

Katamares: Acts: 23:1-11.

## **23:2 *The High Priest Ordered Them to Strike Paul***

### **The Nature of Christian Suffering.**

Origen: We read in the Acts of the Apostles that someone, ordered by Ananias the high priest, struck Paul because he said, "God will strike you, oh whitewashed wall." And even to this day, the Ebionites, under orders from their illegitimate high priest, strike the apostle of Jesus Christ with their calumnies, <sup>2</sup> and Paul says to such a high priest of the Word, "God will strike you," and such a high priest is beautiful from without and a whitewashed wall but "within full of dead bones and every filth." <sup>3</sup> But why do I speak about Paul ...? It is my Lord, Jesus Christ, himself who speaks: "I have given my back to scourgings, and my cheeks to slaps, and my face I did not turn from the shame of being spit upon." <sup>4</sup> The simple know of these things as happening at one particular time, when Pilate scourged him, when the Jews plotted against him. I, however, see Jesus daily giving his back to scourgings: go into synagogues of the Jews, and see Jesus scourged by their blasphemous speech. See those gathered from among the nations <sup>5</sup> plotting against the Christians, how they seize Christ, and he gives his back to scourgings. Consider the Word of God insulted, reviled, hated by unbelievers. See that he gave his cheeks to be slapped, and after he taught "Should someone slap you on one cheek, offer him the other," <sup>6</sup> that he himself did the same. Homilies on Jeremiah 19.12.7

## **23:3 *You Whitewashed Wall***

### **Words of Boldness, Not Anger.**

Chrysostom: Some say that he [Paul] did not know that he was the high priest. Then why does he defend himself as if there was an accusation and adds, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." For if he was not the ruler, was he then to be abused? Paul himself says, "When we are cursed we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it." <sup>8</sup> But here he does the opposite. He not only reviles but also curses him. These are words of boldness rather than anger. He did not wish to appear contemptible to the tribune. For the tribune himself had refrained from scourging him, since he was about to be handed over to the Jews. Had he been struck by the servants, it would have rather emboldened the tribune. For this reason he directs his attack not at the servant but at the one who gave the order. The words "you whitewashed wall" and "you are sitting to judge me according to the law" stand for "you are responsible,"

as if he had said, “you deserve ten thousand lashes.” See how they were thunderstruck by his boldness. The point was to undermine him completely, but they commended him instead. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 48.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Prophecy of Ananias’s Doom.**

Augustine: Of course, those who do not understand him think that [Paul] uttered a reproach when he had been slapped by order of the high priest, for, with seeming insolence, he then said, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall.” But those who understand him take this as a prophecy. The “whitewashed wall” stands for hypocrisy; it is pretense, veiled beneath the priestly dignity, and under this title—as though beneath a white covering—it conceals, as it were, an inner slimy filthiness. Sermon on the Mount 1.19.58.

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### **Christ Spoke Similarly and Was Not Abusive.**

Chrysostom: This is well said. For to kill one who had done no wrong and moreover does not deserve punishment is a violation of the law. For his words could not be called abusive unless one also called Christ’s words abusive, when he said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You are like whitewashed walls.”<sup>12</sup> True, you will say. But since [Paul] spoke before he was struck, it was not out of anger but out of boldness. But I have mentioned the reason for this. Indeed, Christ often insulted the Jews, when he himself had been abused by them, as when he said, “Do not think I will accuse you before the Father.”<sup>13</sup> But [Paul’s words] are not abuse; God forbid. See with what gentleness he addresses these men: “I did not know that he was the high priest of God.” And to show that he was not being ironic, he adds, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.” [Paul] even acknowledges that he is still a ruler. Let us learn the gentleness as well as the boldness, so that we may be complete in both. For much exactness is needed to learn what each of them is. Exactness, because these virtues have their attendant vices: near boldness stands audacity, near gentleness, cowardice. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 48.<sup>14</sup>

## ***23:4 Reviling God’s High Priest?***

### **A Reversal and Transference.**

Augustine: But when [Paul] was asked, “Do you revile the high priest?” then he marvelously complied with the requirements of humility, for he replied, “Brothers, I did not know that he was the high priest; for it is

written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’ ”<sup>15</sup> The mildness of this prompt reply shows how calmly he had spoken what he seemed to have uttered in anger, for such a reply could not be given by those who are angered or perturbed. And in the reply, “I did not know that he was the high priest,” he spoke the truth to those who understand him. It is as though he were saying, “I have come to know another high priest, for whose name’s sake I am suffering these injuries—a high priest whom it is not lawful to revile but whom you are reviling, because in me you hate nothing else than his name.” Thus, a man ought not to parade those prerogatives under a false pretense, but he should have his heart prepared for everything, so that he will be able to accord with that expression of the prophet, “My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.”<sup>16</sup> Sermon on the Mount 1.19.58.17

### ***23:5 I Did Not Know***

### ***23:6 On Trial with Respect to the Hope and the Resurrection***

### ***23:8 The Sadducees Say There Is No Resurrection***

**They Do Not Believe in Things Incorporeal.**

Chrysostom: The Sadducees know of nothing incorporeal, perhaps not even God, so thick-headed are they. Consequently, they are also unwilling to believe that there is a resurrection. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 49.6

### ***23:9 Nothing Wrong in This Man***

**An Ambiguous Passage.**

Ammonius: “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” These words are obscure or something is missing for the completion of the sentence, which would be, “If a spirit or an angel has told to him what to say in order to avoid dangers, he is being deceptive.” Otherwise, what the Pharisees say must be understood in the sense, “Look! He’s clearly talking about the resurrection, since he’s been taught either this teaching on the resurrection by the Holy Spirit or an angel.” Catena on the Acts of the Apostles 23.9.7

## **23:11 *Bearing Witness Also at Rome***

### **Consolation Given During Afflictions.**

Chrysostom: Notice how great is the consolation! First he praises him, “as you have testified about me at Jerusalem”; then, he does not leave him fearful of the uncertainty of his journey to Rome. For not only will you arrive there, he says, but you will also make use of this boldness of speech. From this it is revealed that not only will he be saved but that he will be saved in the great city, honored with great crowns. Why didn’t [Jesus] appear to him before he fell into danger? Because, as always, it is in afflictions that God consoles. For then he appears more desirable, as he trains us even in the midst of dangers. Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 49.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Battle Against Egypt.**

Origen: Scripture says, “Fear not to go down into Egypt,”<sup>9</sup> which means, When you come against “the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world”<sup>10</sup>—those figuratively called Egypt—do not fear or recoil. If you wish to know why you should not fear, listen to my promise: “There, I will make of you a great nation, and I shall go down into Egypt with you, and I shall call you back from there in the end.”<sup>11</sup> He is, therefore, not afraid to go down into Egypt. He fears neither the combats of this world nor the trials of demonic adversaries. Hear, then, what the apostle Paul says: “More than those others have I labored, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”<sup>12</sup> Even in Jerusalem, when a plot had been set in motion against him and he toiled in combat for the word and the preaching of the Lord, beside him the Lord stood and said these same things that are said to Israel: “Fear not, Paul, for just as you have been my witness in Jerusalem, so you must also be my witness in Rome.” Homilies on Genesis 15.5.<sup>13</sup>