, get Paul away from them, and take him into the fort. That night, the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Don't be afraid! You have given your witness for Me here in Jerusalem, and you must also do the same in Rome!"

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you recall "deliverance moments" in your life, in which "skin-of-your-teeth" rescue saw you through...with no other explanation than "divine intervention"? Have you ever wondered why?
- Thinking back, did your "deliverance" come from a totally unexpected direction, an "ally" you would never have thought to ask for aid, or resources you "forgot" you had?
- Have you ever known individuals who "weathered the storms of life fearlessly", trusting God to "see to it", no matter the challenge? Did you ever wonder how they achieved that "state"?

God's Plans can pack a punch! Paul has been through all sorts of trials...and the Lord has delivered him from each of them. But this trial looks like "curtains" for sure...until the Lord employs a most unlikely "deliverer"—the Roman Commander! Roman authorities have refused to "wade in" before on these baffling Jewish disputes about "Law", "Messiah-ship", and "Resurrection". Paul had little reason to suppose this would be different, but he knew the Master he followed, and he may well have heard the story: "The Storm was fierce, and the waves were coming over the sides of the boat as it was tossed all about. All through the night, these 'professional' fishermen used all their skill to fight the storm and save the boat, though frightened for their lives. However, in the back of the boat, one individual slept rather peacefully, seemingly oblivious to the danger. The wind was howling; the foaming waves tossed the boat relentlessly...yet still He *slept*. How? How could anybody *sleep* in such a terrible time? Simple...Jesus Christ knew 'His Father had Him', and allowed nothing to deter Him from His true Mission, not even a storm at sea." Note the words of the Lord to Paul: "Don't be afraid! You have given your witness for Me here in Jerusalem, and you must also do the same in Rome." Essentially, He's assuring Paul, "I've got your back. You still have work to do, and I will make sure you get to accomplish it in Rome, just as you've done here in Jerusalem." The same Lord is working with us today. He will "back" us, just as He backed Paul...as long as we engage enough faith to face our fears. God, grant us the Grace of Steadfast Witness! Your Divine Design transcends the treacheries and tragedies Your opponents raise against Your servants. Earth holds no obstacles Heaven can't handle! So no situations are "un-save-able"; no events are beyond Your Power to redeem, or to "work to the good" of those You love. Teach us to believe that so totally we will eagerly go "all-in" to witness to the "Good News"—the Plan of Salvation You entrust to us!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

02-27-2015 @ 0900

“God’s Mysterious Ways Amaze!”

Acts 23:12-22

### GREAT IS THE LORD!

Great is the Lord! He is holy and just; by His Power we trust in His Love!  
Great is the Lord! He is faithful and true; by His Mercy He proves He is Love!  
Great is the Lord, and worthy of Glory! Great is the Lord, and worthy of Praise!  
Great is the Lord! Now lift up Your voice! Now lift up your voice!  
Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord!

### Acts 23:12-22

“The next morning, some Jews met together and made a plan. They took a vow that they would not eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who planned this together. ...but the son of Paul’s sister heard about the plot; so he went to the fort and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the officers, & said to him, ‘Take this young man to the commander’ ...The commander led him off by himself and asked him, ‘What do you have to tell me?’ (The boy relayed the story) ...The commander said, ‘Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.’ And he sent the young man away.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember “moments of terror” when you wondered if God was unaware of your dire circumstances, or indifferent to your problems? What sort of “rescue” showed you otherwise?
- Did your “deliverance” amaze you? How did it change the way you viewed “God” and “Divine Providence”? Would you say your Faith is stronger or weaker as a result?
- Were you ever stunned as you noticed the composure of a disciple who faced grave crisis or horrific threat with a placid faith that “God had everything under control” & would make a way?

Life can “change direction in a heartbeat”; sometimes it appears to shift even more swiftly than *that!* Especially during the times life seems to “go from bad to worse”, and do so quick, fast, and in a hurry, we can feel “God has been caught off guard”. Take Paul’s situation in today’s Passage, for example. He has awakened deadly rage in some fanatical foes. They’ve concocted a plot and sealed the deal with a vow in nearly total secrecy. Paul knows nothing about it, and neither do his Roman guards. Had it gone undetected, the “spread of the Gospel” would have taken a devastating setback. Was God “asleep at the switch” here, or “caught off-guard”? Nope! By a “supernatural synchronicity”, Paul’s nephew “just happens” to overhear the murderous plot... “coinci-God” is on the job! (There’s no such thing as “coincidence” in God’s Plan; the Lord just decides to remain anonymous...) When things look the most “hopeless and desperate”, God can always find a way, or make one! The “Gold Standard of Deliverance” manifested at the empty tomb of His beloved Son on Easter morning—who would ever have imagined *that* scenario? With that example in mind, we need never fear tomorrow; God is already there. That’s why we need to learn to “walk by faith and not by sight”. The truth of the matter is we still have a long way to go in that regard. God, grant us the Grace of Childlike Trust! In the moments we can see no way, help us to trust You to BE our Way! When the truth of the situation is unclear or hidden from our earthly sight, BE our Truth! As “life-or-death” circumstances unfold about us, remind us that You alone can BE our Life! Teach us anew to submit every aspect of our existence to Your Care, so that Your glory is revealed in the witness You empower us to share. Keep us strong in an “all-in” commitment to You, knowing You are going “all-out” to sustain us!