

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 20TH, 2026 // THE BOOK OF ACTS

DIVISION (ACTS 23:1-11)

"...BEFORE GOD IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE"

Paul is saying that **since surrendering to Jesus, he has sincerely sought to live in obedience to God**. What's the Sanhedrin's response to this? Ananias immediately orders Paul to be struck in the mouth.

- **Sometimes we can do the right thing and still be misunderstood, criticized, or mistreated.**

PAUL "DID NOT KNOW"

Paul responds, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!" When the priest challenges Paul for speaking to him this way, Paul says, "I did not know." Some think this is genuine, and some think this is sarcasm.

- **A title doesn't automatically produce godly character. *Does the way I live match the faith I claim?***

SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES

Paul realizes the council is divided between Sadducees and Pharisees. Sadducees rejected resurrection, angels, and spirits, while Pharisees affirmed them. Paul understands that underneath all the accusations is the real issue: Jesus is alive.

This divides the council, and the argument becomes so violent that the Roman commander fears for Paul's life.

UNEXPECTED RESCUE

The Roman commander orders soldiers to go down, take Paul by force, and bring him back into the barracks. Ironically, Roman soldiers become the means God uses to protect His apostle.

- **God's protection and plan for our lives don't always look like we expect them to.**

JESUS STANDS WITH PAUL

Jesus doesn't remove Paul from the barracks but instead meets him there. Paul has faced rejection, violence, arrest, accusations, and uncertainty. Now he experiences what he needs most: the presence of Jesus.

- **There is no prison, disappointment, rejection, or uncertainty where the presence of Jesus cannot meet us.**

THE PLOT (ACTS 23:12-22)

PLOT AGAINST PAUL

The next morning, more than 40 men form a conspiracy against Paul. They are refusing to eat or drink until Paul is dead. Religious leaders are involved, and an ambush is being organized.

- The enemy may have a plan, people may have a plan, and we may have a plan—but **God's purposes will ultimately prevail.**

GOD USES AN UNEXPECTED PERSON

Luke introduces someone we've never heard about before: Paul's nephew.

Sometimes God uses angels (Acts 5 and 12), and sometimes He uses an earthquake (Acts 16). Here, God uses Paul's nephew overhearing the plot.

- Same God, different methods. **Never underestimate what God can do through an ordinary act of obedience.**

PAUL RESPONDS WITH WISDOM

Paul hears about the plot and immediately calls a centurion and asks him to take the young man to the commander. Paul's trust in God's promise does not produce passivity.

- **God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together.** We can trust God and ask for help. We can believe His promises *and* make wise decisions.

GOD QUIETLY WORKING

At this point, the conspirators believe their plan is still working. The assassins don't realize their plan has already been exposed. God is quietly putting everything in place to fulfill what Jesus said in verse 11: Paul is going to Rome.

- **When we can't see what God is doing, hold on to what we know about His character and His promises.**

CAESAREA (ACTS 23:23-35)

JESUS IS FOR US

Paul doesn't quietly slip out of Jerusalem alone. He receives an enormous Roman military escort: 200 soldiers, 70 cavalry, and 200 spearmen. The Roman government unknowingly becomes part of God's plan to fulfill Jesus' promise.

- **We often focus so much on what is against us that we forget Who is for us.**

BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH

Claudius Lysias writes a letter explaining Paul's situation to Governor Felix. God uses a pagan commander, Roman citizenship, military protection, government procedures, and Roman law as instruments of His providence.

- **God's sovereignty extends beyond the walls of the church.**

GOD'S PLAN IS MOVING FORWARD

Paul arrives before Governor Felix. Think about what has happened since Jesus spoke to Paul in verse 11: a murder plot formed, Paul's nephew overheard it, the commander believed him, hundreds of soldiers were mobilized, and Paul was transported safely.

- **God can move His purpose forward even when our circumstances feel stuck.**

FAITHFUL IN THE IN-BETWEEN

Acts 23 ends in an interesting place: Paul has been delivered from one problem but hasn't arrived at his final destination. Paul isn't in Rome. He's in Caesarea waiting (spoiler, he will spend two years in custody under Felix).

- **We like promises from God when they come with immediate fulfillment. But what about the gap in between?**

JESUS MEETS US WHERE WE ARE

- We often measure God's goodness by how quickly He changes what we don't like.
- Sometimes Jesus doesn't immediately change our situation—**He meets us in it.**
- **Following Jesus doesn't mean a trouble-free life but a life where His presence is enough even in trouble. Is the presence of Jesus enough for us?**

SURRENDER YOUR NEED TO KNOW

- Throughout Acts 23, Paul knows very little about what's happening around him.
- We want God to give us the plan, timeline, reason, and outcome. **Our need to understand everything can become our attempt to control everything.**
- Are we demanding an explanation before we're willing to obey?

GOD IS ALWAYS WORKING

- We naturally notice what's going wrong. **If we dwell on the chaos, then we will miss seeing a sovereign God at work for our good.**
- We often focus so much on what is against us that **we forget Who is for us.**
- **Where have we seen God's faithfulness that we've taken for granted?** God is often doing more around us than we realize.

DON'T WASTE THE SEASON YOU'RE IN

- Paul knows Jesus said Rome, but right now God has him in Caesarea.
- Without realizing it, **we've attached our joy, peace, purpose, and faithfulness to a future circumstance instead of Jesus.**
- Your current season still has Kingdom purpose. What is God teaching you right now? **What is He asking of you right now?**