

# 'TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION...'

SERIES: PAUL, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

By Ron Ritchie

---

As I speak, the hijacked Kuwaiti airliner remains on the ground in Algeria. There are 32 innocent passengers still being held hostage by pro-Iranian terrorists, men who say that they are involved in a holy war and that even if they are killed they will die as martyrs. This sobering news once again makes us aware of what the apostle Paul calls in his New Testament letters "the mystery of lawlessness" at work in the world. Behind our world, national, state and local events and activities a spiritual battle is being fought for the souls of men and women, boys and girls. In this struggle the arch enemy, Satan himself, is trying to destroy humanity by lies, deceit and murder. Here is what Jesus said of the devil, in John 8:44: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies." Two murders have already been committed on this airliner and more are threatened by these gunmen. They believe that by continuing to hold the hostages they will yet achieve their goals, but they are blind to the fact that it is they themselves who are being held captive by the evil one to do his bidding--and his goal is not only to destroy them in the here and now, but for all eternity.

In our current series of studies we are tracing the life and ministry of the apostle Paul from the book of Acts. Today, we find the apostle once more held hostage for his proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This time the Jews in Jerusalem are being used by Satan in an attempt to murder the apostle. The mob in the temple are so blinded and deceived by the arch enemy that the words of Jesus to his disciples in the Upper Room are particularly apt here, "...an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (John 16:2).

In Acts 21, we saw that Paul was verbally attacked by a group of Asian Jews who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Upon seeing the apostle in the temple, they cried out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place" (28). Their four-fold charge was entirely false, but it had the desired effect; the mob dragged Paul out of the temple and began beating him. Four years later from his prison cell in Rome, the apostle wrote in his letter to the Ephesians that the Christian's struggle "is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph.6:12).

The real battles of life are fought not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces controlled by Satan, who is continually trying to destroy God's people by means of lies, deceit and murder. While this warfare is seldom visible to the naked eye, it is still very real and deadly. The Christian's only hope for survival in this struggle is to wrap himself in the resurrected Christ Jesus.

As Paul was writing the Ephesian letter from his prison cell, where he was guarded night and day by Roman soldiers, he used the armor and battle dress of his captors to illustrate his counsel to Christians in Ephesus on how to stand in the face of spiritual warfare. Thus he speaks of "girding your loins with truth," "putting on the breastplate of righteousness," "having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace," taking the "shield of faith," and, as we will see today, putting on the "helmet of salvation." The Roman helmet was made of leather and metal so that the soldier's head was protected from stones, clubs and arrows, whatever the enemy could throw at him in battle. The head controls the actions of the body. Keeping one's head clear in the midst of battle therefore is essential to survival.

In this context, the Christian is instructed to put on the helmet of salvation in order to maintain a clear head in the midst of the spiritual battle. The helmet of salvation enables him to think straight and not be confused. The word for "salvation" here encompasses not only the notion of the Christian's being saved from sin

(justification), but also that his life in Jesus is being saved. As Peter wrote to the Christians in Turkey, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

The Christian's inheritance is the presence and power of the risen Lord who lives in our hearts. He will provide strength, courage and wisdom so that we may stand in times of trial and temptation. As we draw on Christ, he will reveal himself through us. Christians have been saved from the penalty due to sin. We are now being saved from the power of sin; and one day we will be saved from the presence of sin. To wear the "helmet of salvation" is to have the mind of Christ, to see and interpret all the circumstances of life as Christ, not as the world, the flesh and the devil defines and uses them. The "helmet of salvation" enables us to look beyond the physical and discern what is going on in the spiritual world. While Satan seeks to tear down and destroy all that God has created, our Lord is working out his plan of redemption in spite of the devil's schemes.

On the surface therefore it appears to be a dark hour for Paul, "the chosen instrument of the Risen Lord." He is standing alone, in chains, before a murderous Jewish mob; on trumped-up charges; and bereft of the physical support and encouragement of James, the elders and fellow-believers of the church in Jerusalem. But although he is standing alone, the apostle has chosen to put on the "helmet of salvation" so that his thinking will be clear. He will be able to speak the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the hope of salvation in the midst of darkness and confusion, as the opportunity arises.

### **I. A spiritual defense before the Jews, 21:37-22:23**

And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying, "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you." And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you all are today. And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify, From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

'And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are Thou, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go on to Damascus; and there you will be told all that has been appointed for you to do.' But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight!" And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness to Him for all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

And it came about that when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.' And He said to Me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" And they listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!" And they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust in the air.

The Roman cohort, Claudius Lysias, was about to remove Paul from the steps leading up to barracks when the apostle asked the commander in the Greek language if he could address the Jewish crowd. When Claudius heard his Greek, he was relieved to know that Paul was not on Rome's "ten most wanted criminals" list! The man the Romans were looking for was "the Egyptian," who three years earlier had appeared in Jerusalem claiming to be a prophet. He had led a band of followers to the Mount of Olives, and there told them to wait until, at his word of command, the walls of the Holy City would fall down. Then they would march in, overthrow the Roman garrison and take possession of the city. The procurator Felix sent a body of troops against the rebels, killing some and imprisoning others. "The Egyptian" discreetly vanished. Claudius thought he had returned and that his old followers were trying to kill him because he had forsaken them. Relieved to find out Paul was not the much-wanted criminal, Claudius then gave the apostle permission to speak in the Hebrew dialect.

At last, Paul had achieved his desire to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews whom he loved dearly. Placing the spiritual "helmet of salvation" on this head (drawing on the life of Christ in calmness and confidence), the arrested apostle arrested the attention of the Jews by sharing six steps in his spiritual pilgrimage.

First, his roots. He was born a Jew, raised in Tarsus, and educated at the feet of the great teacher Gamaliel, "strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as you are today." Then Paul spoke of his credentials as a persecutor of Christians, followers of "the Way." He had killed, bound, and put both men and women into prison, working under orders from the Supreme Court. He had even been given letters of authority to pursue believers all the way to Damascus.

But then came his conversion in that famous incident on the Damascus Road when he met Jesus Christ, from whom he received orders to proceed to Damascus. There, Paul received his spiritual commission from Ananias, who was told by the Lord in a vision that the apostle was "a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15,16). Here in 22:14,15 we have added insight into Paul's commission in the words, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from his mouth, for you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard."

Then, fifth, Paul shared with the Jews that he had been baptized at the direction of Ananias, who said to him, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." At this point the Jews realized that Paul had bypassed the temple rites. Ananias was instructing Paul to participate in a outward symbol of an inward reality (Rom.6; 1 Cor,12:13). When one accepts Jesus as Lord he is saved, then the Holy Spirit baptizes, places him into, the spiritual Body of Christ. The new believer is thus encouraged to illustrate this spiritual reality with a physical reality, water baptism, demonstrating the death of the old nature, the washing away of sins, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to the new life in Christ (Acts 2:38).

Finally, Paul spoke of his return to Jerusalem and a visit which he made to the temple. There, he fell into a trance and the Lord Jesus again appeared to him, instructing him to leave the city because the Jews would not hear his testimony. Paul resisted that word, and referred to his background as a persecutor of Christians. But

the Lord ordered him out of the city, saying to him, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

This was as far as Paul got in his testimony. Here before this Jewish audience stood a Jew just like themselves, saying that the the Messiah whom they had been waiting for for two thousand years had arrived on earth, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and that his name was Jesus the Nazarene. But once the crowd heard the statement which Paul attributed to the Lord about him, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles," they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

The battle lines had been drawn. On one side stood the physical and spiritual enemies of Jesus the Christ: the Jews, and the evil one and all his demonic forces; on the other side stood a lone Jew named Paul, wrapped in the full armor of God, reaching out in compassion and love towards his beloved Jewish nation. "Away with him," was the response of the Jews who earlier had fallen silent when the apostle first began to speak to them.

Why did they respond in this extremely negative way? If Paul was right, that Messiah had come in Jesus, then the Jews would be faced with the following radical changes: the Temple and all its sacrificial services would be completed in Christ; the money-changers, shepherds, and innkeepers would be out of business; the political influence and power of the High Priest and the Supreme Court would be over; the dreams of the zealots for a political Messiah would be shattered; the traditions of Judaism would come to an end; the Law of Moses would have been fulfilled; and the position of the rabbis, priests, Pharisees and Sadducees would be at risk. The mob was more interested in keeping the Law and putting Paul to death for supposedly bringing a Greek in to the Temple area. That is why they cried, "Away with him!"

In the year 1521, a humble Catholic monk named Martin Luther was summoned to appear at Worms, in Germany, to stand before Charles V, the Emperor of Germany and the Catholic church authorities, because of what Luther had written against the practices of the Catholic church. Luther challenged the church's definition of justification and sought to demonstrate from the Scriptures that men are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works. Asked to repudiate his writings, Luther replied that his "conscience was captive to the word of God and that unless he was convicted by Scripture and plain reason, he would not recant anything. To do so would not be right or safe," he said. Then he added the now famous words, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

It was a dramatic hour. A humble monk and university professor of peasant stock dared to set himself against the constituted authority of both church and State. The Emperor said that this monk who dared to set himself against the Christianity of a thousand years must be wrong, and adjudged Luther to be "a limb cut off from the Church of God, an obstinate schismatic and manifest heretic..."

Blinded by their traditions to the reality that Jesus was their risen Messiah and Savior, the Jews chose to remain in spiritual darkness and confusion and refused to hear anything more from Paul. The apostle was wearing his "helmet of salvation," standing firmly with a rational, spiritual defense of the gospel. He was quiet, calm and assured in spite of the spiritual battle going on around him, delivering a message of deliverance, salvation, forgiveness and hope. Having been arrested himself by the risen Messiah on the Damascus Road, his desire was that his kinsmen also be arrested by their Messiah. But they refused his offer. Paul was then bound and chained and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. Soon he would give a rational political defense before the Romans.

## **II. Paul's political defense before the Romans, 22:23-29**

And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman." And the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." And the commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen."

Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

Claudius, the commander of one thousand Roman troops stationed in Jerusalem, was on the spot. There was a riot going on in the temple area, apparently caused by this Jew named Paul. He and his men rescued Paul from the crowd who were beating him to death because the apostle had allegedly brought a Greek beyond the Wall of Partition of the temple. Then, once order had been restored, he had allowed Paul to speak, only to have the Jews interrupt him and demand his death with cries, throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust in the air.

Claudius had had enough! Paul was taken to the Roman barracks to be examined by scourging. The commander wanted to find out the exact cause of the riot in the temple area. As one of the centurions was preparing Paul to be beaten within an inch of his life, however, the apostle, who was wearing his "helmet of salvation" in the midst of this new spiritual battle, spoke up and asked, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" Paul knew his civil rights, and he knew the answer was no, for the following reasons: It was a misdeed to bind a Roman citizen; and it was a crime to beat a Roman citizen if the crime with which he was charged was not established by the state.

Paul wondered if the centurion knew the law. At that moment the apostle was able to establish his Roman citizenship and the centurion went to the commander with the news that they were both in trouble. The commander asked Paul if he were in fact a Roman citizen. Paul replied, "Yes." "I acquired my citizenship with a large sum of money," said the commander." Paul replied, "But I was actually born a citizen." Citizenship was a high privilege in the Roman Empire. It encompassed all kinds of civil rights, including the right to trial, up to the Emperor Nero himself if necessary.

The commander became fearful when he heard that Paul was a Roman. He knew the Jews and their customs, and thus was aware that this was really a Jewish not a Roman affair, so he went about setting up a meeting with the Supreme Court of Israel to see if he could discover the cause of the temple riot. Paul's clear thinking served him well in the midst of pressure.

In his new book, *Life Sentence*, Chuck Colson, the former "hatchetman" of the Nixon administration and now a spiritual leader in the Christian community, tells of a time when someone tried to set him up in a hotel with two prostitutes while he was in a certain city on a ministry assignment with his Prison Fellowship ministry. A few moments before these people showed up he moved out of his room to a different one because the window of his room would not open. The women forced their way into his former room to no avail. As he was flying out of town next day, he pondered the question,

How many enemies do I have? Would the hatred and suspicion ever end? "You deserve the worst that can happen to you," one critic had once written. I fretted about that for days. Ugly mail came to me at times and on a few occasions people angrily confronted me in public. I knew many still hated me as the symbol of Nixon ruthlessness, and I understood the depth of feelings prevailing in the country....I don't want to be hated, I mused, I yearn for affection, love and support like anyone else, ....If one is to accomplish anything at all, he will meet opposition. So be it. I could only trust the Lord for protection.

We are living in the Age of the Spirit, a time in which the risen Christ has called you and me to participate in a spiritual battle which involves the eternal destinations of men and women in every age until the Lord returns to earth in power and glory. At times the battle will be very rough, as was the case with the apostle Paul. But we have been supplied with the full armor of God, Christ himself, so that we might survive in the battle. One piece of armor that is of vital importance to the Christian in this struggle is the "helmet of salvation." We must wear this helmet if we are to keep a clear and calm head in the midst of the battle, whether the struggle is spiritual, emotional, physical, or political. In order to be victorious, we need to understand who we are and what are our resources. In Paul's case, he was able with a clear head, in spite of stressful conditions, to give a spiritual defense before the Jews, and then a political defense before the Romans because he was wearing his

spiritual "helmet of salvation."

The circumstances which we will be called upon to face in the coming week may not be as dramatic as Paul's was long ago. We will not be called to stand before an emperor and give a defense for what we believe. We will probably not be taken hostage and flown to Algeria. But the battle we may be called to partake in could be just as serious. For instance, I know several couples whose children are facing major physical battles. I have a Christian friend whose life hangs in the balance. I know of a Christian brother whose marriage is being seriously attacked. I know of a Christian brother who is about to lose an important job. I know some Christians who think their civil rights are being violated.

As Christians, we must understand that we are involved in a spiritual battle. But if we will put on the "helmet of salvation," as Paul did, if we by faith put on Christ, and depend on him for clarity, soberness, strength, wisdom and courage, then we will be able to stand in the evil day.

---

Catalog No. 4106  
Ats 21:37-22:29  
Twenty-first Message  
Ron R. Ritchie  
April 17, 1988

Copyright (C) 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.