

This is such a strange time for the Apostle Paul

He'd been told over & over by Friends & Believers
“Do NOT go to Jerusalem”

& since the moment he got there - it's been a total Train Wreck

Paul hands the Jewish church a Large Offering
FROM the Gentile churches

& instead of appreciation they Immediately they start accusing him
of telling Jews to ABANDON the Laws of Moses

So Paul tries to make peace by joining a Jewish Ritual - & it seems
he's about to even make an Animal Sacrifice in the Temple

But that never happens - cause the mob tries to KILL him instead
& the ROMAN SOLDIERS have to save him from his own people

So Paul asks to speak to the Jews one last time
& THAT goes Terribly Bad

& the Roman Commander has to save Paul from the Jews AGAIN

& then (in our text today) The Roman Commander himself
decides to have Paul TORTURED - to interrogate him

& That's Exactly is how things have gone
since the moment Paul returned to Jerusalem

THAT is what you a call
a TOTAL TRAIN WRECK of a MINISTRY Operation

I Promise you - THIS is NOT what Paul had in Mind

He KNEW things were going to be DIFFICULT . . .

But he's been "***Out of the Fryin Pan Into the Fire***"
since the moment he set foot in town

But HERE is what I really want us to see today
as we go thru this LONG Passage

In the Midst of Failure after Failure
With Everything going AS WRONG as it can possibly go

Right In the midst of this Catastrophe - GOD IS AT WORK

But THIS Time - GOD IS AT WORK - Behind The Scenes

In Fact - to the Untrained Eye
it might seem like God isn't AT WORK - AT ALL

But THAT is NOT God - & that is NOT what God is doing here
God is AT WORK - Behind the Scenes - this ENTIRE time

& I want you to know today - if you belong to God . . .

Then God is AT WORK behind the scenes in YOUR Life -
Right NOW - - - whether it LOOKS like it - or NOT

Let's Pray that we'll see that today

In our last Msg - We left Paul being SAVED - By the Roman Soldiers because the Jews were trying to KILL him

& Paul got the Roman Commander to let him speak to them one more time - & he tried to give his Personal Testimony

& it seemed like it was going to go OKAY until Paul said the word - GENTILES

Then the Jews just went CRAZY again Screaming for Paul's DEATH

& so we pick it up in Acts 22:24-25 (esv)

24 the tribune (commander) ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

(he was going to get his answers by brutal interrogation)

25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips, (stretched or bent over a large post - to stretch his back tight - so it would easily rip open from the scourging - the same torture Christ endured) Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"

WHOA - Hold the Phone - this is a HUGE bit of news to the Centurion

It Was ILLEGAL to Flog a Roman Citizen who had NOT been found guilty in a Roman Court

& the penalty for doing so was DEATH to the person doing the Flogging

So we read in Acts 22:26-28 (esv)

26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen."

27 So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes."

28 The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."

**Which was a more respected citizenship
than one that was purchased**

So this **CHANGES** everything - **Immediately**

The **Centurion** quickly **hides** the **Flogging Whips** -
& the **Commander** starts **back-peddling**

Acts 22:29 (esv)

29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

This **turn of the tables** here - may've **saved Paul's Life**

& who knows - **Maybe** - **THIS** moment is **WHY** God saw to it
that Paul was **BORN** a **Roman Citizen**

So - **Paul gets out** of this **Life & Death Situation**
like a **Good Suspense Movie**

& we've **GOT** to Know - This was **GOD** saying - **Behind the Scenes**
"That's ENOUGH - I need this guy's BACK in one piece"

But the Roman Commander still had to figure out what to do

All he knows is - this has something to do with the Jews

So he decides to put Paul in front of the Sanhedrin (Ruling Council)

& we might think - Great, here's another chance for Paul to talk some sense into these guys

So we read in Acts 22:30 (esv)

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet (Sanhedrin), and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

Peter & John had stood here in Ch 2

The Apostles had stood here in Ch 5 - &

Stephen had stood here in Ch 6 before he was murdered

& there was ONE OTHER who stood before this Same Religious Council - w/ the Outcome of a Death Sentence- Jesus Christ

& I just wonder - if the knowledge of all those events -

& Paul's knowledge of HOW this Council actually worked

May've "Influenced" the way Paul approached this trial . . .

Because Paul's gonna do some "Uncharacteristic" things here & another Crucial Event - is going to go VERY BAD

It starts in Acts 23:1 (esv)

1 And looking intently at the council (Gazed Carefully, maybe at each one of them), Paul said, "Brothers (strange - but he KNEW these guys - he was ONE of these guys - these are the same guys that gave him license to arrest Christians - & so - Brothers), I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."

For some reason - this beginning didn't sit well w/ the High Priest

Maybe it was Paul STARING them down -

Maybe it was because he wasn't INTIMIDATED by them -

Maybe it was because Paul KNEW who they really were

But for whatever reason -

the High Priest Responds QUICKLY & AGGRESSIVELY

Acts 23:2 (esv)

2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

This is the response for Blasphemy -

But Paul hadn't been charged with Blasphemy

The High-Priest just immediately goes off on Paul

And Unfortunately - Paul returns FIRE - with FIRE

What you're about to see

is the Great Apostle Paul - BLOWING IT

His response right here - is SINFUL ANGER

Acts 23:3 (esv)

3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"

Easy Big Guy . . . Take a Breath . . .

It's true - it was unlawful for the High Priest to have Paul struck without him being Charged

AND - it's **TRUE** - he was a "**Whitewashed Wall**" (Hypocrite)

But **Paul's response** was equally "**Unlawful**" - He'd **broken** God's **Command** about **not speaking evil** of a Ruler

& **more than that** - Paul is just flat-out - **ANGRY** - **MAD** !!

When Jesus was in this **SAME** position before this **SAME** council
He was **STRUCK** in a similar fashion . . . but his **response** was much
different - & **Jesus** definitely "Kept His Cool" (**Jn 18**)

Here - **Paul responds** in **SINFUL ANGER** - & **the Bible** never hides
the **sins** of its great men - **including Paul**

But **the question** is **Not** "**IS** this a **MISTAKE**"
the **question** is - "**HOW** does Paul **RESPOND** to it"

How **does he respond** to his **Own Error** here ??

Lloyd Olgilvie says:

It is not our mistakes that do us in; it's our pride, keeping us from admitting [our mistakes], that does us in.

So we read Paul's Response in Vs's 4-5

4 Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?"
5 And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.' "

This is Paul's **Immediate Acknowledgement** of his **Wrong**
& **Immediate Self-Correction**

Some Scholars make **excuses** for Paul here
since he **says** he "**Didn't Know**" it was the **High Priest**

but however you slice it - Paul was responding
out of ANGER & FRUSTRATION - & he knew it

Remember - ***It is not our mistakes that do us in; it's our pride, keeping us from admitting our mistakes, that does us in.***

Guys - we Christians are a PEOPLE IN PROCESS

We should be MORE like Jesus today - than we Were a Yr ago

We should be LESS like Jesus today - than we Will Be a Yr from now

& Even Paul the Apostle - was a PERSON IN PROCESS
which should give us HOPE - FOR our own lives

Now - as we continue

we see another interesting approach to this BAD situation

It seems like Paul SAW this little meeting Going BAD FAST -
& so he just SCUTTLES the whole thing

To SCUTTLE a Ship - is to SINK it ON PURPOSE

before things get any worse, & that's what Paul seems to do here

Acts 23:6 (esv)

6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

It's true enough - the reason Paul was on trial

was because of the HOPE & the RESURRECTION of the Dead

But Paul's Faith in those things was certainly NOT

what the Pharisee's faith was

But Paul's motive wasn't to convey a truth about Christ here
it seems his motive was just to get out the situation ALIVE

& so he's going to start an internal battle Within the Sanhedrin
Accomplishing his goal of getting out of there (barely) ALIVE

Acts 23:7-8 (esv)

7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

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

The Sadducees were AGAINST
everything in the "Spiritual Realm" - including the Resurrection

Which is why they were so **SAD - U - SEE**

But the Pharisees Believed in ALL these things

& so - to get the attention OFF himself

Paul PITS these two groups AGAINST each other

Acts 23:9 (esv)

9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"

There's an old saying - that goes like this:

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend"

Paul WAS the Pharisee's Enemy - Until he Spoke Up on THIS subject
Now all of a Sudden - He's their FRIEND

Of course - if Paul would've KEPT talking
the Pharisee's would've turned on him again

But they didn't have a chance to talk anymore
because at this point they were just trying to RIP Paul in HALF

Acts 23:10 (esv)

10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

WOW !! - Did That - Go BAD !!

This is the last time we see the SANHEDRIN in the book of Acts
This is the last time Paul addresses the JEWISH LEADERS
This is the last time the city of JERUSALEM plays a part in Acts

& again - Paul is pulled away to safety
by the ROMAN Guards

This has been a TERRIBLE Time of Ministry in Jerusalem

Every Single thing Paul has tried
has Literally BLOWN UP in his face

Not ONE THING has GONE RIGHT
Not ONE THING has WORKED OUT

& AGAIN - Paul is carried away by the Roman Soldiers
& thrown BACK into Prison - Alone & in the Dark

& he has GOT to be - at this moment - Physically, Emotionally,
& Spiritually - FRIED - SPENT - FINISHED - DONE

Paul's LOVE for the JEWS - & His LOVE for JERUSALEM
Lay in ASHES at his FEET

& At THIS POINT - Paul needs some SERIOUS ENCOURAGEMENT

& so The Lord Himself

Who has been AT WORK Behind the Scenes this Entire time
is going to Personally Bring the ENCOURAGEMENT Paul needs

Acts 23:11 (ESV)

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."

THIS Vs - is the CRUX - The CENTER of this Msg

The Lord Jesus - STOOD by Paul's Side -
& THAT makes ALL the Difference in the World

& the GREEK Clearly Means
Physically Standing by Him - Jesus was THERE - with him

Paul was IN the Fire Bad - & Jesus was THERE with him
Just like the 3 Hebrew Boys thrown into the Fiery Furnace

& the King saw One "Like the Son of Man" IN the Fire with them
& the boys Walked Out - not even smelling like smoke !! (DAN 3)

THIS is THAT Same LORD - In a Similar Fire with Paul

He is WITH HIM - & THAT changes Everything

Isaiah 43:1–3 (esv)

1 . . . “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior . . .

If You have GIVEN your Life to Jesus Christ today

Then He has REDEEMED you, & Called you BY NAME

& He is WITH you - & He Is At Work - Behind The Scenes

& HE will FINISH the Good Work He has Started In You

TRUST Him - MEET Him - Right in the Middle of The FLOOD,

In the FIRE - In the UNCERTAINTY . . .

He’s THERE - LOOK FOR HIM !!

& the FIRST thing Jesus says to Paul - back in Acts 23:11 is

“TAKE COURAGE”

FIVE times this PHRASE is used in the NT

EVERY time it’s JESUS - bringing Comfort to someone

He Used it with a Bedridden Paralytic

He Used it with a Woman who’d been Hemorrhaging 12 Years

He Used it to Calm His Disciples in the Storm-Tossed Sea

He Used it in the Upper Room - To give them Confidence

& He Used it HERE - to Strengthen & Encourage Paul

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& He will use it - with YOU!! - **TAKE COURAGE**
Jesus Says - I AM with you - Do Not be Afraid

I AM here - & I AM AT WORK - Behind the Scenes

& then - Jesus tells Paul - Your Ministry it NOT Finished Yet !!

For Better or Worse - - Jesus says to Paul:

*“as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem,
so you must testify also in Rome”*

If I were Paul - I'd be saying: *“Does that mean I'm gonna have
the SAME RESULTS ? - - - Maybe*

But the Point is - Jesus CONFIRMS Paul's Ministry Here
He's Letting Paul KNOW - This has all been part of the Plan

It doesn't seem like a very GOOD part
But this HAS been PART of God's Plan

& God is NOT FINISHED with Paul yet
& God IS calling Paul to go to ROME

& at this point - Paul KNOWS - the Lord IS WITH Him
& He is AT WORK Behind the Scenes - in these Difficulties

& from THIS Point - Paul NEVER Wavered again -
on his Journey to ROME

& it is going to be a LONG, LONG Journey
with Unbelievable Difficulties & Incredible Setbacks

But Because of THIS Conversation with the Lord . . .

Paul **KNEW** - **he** was going to **Make it to Rome**
No matter WHAT the **circumstances** looked like

Because the **Lord** Himself **said** - ***you MUST Testify of me in ROME***

& so **Paul's Courage** - & **Commitment** - goes **OFF the Chart**
at **THIS** moment - & it **continues** till the **end of the Book**

Pls hear me - Paul's Ministry **FAILURES** in Jerusalem
were somehow **ALL part** of God's **Plan**

& **now** - the Lord says - You're **FINISHED** here (Finally)
It's **time** to get you to **ROME**

& **One** of the **Greatest Truths** we can **learn** from this -
in our **SUCCESS SOAKED Church Culture** - is . . .

Sometimes - **DIFFICULTY & FAILURE** - Might **Actually Mean**
that we are **RIGHT** in the **Middle of God's Will**

100% of **Paul's Efforts** in Jerusalem had **FAILED Miserably**

But **here (V.11)** - the Lord **CONFIRMS** to Paul
that he **IS INDEED** right in the **Middle of God's Will**

& God is Still **AT WORK** - & **Right on Schedule**
Including in the Midst - of the **TRAIN WRECK Failures**

Isn't that **GOOD NEWS** - for those of us who **FOLLOW** the Lord
IN THE MIDST of our **OWN Failures**

Now - I **WISH** I had **TIME** to go through **the rest** of **Ch 23** - **Slowly**
But I'll have to move **QUICKLY** thru it

But it's **So Important** to **SEE God WORKING Behind the Scenes**
that I **have** to **Finish** it - - So, Hold on

First - we have a **DEATH PLOT CONSPIRACY**
as good as any "Action/Suspense Movie made today"

Acts 23:12–15 (ESV)

12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.

14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Bumm Bumm Bummmmm . . . - a Death Plot Conspiracy !!

& Now - **ENTER** - - - **GOD Working Behind The Scenes**

Acts 23:16–22 (ESV)

16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush (1st & only direct mention of Paul's family), so he (Paul's nephew) went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him."

18 So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you."

19 The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"

20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.

21 But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent."

22 So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

Bumm Bumm Bummmmm . . . The PLOT Thickens

The **Jews** were working up a **DEATH PLOT CONSPIRACY**

But **God** was **WORKING Long Before THAT** - To make sure **Paul's Sister & Nephew** were in the **Right Place** at the **Right Time**

Guys - **God** is **NOT** Reacting **AFTER** the Fact to the **Difficulties** in our Lives

BEFORE we even **KNOW** we **HAVE** a Difficulty **God** has already **been AT WORK** - Preparing **the ANSWER** for us

We have **GOT** to **KNOW** that

We have **GOT** to **BELIEVE** that

We have **GOT** to **SEE** that **happening** in our lives

Finally - ENTER - GOD'S PLAN to get Paul headed to Rome

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It's **NOT the way** Paul thought -
& it **WON'T** be **in the Time** frame Paul thought

But **God's Plan** - to get **Paul to Rome**
BEGINS in Earnest - **RIGHT HERE** !

Acts 23:23–24 (ESV)

*23 Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.
24 Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor."*

In the **Middle of the Night** - **470 Roman Soldiers**
Escort Paul out of town - to **Protect him** from **40 Sworn Assassins**

Like it's a GOOD **Bruce Willis Movie** - - - **DIE HARD - JERUSALEM**

Actually - It's Just **GOD AT WORK - Behind the Scenes**
Making Sure **HIS PLAN** for Paul - is **Accomplished**

Then - In **Vs's 25-30** - The **Roman Commander** . . .

Writes a **Carefully Crafted** - **Political SPIN Letter** -
to the **Roman Governor FELIX** - about Paul

& the **REAL Point** of the Letter - is to **cover up** his own **MIS-DEEDS**
in **his treatment** of **Paul** as a Roman Citizen

Which just makes for MORE of a GOOD Movie Script . . .

& then - Finally - we read in Acts 23:31–33 (esv)

31 So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

32 And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him.

33 When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor (Felix), they presented Paul also before him.

**& So BEGINS - Paul's Incredibly LONG - & ARDUOUS
Journey - To ROME**

Guys - **When Paul LEFT Macedonia to Return** to Jerusalem
He was **already 2/3's** the way - to **ROME**

But he **travels 600 Miles** in the **WRONG DIRECTION**

To **Get to Jerusalem** - to **Experience** the **Absolute WORST**
Ministry Catastrophe - of his **LIFE**

& then - it takes **almost 3 years** to get **BACK** to **ROME**
thru some **unbelievable trials** & **difficulties**

& maybe we **have to ask** our selves . . . **WHY??**

Because - - **GOD IS AT WORK - BEHIND THE SCENES**
For **OUR Good** - & For **HIS Glory**

The **ONLY Question** is:

WILL we TRUST Him - & FOLLOW Him - NO - MATTER - WHAT ??

Let's Pray