

Acts 22: 30

30 But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he (that is the Roman Captain of the Guard) released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

Our study this morning finds Paul confronting his accusers and getting punched in the face too.

You know, confrontation is something that most of us try to avoid. But in the Book of Acts we find the Apostle confronting situation after situation with the Jews that seemed to get him in a great deal of difficulty.

When we left off last week in Acts 22, the Apostle Paul had confronted the mob in front of the Temple and they again became enraged and attempted to kill him.

Trying to stop the riot, the Romans decided to interrogate Paul by scourging him. But when they discovered that he was a Roman citizen the officer in charge decides to have Paul's case decided by the Sanhedrin.

Why didn't the Roman Captain just let Paul free?

I'm sure he was convinced that based on the reaction of the crowd that Paul had done something wrong and since he didn't know what to charge him with, he decided to let the Jewish court decide his fate.

Unfortunately every time Paul comes into the presence of these Jews, it is like putting steel to a grinder - sparks begin to fly. It will be no different this time.

Let's begin in verse 1 of Chapter 23 as Paul is now brought before the Jewish council.

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

That seems like a very safe way to start his defense. But notice in verse 2 what happens.

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

What caused the high priest Ananias to get so angry as to have Paul slapped across the mouth?

Paul made a bold statement when he said he had a perfectly clean conscience. This comment enraged the high priest because what Paul was really saying was that he was innocent before this council and innocent before God.

The Jews, however, believed that Paul, having brought a Gentile into the Temple was not only wrong but guilty of a crime worthy of death.

Now being slapped across the mouth was an unusually degrading form of insult to a Jew. And in fact we Gentiles wouldn't like it very much either.

To strike an unconvicted person was illegal. And Paul, being a Roman citizen knew he had not been convicted of any crime yet. It is interesting that both Paul and the high priest knew that fact, yet Ananias did it anyway.

Apparently, however, Ananias, the high priest was not acting out of character. We know from other writing that this man had already attained a reputation as a violent and untrustworthy person. He was a man who was easily bribed and who often confiscated for himself the tithes given to support the Temple.

While Ananias was acting as we would expect a lost man to act, Paul seemingly loses his temper and apparently acts out of character, by rebuking the chief priest.

Look at verse 3:

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?"

Was Paul's anger justified?

Ananias expected Paul to come before him and beg for his mercy. Instead, Paul not only does not apologize, he says that he has a clear conscience and is not guilty of anything.

Now Paul calls the high priest a whitewashed wall and curses Ananias. How do you think the Sanhedrin would react to this?

Paul spoke prophetically. God did indeed smite this wicked man. When the Jews revolted against Rome in 66 AD, Ananias fled for his life because he believed the Romans would save him. But the Jews found him hiding in an aqueduct at Herod's palace, and they killed him. It was a horrific death for a despicable man.

Look at verse 4:

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

Was Paul apologizing for his words?

Some say that Paul was apologizing; others say that his words were meant to be sarcastic.

We don't know if Paul really recognized Ananias as the high priest. Some have said that he apologized for his action and cite the fact that:

1. Paul had not been in Jerusalem in some time, and perhaps he did not know what the high priest looked like.
2. This was a hastily called meeting and it may have been that the high priest was not dressed in his high priestly garments.

3. It is alleged by some that Paul had remarkable poor eyesight and thus did not know who he was talking too.

Or perhaps Paul did know who Ananias was, and knew his reputation and considered him unfit for the position of high priest and so his words were sarcastic and meant to be pointed.

Either way, this act was out of character for Paul because once he was informed that the man he had just cursed was the high priest he cites Exodus 22:28 acknowledges that it is wrong to speak evil of the ruler of the people.

I would like to point out something that certainly has application for us today. If Paul is apologizing, he is apologizing to the position of high priest not to Ananias, the man. The position was to be respected even when the man holding it could not be.

If we take Paul's words at face value, then he is acknowledging that he was wrong to curse the high priest and he claimed that he did it out of ignorance saying, "I did not know that he was the high priest."

So having failed in his personal approach, Paul now tries a doctrinal approach. Look at verse 6:

6 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 knew that this would create a stir. He was well aware of the division in doctrine between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The differences are explained beginning in verse 7.

7 As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 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?" 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.

Was Paul playing politics with the court or was he really trying to witness to these Jewish leaders?

Paul probably knew he could not get a fair trial from this court and perhaps he thought that if the trial continued he would have been condemned and put to death. So the wisest thing he could do was to end the hearing as soon as possible by causing the members to fight over an issue and trust God to use the Roman guard to protect him from the uproar.

Or perhaps he thought the resurrection was the central issue that he needed to get them to hear so that they too would believe in the risen Christ. On several occasions in Paul's writing he claims that he is going to "preach Christ and the Resurrection."

The Roman guard did save Paul and brought him back to prison. What do you think the guard thought? First Paul caused a riot between with the mob and now he caused a riot at the court?

How do you think Paul felt?

After the events of the last two days in Paul's life he finds himself in jail again not knowing what would happen. Where were the members of the Jerusalem church?

Paul may have felt dejected and discouraged. He is back in a cell – utterly defeated with all of his dreams of being a testimony to the Jews in ashes around his feet. It also seems that no help could be expected from the church at Jerusalem. But God in his grace did not leave Paul on his own. Look at verse 11, Luke tells that:

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."

Jesus says to Paul, "Take courage." Literally, what the Lord Jesus said when he appeared to him was, "Be of good cheer. Cheer up Paul."

Only Christ uses these words in the New Testament. On five previous occasions we read of instances where Jesus brought wonderful comfort to others using these words.

1. He said to the bedridden paralytic, "take courage son; your sins are forgiven (Matt 9:1-8).
2. To the woman with the twelve year hemorrhage he said "Take courage, daughter, your faith has healed you (Matt 9:22).
3. To his frightened disciples as he walked to them across the water he said. "Take courage, It is I. Do not be afraid" (Matt. 14:27).
4. In the Upper Room on the night of his betrayal he said, "Take courage I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).
5. This is Christ's unique words for all who are trying to serve Him. In fact the Lord has shown up previously when Paul was in a period of hardship and discouragement. While he was at Corinth the Lord appeared to him Acts 18:9 and said,

9 ... "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

Here in verse 11 the Lord tells Paul that his ministry was not over. Verse 11 clearly says:

11 ...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."

God had a job for Paul to do and no one or no thing could stop God's plans. These words greatly encouraged Paul, so much so that he never wavered in speaking the truth in spite of all the perils that were yet to come into his life. The Lord's promises him that he had more for him to do and this helped Paul to keep on faithfully serving Him.

This is an encouragement to me. We can Take Courage to know that no matter what happens in our lives, He will ALWAYS be there with us taking us through the fire. God does not promise that he will keep us from suffering, but He does promise that He will deliver us.

Back to Acts 23. Will Satan give up? Never! Let's go on. According to verses 12 some forty men banded together vowing not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

12 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. 13 There were more than forty who formed this plot. 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. 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."

According to verse 16 God intervenes in Paul's behalf by taking a previously unidentified nephew and placing him in just the right place at the right time to overhear the details of this murderous plot. Look at verse 16:

16 But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. 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." 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." 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?" 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. 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." 22 So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."

Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke speaks favorable of the Roman military officers, beginning with Cornelius in Acts 10 and ending with Julius in Acts 27. We certainly must admire the integrity and courage of Claudius the Captain of the Roman guard. How did he know the boy was even telling the truth?

Paul had already caused Claudius much trouble. It might have been a relief if the Jews had put Paul to death. But Claudius had integrity and did not allow an injustice to occur.

Next week we will see how the plan that Claudius lays out. But this morning, I think we can take a few applications from this section.

1. We need to be willing to confront evil. God will protect us.
2. Although it may appear that no one comes to our rescue, the only one we really need will never leave us or forsake us.
3. God has a plan for our lives and when we are in the center of His will, nothing can stop His work from being done.