

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 19TH-20TH // THE BOOK OF ACTS

THE ASSEMBLY (ACTS 22:30-23:10) BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

At the commander's request, the Jewish council convened to evaluate Paul's testimony. The commander surely hoped for a not-guilty verdict so he could release this Roman citizen, especially after his "minor" blunder.

- As Paul shared his testimony, he spoke of his clear conscience, ready to stand before them and God to account for his choices. The unspoken question that lingered was: Were they ready?

WHITEWASHED WALL

Ananias, the high priest, was already fed up and had Paul slapped. Paul responded with a strong yet accurate outburst, pointing out that the command given was illegal.

- He quickly described Ananias in a manner similar to how Jesus had described many of the religious elite, calling him whitewashed (or a hypocrite). Even though he was seemingly put together on the outside, Ananias was filled with corruption and death on the inside.

REPENTANCE

Paul most likely didn't know who the high priest was because he had been in and out of Jerusalem sporadically over the past 20 years. He probably only knew Ananias by name.

- When Paul learned the person he had rebuked was the high priest, he quickly repented. It's noteworthy that he didn't try to come up with excuses; instead, he took responsibility for his mistake.

HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

Paul, recognizing both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, boldly declared the reason for his trial. This proclamation was well-timed and achieved a couple of important outcomes:

- It opened a path for him to share the gospel, emphasizing that the hope he and the Pharisees embraced was revealed through Christ Jesus.
- By affirming the resurrection, he inspired some of the Pharisees to defend him, leading to division within the council.

INFIGHTING

The two sides quickly became embroiled in a debate over an issue they had long failed to agree on. This disagreement stemmed from the Sadducees' belief that only the books of Moses held authority.

- Things don't look much different for us today.
- Because of the intensity of the disagreement, violence quickly erupted. Paul had to be swiftly removed for his own protection, so he was taken back to the barracks.

HAVE COURAGE!

Jesus perfectly timed His encouragement for Paul, reminding Paul of his faithfulness in testifying in Jerusalem and assuring Paul that he would do the same in Rome.

- Jesus knew Paul's situation intimately, as Paul was always within His gaze. We must remember that God knows our circumstances and stands alongside us, holding a purposeful plan for our lives.

AMBUSH (ACTS 23:12-22)

AN OATH IS TAKEN

Approximately 40 enraged Jews, driven by their blind rage against Paul, took an oath promising not to eat or drink until he was dead.

- It is interesting to note that they referred to this oath as a curse. Given the circumstances, that certainly seems fitting, as it would be another 10 years before this came to fruition.
- Most importantly, we see that Satan attempted to make Paul question the promise he had just received from Jesus the night before.

DECEPTION

They approached the Jewish leaders and, fueled by their hatred for Paul, quickly became involved in the plan. They realized they didn't have a legitimate case against Paul, but that wouldn't deter them from seeking to deliver their version of justice, no matter how unlawful it was.

- Once again, we see the positions and beliefs they were defending were more important to them than God. They found it easy to disregard God's commands in favor of their own ideologies.

PLOT UNVEILED

God was not surprised by anything that was being plotted against Paul; instead, He used Paul's nephew, a child, to protect him.

- Although Paul was aware God was watching over him for the mission he had been assigned, Paul actively participated in the unfolding plan. Rather than remaining passive, Paul took action by sending his nephew to the commander to reveal the plot.

PROTECTION (ACTS 23:23-35) BY NIGHT

The commander took the threat to his Roman prisoner seriously and decided to move him to Caesarea, the Roman headquarters for the area.

- He arranged for a total of 470 soldiers to accompany the prisoner, including 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen, and 70 horsemen.
- God used the protection of the Gentiles to thwart those who claimed to be fighting for Him. God has a way of using the most unexpected people to accomplish His plans.

A LETTER

A letter was sent with them to explain the current situation to Governor Felix.

- Claudius Lysias was very cautious in how he portrayed the circumstances, carefully emphasizing how he had protected Paul upon learning he was a Roman citizen. However, he conveniently left out the fact that he had chained Paul and prepared to beat him.
- Most importantly, he asserted Paul's innocence.

"WHEN YOUR ACCUSERS GET HERE"

Felix reviewed the letter and decided to wait for Paul's accusers to arrive so he could run a fair trial and understand the situation better.

- These men were set to accuse Paul of half-truths, driven by their strong opposition to the message of Christ.
- We shouldn't be surprised when we encounter similar trials in life, instigated by our accuser. During these challenges, we must remember that we are not battling against flesh and blood.

GOD'S PRESENCE

- What does it look like to be sustained by the presence of God?
- Looking at Paul, we find reassurance that Jesus is always with us, through the Holy Spirit, to encourage and strengthen us, especially for the ministry that lies ahead.
- In our overstimulated lives, we often struggle to feel His presence. It is vital to carve out moments each day to disconnect completely and immerse ourselves in His presence.

ATTACKING THE PROMISE

- Rest assured that as we remember His promises and gain direction by listening to His subtle voice (which includes receiving wise counsel from others), Satan will try to sow doubt.
- For Paul, this was evident when there was a plot to kill him right after God said he would testify in Rome. In the garden, Satan created doubt about eating the forbidden fruit by suggesting that God was withholding something valuable.
- Where is Satan working in our lives to make us question God's promises or what He is doing?

LEGACY

- As we are sustained by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and cast off the doubts of Satan, God will continue to shape our legacy.
- What are some legacies of people in the faith that bring you encouragement and hope?
- Augustine of Hippo
- Corrie ten Boom
- George Müller
- Augustine of Hippo: A legacy of grace
- "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14).
- Corrie ten Boom: A legacy of surrender and forgiveness
- George Müller: A legacy of prayer and faith