

The Sunday-School.

SECOND QUARTER,
LESSON VI.—May 10.

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL.

ACTS 23: 12-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.— *The Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer.* Acts 23: 11.

The lesson includes the whole chapter.

Learn by heart V. 11; Rom. 8: 28; Ps. 2: 1-4.

HISTORICAL SETTING.— *Time.*— May, A. D. 57 or 58.

Place.— Jerusalem, and the way to Caesarea.

Place in the History.— The experiences of Paul in Jerusalem after the journey. The methods of divine providence in preserving Paul's life, and bringing him to Rome.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM.— Vs. 1-10. Paul was brought before the Sanhedrim for trial. He began his plea with a statement that he had lived in all good conscience before God; a general denial of all charges of crime. *I have lived, as a true and loyal Jew.*

The high priest was angry at Paul's claiming a life so much purer and better than his own was known to be, and ordered his attendants to smite Paul on the mouth. Paul, indignant at the insult and injustice, retorted, *God shall smite thee, thou whited wall,* a vivid picture of a hypocrite.

Paul's Apology. When some one, shocked at what Paul said to the highest and most powerful official in the Jewish commonwealth, asked him, *Reverest thou God's high priest?* Paul apologized to the court, saying he was not aware it was the high priest who had spoken. It is noticeable that he did not retract the saying, or deny that what he said was true, but he was sorry that under the circumstances he spoke the true word. For in doing so he had inadvertently broken another law (Ex. 22: 28), which says, *Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.* We should respect the office, even when we cannot the officers. This does not forbid a fair discussion of the actions of rulers, or of their character so far as necessary to prevent the election of bad men.

Paul Divides to Conquer.— A dis-sension arose between the two leading parties of the Sanhedrim, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Taking advantage of this Paul declares his position as a Pharisee, for on the questions of the resurrection and the future life, which distinguished the Pharisees from the Sadducees, Paul heartily decided with the former, while at the same time he opposed with all his soul their selfishness and their hypocrisy.

The result was that the council came to no decision as to the charges against Paul, but continued to quarrel so fiercely among themselves that the soldiers were compelled to rescue Paul again, and bring him into Castle Antonia.

THE VISION OF ENCOURAGEMENT. — V. 11. During the night following the Lord, the glorified Jesus stood by Paul as he had at Corinth (Acts 18: 9, '10), and as he did again two years later in the storm at sea (Acts 27: 24), showing that he was his ever-present helper. *And said, Be of good cheer.* This word brought cheer. *For as thou hast testified.* His work was so approved of God

that he promised him a larger and more difficult field. *So must thou bear witness also at Rome.* His wish was to be gratified in a way of which he had no thought.

Sources of Comfort and Cheer.—(1) The manifest presence of Christ. Paul was not alone, but he who had power and wisdom and love was with him as his friend. (2) He had the approval of God, and his conscience would be at peace. (3) His life was safe. (4) He had more work yet to do for the Master. (5) He should have his heart's desire, and preach the gospel in Rome, the capital of the world. (6) All things were working together for good, and the very hindrances were the means of accomplishing his desired purpose.

THE NEW CONSPIRACY AGAINST PAUL.—Vs. 12-15. *And when it was day,* the day after the trial and Paul's vision, *certain of the Jews bound themselves under a curse, which they invoked upon themselves if they should fail to do as agreed.* More than forty. Showing the intensity of the desire to make certain the death of Paul. *Conspiracy,* a secret agreement. *They came to the chief priests,* many of whom probably belonged to the Sadducean party, and were anxious to have Paul destroyed. *Now therefore.....signify make known.* *We are ready to kill him.* Their plan was to assassinate him on his way from the barracks to the council hall.

HOW THE PLOT FAILED.—Vs. 16-22. *When Paul's sister's son.* This is the only direct reference in Scripture to Paul's family. *Heard of their lying in wait.* The conspirators were numerous, and it would be difficult for so many to keep their secret. *Entered into the castle.* Showing that his friends had free access to him. *This young man the chief captain.* Although Paul had an express promise from Christ of security, that he would escape the snares of the Jews, yet he did not neglect any proper means of safety. *The chief captain took him by the hand.* Seeing, perhaps, that he was nervous.

As though, intending to as a pretext. His sympathies are clearly with Paul personally. *See thou tell no man.* To avoid any interference with his own plans, or a new conspiracy; to avoid danger to the young man.

PAUL TRANSFERRED TO CAESAREA.—Vs. 23-35. That same night the chief captain outwitted the conspirators by sending Paul out of the city under a guard. They left Jerusalem with a letter from Claudius Lysias to Governor Felix, stating the facts. The next day, after a march of forty-two or forty-three miles, they reached Antipatris. The foot soldiers went no further. The cavalry continued to guard Paul the remaining twenty-nine miles to Caesarea. Paul was kept in the palace built by Herod the Great. Probably Paul was not sent to the common prison, but made as comfortable as possible, as the letter of introduction was kindly.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. — 1. Insult and injustice are among the most difficult things to bear and to treat rightly. 2. Paul's indignation was right. But in expressing it he inadvertently transgressed another principle, for which he made apology. He did not condone the injustice and hypocrisy.

3. God gave Paul a promise of protection and care.

4. But this did not keep Paul from using all the means in his power. The

use of the means is the proof of faith in the promise. The promise is the flow of living water, the means is the cup which brings it to our thirsty lips. He that refuses to use the cup does not believe in the running water.

5. We again trace the overruling providence of God. The attack of the Jews to destroy Paul transferred him to the protection of the Romans, by whom he was taken to Rome, and was enabled to preach the gospel.



USE SHORT, FAMILIAR WORDS.

Such is the advice given by B. A. Heydrick, in the *Chautauquan for March*. It is timely and important, especially to ministers.

Perhaps no one thing so effectually weakens the force of a preacher's words or so sadly destroys his influence, as a long-drawn-out, roundabout, platitudinous way of saying things. The simplest, the easiest, and the most direct way of saying what one has to say is always the best.

The use of "bigwords," coined phrases, and uncommon expressions is never an evidence of superior thought or thorough education. To the contrary, their use is, to the truly educated, always an evidence of mental shallowness, lack of scholarship, the absence of the speaker's knowledge of his own ignorance, of egotism and vanity, or of a serious want of common sense on his part. Dr. Heydrick says:

"The man suffers from a bodily ailment," "the man is sick." Is there any doubt which is the stronger? The short, familiar word is the one most readily understood, and the one that has most force. The principle would appear to be so obvious as not to require stating, yet experience shows that this error is one which beginners very often make. They seem to think that the words of ordinary speech are not good enough for writing, so they hunt for long and unfamiliar words, putting their thoughts up on stilts, so to speak, where they move very awkwardly. Years ago, Lowell called attention to this vice of style, as shown in some newspapers, where reporters try to make little items seem important by telling them in big words. A fire is no longer a fire; it is a conflagration, or even a holocaust. If a building is burned, the reporter solemnly writes that "the edifice was consumed." If a crowd gathered to watch it, we are told that "a vast concourse assembled to witness the conflagration." Thus simple thoughts masquerade in pompous diction, puzzling to simple readers, laughable to educated ones. This is not saying that one should never use a long word; there are times when a long word, and no other, will answer; but when there is a choice between a short, familiar word and a long, unfamiliar one, the short word is usually to be preferred.

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