

All Things Work Together For Good

Acts Chapter 23

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The commander, Claudias Lysias, has an assembly with Paul and the Sanhedrin. He needs to find out why there have been two riots in a day. This is an interesting note that 5 times (5 being the number of grace) the Sanhedrin has had the opportunity to hear the gospel.

- 1) Jesus
- 2) Peter and John
- 3) The 12 disciples
- 4) Stephen
- 5) Now Paul

Paul is here to fulfill a 20 year goal - To preach to his own people.

Act 23:1 1) Slap with a Hand, A Slap with Words vs 1-5

Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

Act 23:2 The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

- Paul looks intently; He has known a number of these men. He calls them brethren. He considers himself as one of them.
- "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience" - He's saying that he hadn't defiled the temple
 - Weak Conscience - 1 Corinthians 8:7 + 12
 - Defiled Conscience - Titus 1:15
 - Seared Conscience - 1 Timothy 4:2
 - Evil Conscience - Hebrews 10:22But we can have...
 - Purged Conscience - Hebrews 9:14
 - Good Conscience - Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:5 + 9
 - Pure Conscience - 1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3
- BUT... We must understand that a good or pure conscience is not equal to salvation. Paul said he lived his whole life with a good conscience. The truth is he had a good conscience when he had Stephen murdered.
- 1 Corinthians 4:4 Paul said, "For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."
- "The purest conscience was an insecure basis of confidence under the scrutiny of God." (Bruce)
- The High Priest, Ananias, orders Paul to be struck on the mouth.
- The Law tells us Ananias was in violation of the Law. Deuteronomy 25:1-2 says only a man found guilty could be beaten. Paul had not yet been found guilty.
 - Possibly, Ananias felt the comment immediately proved his guilt thus he struck him or possibly Ananias felt his own conscience being struck had struck back.
- Josephus Tells us that Ananias stole from the tithes that belonged to the priests.
- History showed us that Ananias had strong ties with the Roman Government and was ultimately killed by Jewish Nationalists.

Act 23:3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

Act 23:4 But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

Act 23:5 And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.' "

- Paul responds to the physical slap and slaps back with words.
- Paul very well could be in the flesh.
 - 1 Peter 2:23 Peter speaks of Jesus as our example, "When reviled, reviled not back"
- A whitewashed wall is a wall that is in bad need of repair. The homeowner would put a nice white paint over the imperfections to hide them.
- Ezekiel 8:7-12 "Then he brought me to the entrance to the court. I looked, and I saw a hole in the wall. He said to me, "Son of man, now dig into the wall." So I dug into the wall and saw a doorway there. And he said to me, "Go" in and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here." So I

went in and looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel. In front of them stood seventy elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand, and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising. He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.' "

- Paul is called out by the bystanders as breaking God's Law also.
- Exodus 22:28 "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people."
- Paul says he was not aware of who he was speaking to.
 - Some people think Paul was being sarcastic. Implying that a High Priest should not act like Ananias was.
 - Some people think this was a true statement because of Paul's failing eyesight. (implied in Galatians 4:14-15 and 6:11)

Act 23:6 2) Starting to Preach vs 6-11

But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul {began} crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

- Paul notices two camps of rulers. Much like Democrats and Republicans in our government only these people were rulers of religion.
 - **Pharisees - Conservative Party.** They were middle class business men. Their chief concern was religious. They believed God was involved in man's every day life. They believed in a resurrection, punishment or reward in an afterlife and they believed in angels. They were a minority party of the Sanhedrin.
 - **Sadducees - Liberal Party.** They were Upper Class. Wealthy. Out of touch with the common people. Their chief concern was political. They did not believe in God's involvement in everyday live. They did not believe in an afterlife or angels. They were the controlling party of the Sanhedrin.
- Paul declares he is a Pharisee. But declares that he is on trial for his views on the resurrection.

Act 23:7 As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

Act 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

Act 23:9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and {began} to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

- Much like in chapter 22, when Paul used the word "Gentile" and a riot began, here at the word "Resurrection" another argument erupted.
- The Pharisees saw the opportunity to strengthen their views by embracing Paul's view and his innocence. The Sadducees disagreed strongly.
- Some people think Paul was cleverly using a divide and conquer technique.
- Some people believe Paul was starting to preach the resurrected Jesus and was interrupted..

Act 23:10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

- Claudius Lysias feared for Paul's life went to rescue Paul. He did this because Paul was Roman. He did this because Paul was in his custody. He did this because he would have to explain how this Roman citizen became a prisoner, and how he could let him be killed at an assembly that he called for.

Act 23:11 But on the night {immediately} following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

- Paul alone in the barracks reflecting on his ministry in Jerusalem.
 - Went to the temple, Just being there caused a riot. He should have been cautious.
 - He gets a once in a lifetime opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin. He begins with "Gentile" and another riot started. He should have known better.
 - He is standing before the leaders again. An another chance at the once in a lifetime opportunity, and he calls the high priest a white washed wall. He should have taken the high road.

- He gets their attention for an incredible third time in a lifetime opportunity and he starts a third riot in a 24 hour period. He shouldn't have used the punch of "resurrection" in his introduction.
- Paul is in prison with dark depressing thoughts. And Jesus comes to him and encourages him.
- Have you ever been in that dark place of depression thinking that you are alone, a failure and about Jesus...He isn't nowhere around? Jesus knows you and knows where you are.
 - Jesus has miraculously delivered Paul from prisons before.
 - But here Jesus is there encouraging Paul not by delivering him but encouraging him through the prison.
 - When John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was in jail, a man visited him and said, "Friend, the Lord sent me to you, and I have been looking in half the prisons in England for you." John Bunyan replied, "I don't think the Lord sent you to me, because if He had, you would have come here first. God knows I have been here for years."
- Three things Jesus tells him.
 - Paul, take courage - (KJV = be of good cheer)
 - Paul you did good. -- You **have** preached the gospel
 - Paul you still have work to do. -- You are going to ROME.

Jesus tells Paul that he did a good job and has more to do. Yet it doesn't look like he did a good job. **Romans 8:28** "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Our job is to bring Christ to men. It is the Holy Spirit's job to bring men to Christ. So what ever it looked like God is able to use it and save souls.

Jesus encourages Paul but that doesn't mean the Devil isn't done.

Act 23:12 **3) In the Right Place at the Right Time** vs 12-22

When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

Act 23:13 There were more than forty who formed this plot.

Act 23:14 They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.

- 40 men vow to not eat again until Paul is killed. (Little do they know they are gonna starve to death)
- We need to realize that this is happening but Paul and the commander know nothing about this.

Act 23:15 "Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near {the place.}"

- The plan is that the Council will ask for another hearing. As they bring Paul to the hearing the assassins will fulfill their vow.

Act 23:16 **But** the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.

These events are the cool whip of the Christian journey.

- This is the only place in the Bible that we hear of Paul's family. A sister and a Nephew.
- This is one of those SUPERNATURAL - NATURAL OCCURANCE.
- We have those moments where we say, "It just so happened." GOD THING! GOD THING!
- "It just so happened" that Paul's nephew was in the right place at the right time for what ever reason to overhear the plot.

Act 23:17 Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him."

Act 23:18 So he took him and led him to the commander and *said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you."

Act 23:19 The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, {began} to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?"

- This is amazing that this Commander tenderly takes this young man by the hand, takes him aside to hear him privately.
- This shows also the respect that is forming for Paul by the Commander.

- Act 23:20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him.
- Act 23:21 "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you."
- Act 23:22 So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."
- The thing done in secret has now been revealed to Paul and now the Commander.
 - The Commander now has the opportunity to have the upper hand if the assassins don't find out that he know what they think he doesn't know.

Again we see that Romans 8:28 is true even when the principal people are unaware.
"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Act 23:23 **4) In Protective Custody** vs 23-35

And he called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen."

- Act 23:24 {They were} also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.
- The Commander, at 9:00 at night call for
 - 200 soldiers
 - 70 horsemen
 - 200 spearmen
 - TOTAL OF 470 MEN TO GUARD PAUL
 - Not only that but Paul is going to travel on a horse.

Act 23:25 And he wrote a letter having this form:

Act 23:26 "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

Act 23:27 "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

Act 23:28 wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;

Act 23:29 I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

- The Commander is acknowledging that he has found nothing criminal concerning Paul.
- The Commander doesn't bring up the fact that he put Paul in chains and was going to scourge him. (which was illegal)

Act 23:30 "When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

Act 23:31 So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

Act 23:32 But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.

- So Paul who was discouraged in prison, had Jesus encourage him. After that a plot arose, "It Just So Happened" it was found out. And Paul gets a 470 armed member escort headed to Rome.
- They get as far as Antipatris 400 leave and onward to Caesarea the 70 horsemen and Paul went.

Act 23:33 When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

Act 23:34 When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

Act 23:35 he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

- Paul is now in Caesarea, in prison. Do you think he is in depression? The circumstances are still the same. But he has a Word of encouragement from Jesus.
- And he has seen the truth of Romans 8:28 "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.*"
- Paul will be here 2 years. With this lesson learned, Paul can live in peace and assurance even in his prison.
- The comfort is found in that truth that though our circumstances appear hopeless, difficult and at times life threatening, we can trust that Jesus has our future and best interest.

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