

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ON TRIAL (ACTS 23:1-11)

Paul is in **Jerusalem** as a response to an invitation **by the Holy Spirit** to travel there.

- While in Jerusalem he'd been **falsely accused** by the Jews of **bringing a Gentile into the temple** and then apprehended by a Roman cohort.
- The Romans were a bit confused as to why **Paul had made the Jews so angry**, and they'd tried to flog him to get him to talk.

But Paul was a **Roman citizen**, and upon hearing this news, the Roman tribune decides to bring **Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin**.

- As Paul stands before this Jewish council, he uses the **common formal address** for assembled Jews and affirms **his commitment** to godly duty as a Jew (vs. 1).
- This didn't go over so well, **as the high priest orders someone to slap Paul** on the mouth.

Why did this make them **so angry**? Since Paul was talking about, "living his life before God in all good conscience", they must have concluded that he was **condemning** them for not doing so.

- Living for Christ and **doing the right thing** will sometimes **make other people angry**.
- People get angry because they're **convicted** by the truth of God at work in your life, but they assume **their conviction** is you **condemning them**.

PAUL'S RESPONSE IS A BIT SURPRISING.

He **strongly rebukes Ananias the high priest** for ordering to have him struck because he'd not **been formally convicted of breaking any laws**.

- The phrase, "**whitewashed walls**" accused Ananias of **hypocrisy**.
- The one who had been **appointed to uphold the law** had just ordered it to be broken!

But after Paul's strong rebuke, someone **informs him that Ananias was a high priest**.

- Upon hearing this, Paul apologizes profusely, as **he gave a rebuke** not knowing who Ananias was.
- Honor and **respect** was a big deal to Paul, and it **should be for us as well**.
- We live in a culture that **hates the idea of authority**, but as Christians we should be different!

Sensing that the group was **part Pharisee & part Sadducee**, Paul now changes tactics.

- The Pharisees & Sadducees disagreed strongly on the issue of the **resurrection**
- If Paul could create a doctrinal civil war, he might divert attention away from **himself to an ongoing internal debate**.
- So Paul brings up the hot-button topic-resurrection.

IMMEDIATELY THE IN-FIGHTING BEGINS.

The Pharisees argued for Paul's release, **stating that they could find nothing wrong with him!** (vs. 9).

- This enraged the Sadducees, and the **meeting turned into absolute chaos** until the Romans had to intervene and take Paul back to the barracks (vs. 10).
- In-fighting, disunity, & conflict are hallmarks of **religion** (Titus 3:4-11)

The following night after this violent meeting, **Paul received a vision from Jesus**.

- Jesus told Paul to, "take courage", because these trial appearances **weren't really just defenses for his life**, but rather witness of the truth.
- Just as Paul had testified of Christ in Jerusalem, he would also **testify of Christ in Rome**.
- How we **respond to trials** is a witness to our faith in Christ-**people are watching!**

A DEADLY PLOT (ACTS 23:12-22)

Hatred distorts and **twists people's minds** to where they're willing to do **unthinkable and immoral things** to get revenge or payback.

- These radical Jews, so **devoted to the law and their desire to protect its purity**, took an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead.
- Apparently they were prepared to break one of the **10 Commandments** to achieve this "religious" goal.

The radical Jews went to the **chief priests and elders (the religious leaders/rulers)** with this plot, where it seems they received an official seal of **approval from a governing body**.

- A body of ruling religious leaders **were willing to conspire with anarchists for an illegal murder plot**- simply so they could protect the purity of their religious tradition.

We get the impression from Paul's letters that **he didn't have much of a relationship with most of his family** (Philippians 3:8), but he still had nephew in Jerusalem who was watching out for him.

- When **Paul's nephew heard of the murder plot, he came and told Paul**, who then sent him to Roman tribune to **expose the plot**.

We see **God's providence and protection** at work within this story.

- An unnamed member of **Paul's family hears of the plot, who's willing to bring it before Paul**, who then speaks to the commander in the Roman army, who just so happens to **listen, believe, and take action to stop it**.
- God **has a plan for each of us** and knows the number of our days.

There's a **misconception that fear often breeds** in us that if we don't stay frantic, worried, or on the lookout constantly for whatever could go **wrong in our lives, disaster will strike**.

- But the reality is that God has the final say on the day of your death and He's completely sovereign over the things that happen in your life now.
- Until He's done with us, nothing can touch us.

In the meantime, He's in the business of miraculously working out His plan for our lives.

- God's miracles in our lives sometimes go completely unnoticed.
- Sometimes the most casual and normal happenings throughout our day reflect divine interference and intervention- and most of us don't even notice.

WHAT IF THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS COINCIDENCE?

What if there are no random or chance encounters?

- **What if the greatest disappointments, pains, struggles, and challenges in your life are a part of God's plan to make you holy and a greater witness to Jesus?**

A PRISONER EXTRADITION (ACTS 23:23-35)

Under the cover of darkness, **470 Roman soldiers** escorted Paul to the Judean capital of Caesarea, **headquarters of Governor Felix**.

- Seems like a bit much? Although 40 were involved in the planning of the murder plot, **hundreds or even thousands** had rioted in the temple.
- Lysias (the Roman tribune) knew **that losing a prisoner of this importance** could cost him his job or his life.

So Paul's escort to Caesarea included **two hundred infantry, seventy cavalry troops, and two hundred spearman**.

- Claudius Lysias **wrote a letter** to the governor Felix to explain what was happening and why **Paul was being transferred** as a means of protection so he could have a fair trial.

- The Roman attitude towards **Christianity at this time was one of indifference**.

At this point nothing **about the message of Jesus challenged anything** in Roman law.

- This charge against Paul had more to do with disputes concerning **Jewish theology**.
- Once Paul arrived at Casarea, **he was presented to the governor**, who promised him a fair hearing once the accusers from Jerusalem arrived.
- Paul then entered into a type of **protective custody** in Herod's praetorium (vs. 35)

IMAGINE HOW PAUL IS FEELING AT THIS POINT.

His enemies had planned to take his life through an **elaborate conspiracy** and murder plot that's too much **for Paul to defend on his own**.

- Through human standards, **Paul is outmatched, outnumbered, and outwitted 40 to 1**.
- But God's providence and protection of Paul is **greater and more powerful** than any plot that could be brought against him.

The **hundreds (or even thousands)** of angry unarmed Jews were no match for 470 highly trained, heavily armed Roman guards.

- During the riots in the temple, Paul **must've felt alone, afraid, and outnumbered**.
- But in Caesarea, he rests under the guard of the soldiers that **God had placed in his life to protect him from harm**.

Spiritual attacks, setbacks, and challenges are real and should never be dismissed as silly or trivial.

They can cause us to feel alone, afraid, overwhelmed and outnumbered.

But if we're in Christ, our real enemy has been defeated and his plans for us won't prevail.