

Acts Chapter 23

- Paul has been captured / rescued by the Romans from the Jews. The Captain / Claudius Lysias knows that he's accountable for any riots in Jerusalem and wants to get to the bottom of whatever was going on. He has figured out that he can't scourge Paul who is a Roman citizen, so he arranges a hearing before the council, the Sanhedrin, in the hope of discovering what the situation is, trying to figure out what exactly was going on.
 - The council is assembled, and Paul has been brought before them which is where we pick it up.
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V: 1 Normally at a formal proceeding like a court appearance, the plaintiff or the defendant would address the court as "your honor" or "may it please the court" something that shows deference or respect to the court.

- Paul does neither, he simply begins his address as "men and brethren..." respectfully and at the same time reminding them that he is one of their brethren, a fellow Jew.
- Paul's opening statement seems to be a profession of his innocence; he's sought to live a good life before the Lord.
- This is not a boastful statement, or an arrogant one, simply a statement of fact.

Psalm 26:1 "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide."

Psalm 26:11 "But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity:..."

- David is not boasting, neither is Paul - both are saying that they have sought to honor God, not that they are perfect, but they know they're forgiven, they're depending on His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness - and that they're not walking in willful rebellion to God's will.
- Paul is saying that basically he has a clear conscience before the Lord.

V: 2 Paul speaks these words and the high priest, Ananias orders that Paul be slapped or punched in the mouth, presumably for lying or at the least as an expression of his anger and disagreement over what little Paul has just said.

- We know from the Gospel accounts that Caiaphas was the high priest who presided over Jesus' mock trial, but that he was also taken prior to Annas' house

who was Caiaphas' father in law and the real power behind the priesthood, the were two very corrupt men.

- Ananias was cut from the same cloth, he too was very corrupt and despised by many of his countrymen.

Ezekiel 34:2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”

- Ananias was later killed by the Jews during the 1st / Great Revolt against Rome (66-72 AD). The Jewish guerrillas holed up in Jerusalem found Ananias hiding in the aqueduct near Herod's palace and because of his despicable life and his sympathies towards Rome, they killed him in what became an ignoble death.
- Ananias' treatment of Paul parallels Caiaphas' treatment of Jesus:

John 18:22 “And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, answerest thou the high priest so?”

V: 3 Paul responds: “*God smite thee, you whited wall...*” This is a reference to the many tombs around Jerusalem which no observant Jew would touch because they contained dead bodies which would defile, but they were “whited” on the outside to identify them so that they would not accidentally defile themselves.

Matthew 23:27-28 “²⁷Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all un-cleanness. ²⁸Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

- Paul was calling the high priest a hypocrite.
- Paul further accused the high priest of violating the law in his treatment of Paul, having him struck.

Leviticus 19:15 “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment...”

Deuteronomy 25:1-2 “¹If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked. ²And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault, by a certain number.”

- The idea then was that same as it is today; an un-condemned prisoner should not be abused and even a condemned prisoner was only to be struck or beaten in a prescribed and limited manner
- Paul asks or at the least intimates: “how can you, being a violator of the Law judge me according to the Law?”
- This seems like a valid question. That is why Jesus is our judge.

2 Corinthians 5:21 “For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

John 5:22 “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”

V: 4-5 Those standing by then questioned or challenged Paul on speaking against the high priest.

- Paul then said four things in response:

1. I didn't know he / Ananias was the high priest. That could be that he really didn't know, which I find somewhat far fetched, or it could mean that I didn't know that kind of person could qualify, certainly a man of his reputation and low morals couldn't be the high priest.

2. He cites the Law, which states you should not speak evil of the ruler of the people.

Exodus 22:28 “Thou shalt not revile the gods (judges), nor curse the ruler of thy people.”

3. In citing the Law he indicates that he is well aware of it, which might point more to his criticism of Ananias' character or lack there of. Which is related to the fourth and un-stated, implied statement.

4. Paul simply moves on, he does not apologize or retract his statement, it is in fact left standing that Ananias is a lawless hypocrite.

V: 6-10 Paul could readily see that he wasn't going to get any kind of a fair trial out of this so he takes advantage of their animosity towards each other.

- The Sadducees were very materialistic, very liberal in general but they also didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, or in angels, or miracles - their greed and avarice along with all the other things put them at odds with the Pharisees.

- The Pharisees were the religious conservatives, they took the Law as literally as possible, but they also placed a greater value on their traditions. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, in angels, and miracles - they also believed that they were the ones to correctly interpret the Law - giving themselves a lot of power and sway over people's lives.
- So Paul instigates a tremendous brouhaha from which the Romans must once again rescue Paul, now for the 3rd time.
- What a sad thing it would be for the cops to have to come and break up a riot whenever we had a board meeting or when the church met to discuss difficult or controversial things. What the Romans must have thought about these Jews and their council.

V: 11 Paul's grand plans for witnessing to the Jews, trying to win them over had utterly failed. Not that he had been a bad witness or had failed personally, but that the Jewish council simply wasn't yielded to the Spirit.

- There were many Jews who came to know Jesus as their Lord, the Church was made up primarily of Jews, even though many Gentiles were coming to faith.
- Knowing that Paul was grieving over his brothers, Jesus came and stood by him - comforting him with His presence and with His Word.
- Paul had some awesome victories in ministry, people saved, revivals, awesome miracles, churches planted - but he also went through some very difficult trials as well.

2 Corinthians 1:8 "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life."

- Jesus' first words to Paul here are "... *be of good cheer, Paul...*"
- ***Just knowing that Jesus is near, that He is right there with you, and speaking to you - oh what comfort!***
- *This foray into evangelism might not appear to have all that successful - but Jesus tells Paul, as you have testified here in Jerusalem so will you testify in Rome - the same way...*
- It would be a couple two or three years before Paul would actually see Rome, but Jesus comforted Paul that as he had testified in Jerusalem that would he also testify in Rome.

- Very much like Jesus telling the Apostles to go to the other side of the lake. They're going to get there, there would just be some stormy issues along the way, but they / he would get there.

V: 12-15 Paul's attempt to reason with the Jews had the effect of galvanizing or uniting them in their hatred for Paul and moving them to action to kill him.

- They took an oath, bear in mind he's in the custody of the Romans... but they won't eat or drink until they kill him, this is as foolish as it is passionate.
- They concoct a plan along with the high priest and council to gain access to Paul so they can terminate his command with extreme prejudice.
- The will of God often leads to a cross. Persecution is not a sign that you are out of God's will; it may well be a sign that you are actually in God's will,

2 Timothy 3:12 "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

- We don't or shouldn't quit just because they reject our testimony, Paul encourages us:

Philippians 4:11-13 "11Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Hebrews 10:38-39 "38Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

- So how do you suppose those poor starving angry Jews fared....?

V: 16-22 Paul's nephew gets wind of the plan and informs Paul. Paul grabs a centurion who passes the info and Paul's nephew onto Claudius Lysias the Roman commander.

- If the Jews plan were to be successful this would be bad for the Romans to loose a Roman citizen for whom they've become responsible
- In all reality Paul's life really isn't in any danger. Jesus had just given Paul the e-ticket to Rome - he's not at this point guaranteed anything beyond Rome, but Rome is guaranteed because Jesus said it was going to happen!

Revelation 11:3 “And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand and two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.”

V: 23-30 Claudius Lysias takes immediate actions and orders up 200 soldiers supported by 70 horsemen / calvary, and another 200 spearman.

- This would be an overwhelming display of force intended to intimidate and prevent any kind of attack which would work both in Paul and the Romans favor.
- He doesn't wait until the morning or daylight, he sends them out immediately there at 9-10 PM, before the Jews can react or prepare any kind of an attack.
- Claudius composes a letter to explain to Felix the governor why Paul would be sent to him there in Caesarea (Caesarea-Maritima). (60 miles from Jerusalem)

(Map)

V: 31-35 The soldiers then took off with Paul to “Antipatris” (40 miles from Jerusalem) then onto Caesarea from there in the morning.

- Felix may have tried to dodge the bullet by seeing if Paul was out of his jurisdiction, but he wasn't.
- Felix sets a court date for when the Sanhedrin can be present so they can start the process all over again.
- Paul was told he'd go to Rome, but he wasn't told how he'd go or how long it would take.

Psalm 27:14 “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”