

Acts 22:17-23:22

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[0 : 00] When thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live.

And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

So Paul is telling them about being in the temple in a trance, and Jesus talked to him, said, Get out of Jerusalem. And Paul is trying to reason with the Lord.

He said, But they know me. I can be effective here. They know my testimony. They know I was one of them. And it hadn't been that long ago, really. And so they would have remembered him.

[1 : 05] They would know who he is. They would know exactly what he did. A lot of these same people were probably there when Stephen was told. They knew exactly who Saul was. And he's saying, They know me.

But the Lord said, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. The Lord's already told him, Make haste and get out quickly. Basically, hurry and leave. Like, don't mess around.

Don't stand here. Get out of here. Leave quickly. And then he says, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. In other words, I'm going to send you far away from here.

Like, leave and go far away from here. And if you think about, remember the rejection, how the Jews rejected Stephen. When Stephen told them, said, You always do resist the Holy Spirit just like your fathers did.

And then that's when they went after Stephen and stoned him, showing the ultimate rejection of the message of the gospel. And then the attention started to turn away from them.

[2 : 04] We have Philip going to Samaria. We have the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Then we have Paul's conversion. Then the conversion of Cornelius. And things are going away from the Jews because of their rejection.

And so, no doubt, individual Jews here and there might be getting saved. But as far as, by and large, the whole group of Jews have predominantly resisted and rejected. And so the Lord has turned his attention away to the Gentiles.

And so he tells Paul to depart, For I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And so these people have been listening to Paul. And when he says that, when he says, Go, I'm going to send you to the Gentiles.

That ignites a rage even greater within them. So then they gave him audience unto this word. And then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth.

For it is not fit that he should live. So what has Paul done here? Paul has revealed to the Jews that he was commissioned by the Lord to go to the Gentiles.

[3 : 06] So he is basically saying the Gentiles are now on equal footing with the Jews. We're not trying to convert a Gentile to a Jew. We're trying to convert a Gentile to a Christian.

And when Paul is telling that, the Jews are thinking he's putting the Gentiles on an equal footing with us. And that enrages them because Gentiles were pagans.

Gentiles were heathens. Gentiles were dogs. Gentiles were, you go around them, you hang out with them, you're defiled. That kind of people. And so to be on the same footing with the Jews now, that was an insult to them.

That was unthinkable. But that's what Paul had done. And so the Roman captain, he intervenes again. Verse 24, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle and bade that he should be examined by scourging.

That he might know wherefore they cried so against him. So scourging, just like they scourged the Lord before his crucifixion. Many people died during scourging.

[4 : 11] It was a very brutal thing. And so it's at this moment, verse 25, and as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?

So Paul here is declaring he is a Roman citizen. By law, a Roman citizen could not be bound or beaten until he was proven guilty. If they were falsely bound and falsely beaten before they had been proven guilty, then the ones who carried it out were in serious trouble because they had done that without fair trial, without proving them guilty.

And so the question is, maybe, why hasn't Paul said anything about his Roman citizenship up until now? Well, if you remember, what was Paul's offense against the Jews?

What were they charging him with? They charged him with bringing a Gentile into the temple, into a place where the Gentiles were not supposed to go. And there was actually, they have found inscriptions, archaeologists have found inscriptions, that may have been on the temple that said Gentiles going beyond this point are responsible for their own death.

And so, and historians such as Josephus tell us that the Roman people actually allowed the Jews to carry out this sentence themselves.

[5 : 33] Even if it was a Roman citizen. The Jews were allowed to carry out this sentence of death upon anyone that passes by that certain way. So Paul's Roman citizenship would not have helped him there.

At that point, he could have been executed either way, and the Romans would not have intervened even though he could claim Roman citizenship. But now he gets to a point where he's no longer dealing with the Jews, he's dealing with Romans.

A Roman to a Roman, now we've got something where he can use that. And so as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to discourage a man that is a Roman and uncondemned?

When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman?

He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was freeborn. Now history helps us with what was just said there.

[6 : 35] Under the emperor Claudius, it was made possible that a person could purchase Roman citizenship. Even if you weren't born into the status of being a Roman citizen, Under the emperor Claudius, if you had enough money, you could purchase citizenship and become a Roman citizen.

But you were still not looked as favorably upon as someone who was born into Roman citizenship like Paul was. And so not only was Paul a Roman citizen, but you can just about feel this man's heart sink when Paul said, I was born into it.

Because that put him at even a higher status. And so not only have they bound a Roman citizen that was born into Roman citizenship without him being tried and condemned, but they have threatened to beat him.

And so now they are walking on eggshells right now. They are very, very careful with what they're doing. He said, Then straightway they departed from him, which should have examined him.

And the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priest and all their counsel to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

[7 : 57] So basically he knew that whatever he was being charged with was a Jewish matter. He hasn't violated Roman law. He hasn't done anything worthy of punishment from them. And so he was going to let the Jews deal with it.

So chapter 23, And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the priest and the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

And so before we go too far, there's a number of people in the Bible named Ananias. So we don't want to get him confused with somebody else. There was Ananias in chapter 5. Remember him and Sapphira sold property, but they didn't bring all the proceeds to the church.

And they were killed. So this is definitely not that one. And then there was another one in Acts chapter 9 that was in Damascus, and Paul was to meet him after his conversion.

This is not him either. This is Ananias the high priest. And so this is not a very good high priest. In fact, the historian Josephus describes Ananias as insolent, hot-tempered, profane, and greedy.

[9 : 10] Another commentator said this was one of Israel's most corrupt and cruelest high priest. His pro-Roman policies alienated him from the Jewish people who murdered him at the onset of the revolt against the Romans in AD 66.

So in order, the way the Jews viewed their high priest, if you're a high priest that gets murdered by the Jews, you've got to be a bad person. They're not going to murder their high priest because that's their connection to God, remember.

So if they're going to murder their high priest, he's not a good person. And so he gets murdered by the Jews in AD 66. So this kind of tells you how he was. And so he commanded that those that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

This wasn't a pleasant slap on the cheek or something. This was, the word here is to beat, to injure. And so this was not just a slight tap.

This was injure, this person. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall. Forsittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law.

[10 : 23] So Paul called him a whited wall, looked good on the outside, but on the inside there was decay and corruption. He had been whitewashed. He had been painted up, whitewashed on the outside to look real nice, but on the inside there was not good.

And Paul is saying, you're going to judge me after the law, but you're commanding somebody to hit me, and I've not even been condemned yet, so you're breaking the law and doing that.

And they that stood by said, revile us thou God's high priest. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest. For it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

So Paul did not, Paul had been away from Jerusalem for a while, but he didn't know this was the high priest now, is the idea there. Some people have suggested that maybe Paul was being sarcastic here, basically saying, the way you're acting doesn't look like a high priest, so therefore I didn't recognize you as the high priest.

But that's probably not what's going on. Paul had been away from Jerusalem for some time. He's now back. There's been a change in the high priest between the time he left and the time he's back now.

[11 : 32] And so Paul would, if this was not a formal temple kind of gathering, he may have not been in his high priestly garments, so he wouldn't have stood out in the crowd.

And so Paul just didn't recognize him. He said, I didn't know you were the high priest, for it is written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. So Paul was respecting the office, even though the man had showed himself to be not someone to be respected, did Paul still respect the office that he was in?

And so now Paul is starting to notice, when we get to verses 6 through 10, Paul is going to notice a mixture in the crowd. Remember, he's in front of the Sanhedrin. That's like the Jewish Senate.

So they were the ones that kind of carried out Jewish law. And if you were going to be killed as a Jewish person for something you had done that was violated the law, they would be the one to hand down that sentence.

And so the Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, which had some disagreements. Paul knows this. And so if you've got an enemy, what's one tactic that you can do to weaken them?

[12 : 46] If you can get them fighting each other, then you're well on your way. And so that's what Paul's going to do. Verse 6, But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called into question.

So he said a lot there. So by saying, by associating with the Pharisees, he's already going to rile up the Sadducees a little bit because they actually didn't agree as much as we think they would.

The death of Jesus brought them together because they both wanted him eliminated. But in a lot of ways, they didn't get along. The Sadducees only went by the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, that's all they went with.

And they didn't believe in a resurrection. They didn't believe in anything supernatural. The Pharisees believed in all this. And so that's going to cause some division here. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the multitude was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit. But the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry and the scribes that were of the Pharisees part arose and strove saying, we find no evil in this man.

[14 : 07] But if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God. Do you see what happened? Let's read that verse again. And there arose a great cry and the scribes that were of the Pharisees part arose and strove saying, we find no evil in this man.

But if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God. So once they found out he was like one of them, which means he disagreed with the Sadducees who they disagreed with, all of a sudden they were on his side.

Like he hasn't done anything wrong. Let him go. And so he has now his enemies fighting each other. And now one of them is taking his side. And so now, and when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down and to take him by force from among them and to bring him into the castle.

So this is the third time the Romans have rescued Paul from the Jews. So the Romans are earning their pay. At this point, three times they've had to rescue Paul. It's interesting that when this is all over, Paul is going to end up in Roman custody and he's going to get taken to Rome where he wanted to go originally, where the Lord wants him.

He's going to go to Rome, taken there by the Romans. So basically his way is paid and everything. He's just kind of along for the ride. Now there's going to be some bumps along the way, some shipwreck and some things, but he's going to get there basically by the hand of the Romans to Rome.

[15 : 40] And so verse 11, and when, and the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness at Rome.

And so the Lord has let Paul know he testified in Jerusalem. I'm taking you to Rome. You're going to testify there. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Now the idea of that word curse there is the same word where Paul talks about in Galatians. If anybody preaches another gospel, let them be accursed. The word is anathema, or anathema, where we get the word to anathematize, to put somebody under, they're under the curse of God, they're in danger of judgment.

Same, same word. So they're saying, we vow that before we eat or drink, Paul is going to be dead. And let us be under a curse if that doesn't happen.

So this is serious. For a Jew to use the word anathema, talking about themselves, they are deeply passionate about wanting something done. They are saying, may we be under a curse, may we be in danger of the judgment of God if we don't take this man out before we eat or drink.

[17 : 05] And there were a lot of them that did that. Certain of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that we would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

And there were more than 40 which had made this conspiracy. So it wasn't just two or three, it was more than 40. So a lot of people have banded together and said, we're not going to eat, we're not going to drink, until Paul is dead.

And may we be cursed, may we be accursed, may we be anathema if this happens, if this doesn't happen. And they came to the chief priests and elders and said, we have bound ourselves under a great curse that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow as though you would inquire something more perfectly concerning him and we wherever he come near are ready to kill him.

And so they were going to get the remaining part of the Sanhedrin to help them. Bring Paul down, say we've got to question you more about something and when this happens, when he gets close, we're going to kill him.

[18 : 17] And you see Mike that maybe they had agreed to be complacent or to be assistant in this because of what goes on, it goes on to say a little bit later.

It says verse 16, and when Paul's sister's son had heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him and said, bring this young man unto the chief captain for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

So he took him and brought him to the chief captain and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee who had something to say unto thee.

So this is also beneficial for Paul letting them know he was a Roman because he's going to get privileges that not everybody would have gotten. And so in this, you can see the hand of the Lord caring for Paul because the Lord wants Paul in Rome.

And the way he's getting him there might not be what we would think is the easiest way or the most conventional way, but the Lord wants Paul in Rome and he's going to get him there. And Paul's Roman citizenship is allowing him opportunities that wouldn't come to the average prisoner, this being one of them.

[19 : 27] And so then the, so he took him and brought him to the chief captain and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee who had something to say unto thee.

Then the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately and asked him, what is that thou has to tell me? And he said, the Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council as though they would inquire something somewhat of him more perfectly.

But do not thou yield unto them for they, there lie in wait for him of them more than 40 men which have bound themselves with an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him.

And now they are ready looking for a promise from thee. So put yourself in the position of the chief captain. You've got a Roman citizen in custody.

One that you had bound before you tried him and he wasn't condemned but you had bound him and had threatened to beat him before he was condemned. Now you find out he's a Roman citizen.

[20 : 34] You've loosed him. You've just kept him kind of in protective custody to take him to Rome and now there's a threat upon his life. So you don't want this getting back to your superiors.

Yeah, we had a Roman citizen in our custody. We were going to, we had bound him. He wasn't condemned yet. We were going to beat him until we found out he's a Roman citizen and now he's been killed of the Jews while he was in our custody.

You don't want that to happen if you are the people responsible for him with him being a Roman citizen. His Roman citizenship carried that much weight. And so now the chief captain is thinking, okay, this just went from not so good to could get even worse.

And so the chief captain then let the young man depart and charged him, see thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things unto me. And so now from here, Paul is going to be sent to Rome with protection.

He's going to be sent to appear before Felix. And so next time we'll see, we'll see what happens when Paul is sent to Felix. He's going to have the opportunity to begin to share the gospel with some of the Roman leadership when he's headed to, as he's starting his journey to Rome.

[21 : 54] He's going to appear before Felix and then Festus and Agrippa. And he's going to be able to give the gospel to every one of these. Just as the Lord said he would do. So we'll see that in two weeks, the Lord will.

And this week, I fly to North Carolina. I have a niece that's getting married. So I will be away next Sunday. But the Lord willing, two weeks from today, we'll see what happens as Paul is on his way to see Festus and Felix.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you protect your people.