

Acts

Part 56 – “Paul and Jesus in Jerusalem

Acts 22:30-23:11

The events recorded in this passage took place in AD 57. Unable to quell the violent protests in the temple and thwarted in his attempt to extract a confession out of Paul the tribune Claudius Lysius calls upon the Sanhedrin to make their case. Throughout this episode Luke highlights the difference between Paul's integrity before God and the duplicitous nature of the Jewish leadership who circumvented the very law they claimed to uphold.

Main Idea: Christians can face with courage and integrity violent persecutors and corrupt authorities because Jesus stands with them through all their trials.

Vs. 30 – There are obvious parallels between this pre-trial hearing for Paul and the trumped up charges brought against Jesus in his trial.

Vs. 1 – Luke records only Paul's words. In all likelihood, the Sanhedrin presented its charges first.

Vs. 2 – The high priest at this time was a man named Ananias who was appointed in A.D. 47 and would be dismissed in A.D. 58-59, very soon after these events. He was assassinated in A.D. 66 by pro-Jewish zealots who resented his close ties to Roman authorities. He ordered Paul struck on the mouth as a sign that he was lying. Josephus confirms that Ananias was an insolent and quick-tempered man (Ant. 20:199) He seized tithes that were due the common priests. His action in slapping Paul was completely contrary to Jewish rules of justice.

Vs. 3 – “White-washed wall” is a metaphor for “hypocrite.” The first use of this image in the Bible is in Ezekiel 13:10-11, where Ezekiel mocks the false prophets who are prophesying “peace” by saying that they are like a rotted wall using nothing more than paint to hold together. The high priest Ananias, who is supposed to be upholding the law, violates it himself in the very legal proceeding he is in charge of.

Vs. 5 – There are various explanations as to why Paul did not recognize the high priest. Some say it is simply because it had been years since Paul had participated in the religious life of Jerusalem. Others argue that Paul is being ironic by suggesting that the high priest's unjust actions made him unrecognizable in that role.

Vs. 8 – The Sadducees were the theological liberals within Judaism while the Pharisees represented the conservative side of the spectrum. Interestingly, a Pharisee could become a Christian and remain a Pharisee but a Sadducee would have to leave his party because of their denial of doctrines essential to Christianity. The Sadducees were the dominant party in Jerusalem and were useful to Rome for maintaining the status quo. The reference to the Sadducees' denial of both “angel” and “spirit” is a way of saying that they denied any positive hope for an afterlife (Witherington, 692).

Vs. 9 – The doctrines of resurrection and eternal hope exposes the deep rift between Sadducees and Pharisees.

Vs. 10 – The commander had not made much progress in discerning the nature of the dispute.

Vs. 11 – Twice before the Lord had come to Paul to counsel him in such dangerous circumstances (22:17 on his first visit to Jerusalem; and 18:9: in the face of Jewish opposition to Paul's ministry in Corinth, “stay in Corinth for I have much people in this city.”)

1. Paul takes his stand

Violent opposition to the gospel and corruption among civic and religious leaders warrant a clear rebuke.

a) His Discernment

Vs. 1a – “And looking intently at the council...”

- Paul appears before what may be understood as the Supreme Court of the Jewish religious life. It consists of members of both parties within Judaism: Pharisees and Sadducees. The high priest, a Sadducee named Ananias is the presiding officer.
- Ben Witherington suggests that the opening clause of verse 1 should be understood in light of Paul's keen discernment (p. 687). In this case Paul "looking intently at the council" means that he was able to discern their spiritual condition and true motives. Just as Paul understood his audience in Athens so too does he understand the hostile crowd before whom he now stands.

b) His Integrity

Vs. 1b – "Paul said, 'Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.'"

- Paul lived his life *coram deo* – in the face of God. It never occurred to him that he could somehow hide a secret life of hypocrisy. Certainly Paul was not claiming sinless perfection. But he is not shy to confess that he is innocent of the charges being made against him.
- The clause "up to this day," means that his integrity has been consistent. "Up to this very moment I have not been guilty of these charges."

c) His Humanity

Vv. 2-5 – The high priest Ananias orders Paul to be struck on the mouth and Paul responds with a strong rebuke. After having it pointed out that his words had been directed to the high priest Paul repents for unknowingly violating a law recorded in Exodus 22.

- Even though the high priest was worthy of a rebuke Paul nevertheless demonstrates his commitment to the law which forbids reviling those appointed as leaders. Thus he humbles himself before his corrupt accusers.
- We should not be surprised by seeing a flash of anger from Paul (whether that anger was holy or sinful). Like all of us, Paul was in the midst of sanctification.

2. The Gospel Divides

Vv. 6-10 – Paul recognizes that the gathered Jewish religious leaders were divided between Sadducees and Pharisees. Paul shines a light on the deep theological division between the two parties by introducing the doctrine of the resurrection. Paul also exposes the truth that what is driving the anger against him is not a concern for civic tranquility but hatred for the gospel.

- Paul is not using some sort of divide and conquer technique. He is exposing the true nature of the conflict.
- Paul is deliberately seeking a shared starting point that will lead to a clear witness to the gospel in his remaining speeches.

3. Jesus Comforts

Vs. 11 – "The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'"

- Literally, "Keep up your courage." The imperative points to the fact that just as Paul has given witness to Christ in Jerusalem so too must he do the same in Rome. From this point forward there will be no more miraculous deliverances.
- "The Lord's reassurance must take the place of miraculously opening doors. The divine power that rescues from prison has become a powerful presence that enables the witness to endure an imprisonment that lasts for years." – Robert Tannehill (2:292)