

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 23 as we continue our study through the Word of God. And, as we have seen, the Gospel message has spread out to the ends of the earth. Now, in saying that, there has been much opposition to the Gospel.

You see, the light of God has shined down upon sinful man and man, loving darkness rather than the light, tries to extinguish the light.

But, even with all that opposition, many have come to the saving faith of Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles even though the Jews were becoming more reluctant and antagonistic towards the Gospel.

Now, to give you a little background that will lead us into our study, Paul has come to Jerusalem during the Feast of Pentecost. Jerusalem was filled with Jews who came to celebrate this feast and Paul had a large audience to share the Gospel message with. His passion was to see his brethren, the Jews, saved!

And as Paul is in the Temple area there were Jews who traveled from Asia and they recognize Paul, and as much as they hated Paul coming to Asia with the Gospel message, in seeing him in Jerusalem, they went nuts!

They accused Paul of bringing a Gentile into the Temple area, past the court of the Gentiles, which he did not do.

Listen to what transpired as we are told in Acts 21:27-30, **“Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.”**

So as they are beating up Paul, all the noise and commotion that was occurring, caught the ears of the Roman soldiers and they came down to rescue Paul and arrest Paul.

Claudius Lysias, the commander of the garrison, thinks Paul is some kind of insurrectionist, but Paul clarifies that he is not.

And as they are carrying Paul up the steps into the Fortress of Antonia, on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, Paul asks the Roman Commander, Claudius Lysias if he could speak to this crowd of Jews who wanted to kill him. And, for whatever reason, Claudius Lysias allows Paul to speak.

Probably speaking Aramaic, Paul shares with his fellow Jews what he was like before he was saved, how he persecuted Christians and was on his way to Damascus to round-up and arrest more Christians.

But, on the road to Damascus Paul had an encounter with Jesus and he surrenders his life to Jesus, asking Him to be Lord and Savior of his life.

Not much of a problem yet but they were probably starting to get a little hot under the collar when Paul started sharing his testimony about Jesus and what Jesus did in his life.

From there Paul goes into his ministry for the Lord and he shares with them the ministry that Jesus gave to him. You see, he was warned by Jesus “**... ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’**” Acts 22:18.

Then, after the warning to get out of town, during Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem after he got saved, Paul is told the next step he is to take, “**... ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’**” Acts 22:21.

Talk about the release of nuclear energy, it was like an atomic bomb went off when Paul said that salvation has come to the Gentiles.

We read in Acts 22:22-23, “**And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air.’**” Acts 22:22-23.

Why did they respond like that? Because they did not believe that Gentiles could be saved unless they became proselytes, they became Jews!

We even saw this in the early church as Gentiles were getting saved and some of the Jews were complaining because they were not circumcised, they didn’t keep the Law of Moses, they did not become Jews!

And we saw this played out in Acts chapter 15 as they had an emergency church meeting in Jerusalem and decided that the Jews themselves could not keep the Law so how could they place such a heavy burden upon the Gentiles in regard to their salvation.

And Peter tells us in Acts 15:11, “**But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’**”

In other words, the Jews are saved just as the Gentiles are saved, by grace through faith in Jesus and not by works, not by the keeping of the Law.

In fact, if you try to live by the Law, try to obtain salvation by the Law, you will die by the Law as James tells us, **“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”** James 2:10.

And let me be clear on this. It is not that the Law is bad, the Law is good. The problem is that we are bad, we break the Law and thus, salvation cannot come by the Law, but it comes through Jesus, it is a gift of God’s grace, which we don’t deserve!

And that should just make sense. Even in the Garden of Eden God gave Adam and Eve one command, don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could eat of everything else but that one tree, that one command, and what did they do? They ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and sin entered this world.

And we think we can do better. Like my Italian family says, ***“Forget about it!”***

Paul put it like this in Ephesians 2:8-9, verses we are all familiar with, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

Now, as all this commotion is going on, the Roman Commander, not understanding Aramaic, wants to know what Paul said to get them going again! They want to kill Paul, again!

So the commander rescues Paul, again, and puts him inside the Fortress of Antonio until they can figure out what to do with this guy, what made the Jews so mad!

And he calls for the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Religious Supreme Court you might say, to come together the next day and share with him the charges they had against Paul, what he did that got them so mad!

That is where we will pick-up our study this evening in Acts chapter 23, beginning in verse 1, as Paul is before these Jewish religious leaders, the Sanhedrin.

ACTS 23

VERSES 1-2

Paul has another chance to share his faith, this time with the Jewish religious leaders. And, if he can get them to come to Jesus, they will share this Good News with the Jewish people. At least, that is what he is hoping for!

Now, as Paul is before the council he addresses them in an informal way. The customary way of addressing this religious body, the Sanhedrin, was “*Rulers and elders of the people. . .*” or “*Brethren and Fathers. . .*”

Why didn't Paul address them that way? Because Paul was once a member of the Sanhedrin, of this council and he probably knew many of these men and thus, he addresses them as equals.

Also, when Paul said “**I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day**” he was not saying he was sinless. Paul recognized his failures and then acted upon it to correct them. In fact, he saw himself as the chief of sinners.

With the light that God had shown Paul, that is how he lived and now, in coming to Christ, the light is even brighter. But, again, Paul did not see himself as sinless.

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 4:4, “**For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.**”

Now, as we see in verse 2, Ananias, the High Priest, was not happy with Paul. Before we get to that, who is this Ananias?

“**Ananias**, the son of Nedebaeus, is not to be confused with the former high priest Annas (Luke 3:2). Ananias reigned for eleven or twelve years, beginning in A. D. 47, and was one of the most cruel, evil, corrupt high priests ever to hold office. According to Josephus, he stole from the common priests the tithes that should have gone to them, beating any who resisted (Antiquities 20.9.2). He did not hesitate to use violence to further his goals; in fact, a few years earlier the Romans had suspected him of complicity in atrocities committed against the Samaritans.

They sent him to Rome to appear before Emperor Claudius, but he was acquitted (Antiquities 20.6.2–3). He was hated by the Jewish nationalists because of his staunchly pro-Roman stand. When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in A. D. 66, Ananias was promptly killed by the Jewish rebels (Wars 2.17.9).” (Source Unknown)

Ananias was not a good man, his conscience was seared with a hot iron so that he did not feel the wrong he was doing anymore and yet, he is coming against Paul for his statement about trying to do what was right according to his conscience!

So the High Priest, Ananias, was infuriated by this statement. He doubtless looked on Paul as an apostate from the Jewish religion, a renegade, a turncoat. How could one who had turned from Judaism to Christianity claim such innocence?

And we see that he “**. . . commanded those who stood by him to strike him [Paul] on the mouth.**”

Now, no matter what his motive was, “This order was illegal, for the Jewish law said, ‘He who strikes the cheek of one Israelite, strikes as it were the glory of God,’ and ‘He that strikes a man strikes the Holy One.’” (Hughes)

And please keep in mind that the verb translated “**to strike**” (*tuptō*) depicts more than a mere slap to the face. It is the same word used in Acts 21:32 to speak of the crowd’s beating of Paul and of the Roman soldiers’ beating of Jesus in Matthew 27:30.

Listen to how Paul responds to this threat.

VERSES 3-5

Now the problem for us is that we don’t know the tone of Paul’s voice as he said these words, but I am sure they were boldly spoken.

The High Priest was to be an example of the Law, not just to help administer it to the people. But Ananias was not a good example!

You see, under the Law we are told, “**If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows.**” Deuteronomy 25:1-2.

Paul was not found guilty of any crime yet because there was no trial, and yet, Ananias wants to strike Paul in the face! That was not legal!

You see, this great leader of the Law, the judge of the Law was breaking the Law and thus Paul says that he or more likely Paul thought it was one of the other members, and thus, they are nothing more than a “**whitewashed wall!**”

And that was a perfect picture to paint for them because of the Feast of Pentecost, when Jerusalem was filled with people. You see, they had many graves around Jerusalem and if you were coming to the Temple to worship, not just on the feast days but any time, and you touched one of these graves, you would become unclean and would have to go through the ceremonial cleansing process.

In other words, you would miss out on the feast that you were coming to celebrate. Thus, they would whitewash these graves, so people could see them, and outwardly they looked nice, but everyone knew that inside of them were dead men's bones!

Jesus picked up on that in Matthew 23:27-28 regarding the religious leaders. He said to them, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”**

That was truly Ananias in a nutshell!

One little footnote regarding this man, Ananias, as Paul said **“God will strike you”** became prophetic as Longenecker tells us, “Paul's words, however, were more prophetic than he realized. Ananias' final days – despite all his scheming and bribes – were lived as a hunted animal and ended at the hands of his own people.”

Now, when the other religious leaders heard what Paul said, they were taken back by his words, **“Do you revile God's high priest?”** Acts 23:4.

And Paul tells us that he did not know that it was the High Priest who spoke to him. How can that be? There are a few ideas and I am not sure if we can clearly say which one is right, especially when we don't know the tone of his voice when he said, "**I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'**" Acts 23:5.

Paul did not recognize that this was the High Priest because . . .

They were at the Fortress of Antonia and Ananias was probably not in his High Priestly garments and obviously not sitting in his chair.

Also, we need to remember that Paul had been away from the council and the high circles of Jewish authority in Jerusalem for more than 20 years. Probably, he simply didn't recognize the man who gave the command to strike him as the High Priest.

Some also feel that Paul was being sarcastic here and basically saying, "I didn't think that anyone who acted in such a manner *could* be the high priest." I don't think that is the issue and I will expound on that a little more in a minute.

Others feel that this took place in the early morning and the torches that were used to light the room made it hard to see. Possible, but I don't lean in this direction as the sole reason.

The last one, and possibly the right one, or, more than likely it is a combination of a few of these, is that Paul's eyesight was poor.

We are told in Galatians 4:14-15, "**And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.**"

And in Galatians 6:11 we are told, **“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!”**

So that is a possibility, or it may be a combination of a few of these, like I have said, that lead Paul to not recognize that it was the High Priest who said these things.

Now what about this idea of Paul being sarcastic towards the High Priest and telling him, *“How in the world could I have known this was the High Priest when he is acting in such a way, a way that was contrary to the Law?”*

I don't agree with that one, as good as it may sound to some. The reason being is that as you look back at Acts 23:1 where Paul said, **“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”** it doesn't fit in with living a good conscience before God, but more of a work of the flesh! So I don't think Paul would have been sarcastic like that before the High Priest.

But this guy was evil, immoral, crooked, a horrible representative of God. As true as that was, he was still the High Priest and Paul knew it was wrong to speak against the High Priest, his position in that manner. And thus, he does apologize for his action, his behavior, (Exodus 22:28).

For us, it is speaking against those in authority over us. You may not agree with what they are doing or saying, you can share these things with them, but you can't put down the person, mock the person, slander the man.

It is as Titus 3:1-8 says, **“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”**

Also, as David had King Saul cornered in a stall of a cave, he was using the bathroom facilities there, and we are told **“Then the men of David said to him, ‘This is the day of which the LORD said to you, “Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.”’ And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Now it happened afterward that David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe. And he said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.’ So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.”** II Samuel 24:4-7.

Something for each of us to think about!

And one more. Paul put it like this in Romans 13:1-7, **“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”** It is interesting that he wrote this at a time when Nero was on the throne in Rome, and Nero was a madman.

Therefore, we are to respect the office and the man in that office, even if we don’t agree with them. I think the Scriptures are clear on that even though I have heard many try to negate this.

VERSES 6-10

I think Paul saw the hand-writing on the wall, this group of religious leaders wanted nothing to do with Jesus, nothing to do with the Gospel, they wanted Paul dead and thus, Paul did not cast his pearls before swine! (Matthew 7:6).

And I believe that the Holy Spirit gave Paul the words to say to these men. Keep in mind that Paul knew his audience, and that is important for us also as we are sharing our faith.

The Pharisees were the conservatives of their day, the keepers of the Law, they took the Scriptures very seriously but erred by adding the traditions of men and editing the Scriptures to fit their ideas and thus, they missed the Messiah!

In John 5:39-40 Jesus said **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”**

On the other end of the spectrum were the Sadducees, the liberals of their day, holding onto the first five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. They denied life after death, denying the resurrection, and thus, they are *SAD-U-SEE!*

Paul, knowing he is not going to beat these men, decides to divide them by saying he is a Pharisee and he believes in the resurrection, which was true!

The center of Paul’s Gospel was the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 15:3-4, **“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”**

Or as The Amplified Bible puts it, **“For I passed on to you first of all what I also had received, that Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for our sins in accordance with [what] the Scriptures [foretold], [Isa 53:5-12.] That He was buried, that He arose on the third day as the Scriptures foretold, [Ps 16:9,10.]”**

Now, when the Pharisees heard what Paul said, they responded positively, ***“Right on dude!”*** Okay, that was a paraphrase!

But, when the Sadducees heard Paul speak of the resurrection, they responded negatively, ***“No way, dude!”*** Again, a paraphrase!

So you have the fundamentalists and the liberals, these two religious groups, fighting with each other. And Paul is just watching all this.

And as things began to get out of control, the Roman Commander once again calls his men to go and rescue Paul before he is torn in pieces!

Think about the opportunity that Paul had and these religious leaders were not open to what Paul wanted to share with them. Thus, as Paul was brought back into the barracks, I think he was down.

He had his chance, his golden opportunity and now he probably thought he blew it. Disappointment, discouragement, feeling like a failure, all these things are going around and around in Paul's mind.

Now you may be thinking how in the world do I know that is how Paul felt? Look at the next verse!

VERSE 11

On the night following his failure before these religious leaders, the Lord tells Paul to “**be of good cheer.**” He is encouraging Paul that he did what he was supposed to do, he shared his faith in Jerusalem even though they did not receive it, and now he is going to go to Rome to share his faith, to be a witness to them of Jesus being their Messiah also.

Isn't it interesting how we tend to live in the past failures and we are discouraged, depressed, down. Well, I don't know if love is the right word, but we do *LIVE* in our past failures. And when we are living there Satan loves to jump on that band wagon and take advantage of the situation that we are in.

And we begin to wonder if we have disqualified ourselves from service, if we are just too far gone. We failed and that is it. No, it is not! What did the Lord tell Paul, “**Be of good cheer.**” And I believe He is saying the same to us!

When did the Lord come to Paul and stand by him? It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him.

I like the way that Morgan spoke regarding this situation. He said, “Bold, courageous, fearless during the day, the night of loneliness finds the strength spent, and the enemy is never slow to take advantage of that fact.”

Folks, it is during those dark times that the Lord will come to us and comfort us if we allow Him to.

It is as Paul said from a Roman prison in a letter to Timothy, “**At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!**” II Timothy 4:16-18.

Never forget that, all may forsake you, but the Lord will stand with you, especially during those times of darkness to strengthen you!

And the Lord tells Paul that his work is not over, he has work to do for the Lord in Rome! Which Paul desired to do as he said in Acts 19:21, “**When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’**”

It is as Spurgeon wrote, “A divine decree ordains for you greater and more trying service than as yet you have seen. A future awaits you, and no power on the earth or under the earth can rob you of it; therefore be of good cheer.”

In other words, “**Be of good cheer.**”

VERSES 12-15

Isn't it interesting how the enemy keeps coming after us and he does not give up!

Here we see a plot that was formed to have Paul killed. Amazingly, over forty men took this oath and the Greek word that is used is ANATHEMATOZO. It is a word that speaks of a person who binds themselves under a curse if they do not fulfill this oath that they have made.

In other words, “May God do so to us and more if we eat or drink anything before Paul is put to death!” That is a pretty serious oath, nothing to eat or drink until they kill Paul!

Now to help pull this off they get the members of the Sanhedrin to play along with them. They are to tell the Roman Commander that they want to speak to Paul again regarding some issues!

I am always amazed at those who try to keep the Law and yet will break it when it fits what they want to do, and that is exactly what we are seeing here.

Think about it. These keepers of the Law hated Paul so much, hated what he stood for so much, that they were willing to break the Law and lie, make up a story to get Paul out and kill him!

Yes, they had a zeal for God, but that zeal was without knowledge. And if they thought about, just a little, they would have seen that God was not going to be honored by their actions? And yet, today, many do the same, they have a zeal for God but without knowledge.

Thus, the result of their actions is given to us in II Corinthians 4:4 where Paul tells us that these are the people, **“whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”** You see, they were not serving God by their actions, but the Devil!

How is Paul going to escape this one? Please, remember that God said to Paul that he was going to Rome, so if God is for Paul, then nothing is going to stop Paul from getting to Rome, not even these zealous men!

Look at what God does.

VERSES 16-22

Make no mistake about it, faith must have legs to walk, you might say. Trusting in the promises of God.

What promise? Remember what God told Paul, **“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”** Acts 23:11.

Thus, Paul was going to Rome. Nothing was going to stop him from reaching the destination that God has set for him.

Here we see Paul’s nephew hear of this plot by these men against his uncle Paul, and he goes and tells his uncle Paul what they are planning to do to him. The providence or divine intervention of God comes shining through here!

And let me say this, it is not likely that either his sister or the nephew were believers, for that certainly would have shut them out of the official religious circle in Jerusalem if they were.

Keep in mind that is where his nephew heard of this plot.

So once Paul hears of this plot, he calls over one of the Roman Centurions and tells him that his nephew has something to say to the Commander.

Thus, he brings this young man to Claudius Lysias who then takes him aside and inquires what he has to say.

Paul's nephew then explains this plot by these over forty men with the backing of the Sanhedrin to kill Paul.

As Claudius Lysias hears all these things he told this young man not to say a word to anyone about what he has said, what he knows regarding this plot against Paul.

Why did Claudius Lysias want to protect Paul? Because Paul was a Roman citizen and according to their law, he had to have a fair trial and he was responsible for Paul's protection as we will see in the next few verses.

Now, as much as the hand of God was upon the life of Paul, the same is true for each of us. God has a plan, He has a purpose for each of our lives and thus, He wants us to walk accordingly, by faith! He wants us to trust in Him no matter how difficult the situation may be.

In other words, "***Be of good cheer!***"

VERSES 23-24

I think God is showing Paul that he is secure as there are going to be 470 soldiers protecting one man, Paul! Just a little overkill!

And think about it, our own President doesn't have that many men following him, protecting him at one time!

And keep in mind that these are not your average soldiers. These 200 soldiers were Roman Legionnaires; they were the most formidable troops of antiquity.

Not only that. Then there were seventy horsemen from the cavalry.

And if that was not enough, there were 200 lightly armed men carrying spears or javelins.

You see, God wants Paul to go to Rome and thus, He is going to get him there no matter what may come his way, no matter what kind of oath these men took.

So, at 9:00 pm, under the cover of night, they took off to go to Caesarea, where Felix the Governor was staying.

Of this governor, Felix, he was the only slave in Roman history to become a governor. And make no mistake about it, Felix was a cruel character who received his appointment because his brother, Pallos, was a friend of Caesar Nero.

Of Felix, the brilliant Roman historian, Tacitus, said, "He executes the prerogatives [privileges] of a king with the spirit of a slave," for although he was in power as governor, Felix retained a slave's mentality of getting back at the world for all the abuses it had heaped upon him.

And now Paul was going to see this guy! Again, it may not look good from a human standpoint, but God is going to get Paul to Rome and He will not fail!

But who did fail here? Remember those over forty men who would not eat or drink until Paul was put to death, they failed, and they failed big time!

So what happened to these over forty men who said they would not eat or drink until Paul was put to death, assassinated?

I don't think they starved to death nor did they die of dehydration. The Scriptures don't tell us, but I believe they broke this oath they took because they could not carry it out.

Yes, they were willing to die for their cause until death looked them in the eye and then they changed their mind, their faith was not real.

What they believed was not something they were willing to die for even though they were totally wrong in what they were doing, what they did believe!

Also, keep in mind that the rabbis allowed for four types of vows to be broken: “vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint.” (Longenecker)

In other words, there were exclusions allowing for almost any contingency.

Now for us as Christians, if God has called us to do something, may none of the things that may come our way move us off the course that God has set for us.

Listen to these words of Paul written from a Roman prison. He wrote, **“according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”** Philippians 1:20-23.

Again, *“Be of good cheer!”*

VERSES 25-30

Along with Paul, Claudius Lysias sends a letter to Felix, the Governor of the area, who lived in Caesarea.

And Claudius gives a summation of what transpired, what happened to this man named Paul and why he was ending up in Caesarea by Felix.

The interesting thing here is that he doesn't mention that he was going to have Paul scourged, that he had Paul in chains, that he had mistaken Paul for an Egyptian renegade!

What you do see as you read this letter is that Claudius Lysias speaks of the good things he did for Paul, a Roman citizen.

Now we can't negate the fact that he did rescue Paul a few times from death, so in that regard he did do good.

But you can clearly see he did embellish the story, just a little.

As he concludes this letter to Felix he ends with why Paul was there, the plot by the Jews to kill him and that the accusers would also be coming before Felix to state why they wanted Paul dead.

Their problem was it had nothing to do with Roman law but their own religious beliefs, which were in error.

And what we will see is that they will try to make it a matter of Roman law but that won't fly! Paul broke no Roman law and thus, he should have been a free man, but, as we will see, that does not happen. But Paul does make it to Rome, not exactly how he thought but God did get him there!

I wonder how many times we have things planned out, what we are going to do, what is going to happen, and God accomplishes the task completely differently than what we thought. May we surrender to His will because He has what is best and we can rest in that!

VERSES 31-32

Antipatris was located about 35-40 miles from Jerusalem and was a Roman military post that was often used as a place for travelers to stop and rest as they traveled between Jerusalem and Caesarea.

This military post was built by Herod the Great and named in honor of his father, Antipater. Now traveling this distance for these foot soldiers was grueling, but they made it very quickly.

Now, why did the 400 soldiers, the 200 soldiers who were Roman Legionnaires being the most formidable troops of antiquity and the 200 lightly armed men carrying spears or javelins return to Jerusalem and only the 70 horsemen continue on to Caesarea?

Because the area between Jerusalem and Antipatris was dangerous, inhabited by Jews and they wanted Paul dead. Also, the terrain was tough and easy to hide for an ambush.

But once you get past this area things opened up and it was safe for traveling, for the most part. You could see if someone was coming at you. Thus, the cavalry brings Paul the rest of the way to Caesarea, as we will see.

VERSES 33-35

As they brought the letter from Claudius Lysias and Paul to Felix, Felix asked Paul where he was from.

Why did Felix ask Paul that question?

Because he wanted to know if he had the jurisdiction to hear this case and once he found out that Paul was from Cilicia, Felix had the authority to try Paul's case.

Now he is going to wait for Paul's accusers to come and then the trial will begin. Until they came, Paul was kept in Herod's Praetorium or the Governors official residence. Paul would spend two years in protective custody on the beach!

Now, as great as that sounds, Paul was not a man who liked to be kept from bringing the Gospel message to people. So how do you think Paul felt at this time? Maybe he was discouraged? Maybe down? Maybe frustrated by all these things.

But maybe he was just trusting in the Lord, the promises that the Lord made to him! Remember what the Lord said in Acts 23:11, **“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”** Thus, he was going to Rome, he just stayed in this beautiful seacoast city for two years before he was off for Rome.

Also, keep in mind that this would be Paul’s first opportunity to speak to someone at this level of authority, the governor!

And remember, this was the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise made to Paul some 20 years earlier; that he would bear the name of Jesus to kings. In Acts 9:15-16 we are told, **“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’”**

Paul knew that God is faithful and what He said He was able to bring to pass!

It is as Paul said in II Thessalonians 3:3, **“But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.”** That is what the Lord is doing here.

Now, if you are afraid, fearful, troubled, discouraged, listen and follow what Peter tells us as we close this evening.

He said in I Peter 5:6-11, **“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

God is working in us and through us and Satan is working against us and trying to discourage us. ***“Be of good cheer, God is in control!”***

Next time we will see Paul’s trial before his accusers, the Jews!