

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Paul's Journey from Jerusalem to Rome: To Caesarea
Acts 23

I would like to share a personal testimony of the faithfulness of God

On Sunday May 7, 1989...my 34th birthday...I was born of the Spirit of God

The son of Depression era parents who was schooled on "Don't waste anything, not food or money or anything or time"

Soon thereafter I was remorseful, feeling that I had wasted 34 years of my life

I mentioned that to an elder in the Church, Kelly Kappen, who gave me Joel 2:25-26

I took that as a promise of God and now, here we are on Sunday May 7, 2023...

my 34th spiritual birthday...I start my 69th trip around the sun

Scorecard: 34 years dead in sin, 34 years alive to God by grace thru faith in Jesus

Last time...given his heart's desire, Paul testified of Jesus Christ to his kinsmen

The mob seeking to kill him fell silent and paid very close attention to everything Paul said (in Hebrew) as he shared his personal testimony

Paul very clearly identified the God of Israel as Jesus of Nazareth...without incident

But when he said one word, "Gentiles", pandemonium again

This time...in Acts 23, starting in Ch 22:30, Paul is put before the Council of the Jews so the

Roman chief captain can understand what had happened the day before

And trouble just keeps coming...as does the comfort of the Lord Jesus Christ

v1 Paul is looking at trouble..."peril by my own countrymen" again (2 Cor 11:26a)

He "earnestly beholds"/gazes intently upon...inspecting as if taking inventory...
and addresses the Council of the Jews (Sanhedrin, 70 elders)

Men and brethren...I am a Jew too

I have a clear conscience before God, I have lived my life with a good moral
consciousness

Which did not sit well with the audience who despises him

v2 The high priest Ananias

- the highest bidder for the sale of the title/office by the Romans
- a wicked, corrupt, devious man...a "bad actor"
- a Sadducee...a liberal elite
- would probably feel right at home in the house of Biden
or the house of Clinton or the house of Soros

commanded his goonies standing by Paul to punch him in the mouth

"smite" = repeated blows (there is another Greek word for a single blow)

ie. each of them probably got a shot at Paul

- v3 Paul is feisty and calls out the crook calling the shots for being a hypocrite/actor,
a whited washed wall...Jesus-style
Matt 23:27-28 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like
unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward,
but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.
Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within
ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

You dare judge me according to the Law while breaking the Law yourself!
God with pummel you as you had me pummeled!

Is what Paul is saying true, in word and in tone?
How was the truth received?

- v4 Hypocrites don't like the truth being spoken about them or to them.
They don't acknowledge the truth but instead deflect/redirect/divert the attention back on
the one speaking the truth

Nothing new under the sun...this is the "politics" of fallen man

Diverting the penetrating spotlight away from themselves, the goonies put the focus back
on Paul – "You dare revile God's high priest!?"

Is this God's high priest?

No, this is a corrupt politician heading up a false priesthood oppressing the
common people...a child of the devil

Who is God's High Priest?

Jesus Christ

- v5 Paul responds by taking the High Road, apologizing for his "ignorance" and taking
personal responsibility for his actions with a clear conscience before God (v1)

I did not know this was the high priest

either because his "thorn in the flesh" (bad eyes)

or because Ananias, not in the Temple, is not all decked out in his regalia

or because Paul "is not from around these parts" any longer and out of touch with
the religio-political scene in Jerusalem ie who was the highest bidder this
year

I apologize, I should not have said what I said because the Law says I am not to speak
badly of the ruler of the people (quoting Ex 22:28)...even if he is bad!

v6 The “introductions” out of the way, Paul looks around and discerns who is in the room

1. Sadducees

- the liberal left
- the secular humanists and unbelievers
- the social elites
- “Democrats”

2. Pharisees

- the conservative right
- the strictest religious sect of Judaism
- “Republicans”

Paul is the servant of God; who are the un-friendlies surrounding him?

- the liberals and the conservatives
- the secular humanist Left and the self-righteous religious Right
- the “Democrats” and the “Republicans”

Take note, follower of Jesus Christ in 2023!

To think either end of the political spectrum is friendly is naïve;
all both care about is power

Paul, the servant of God, is following Jesus, being Spirit-led

Matt 10:17-20 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

So Paul does as he was inspired to write to the Corinthians

1 Cor 12:31a But covet earnestly the best (spiritual) gifts

What is the best spiritual gift in this situation?

A word of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8a)

Given the best gift and the words of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes his opening statement

- his people – a Jew
- his religious affiliation – Pharisee
- his heritage – son of a Pharisee, a legacy Pharisee
- his hope – resurrection of the dead
- his crime – being a Pharisee and sticking to his beliefs

“Money!!”...the perfect answer for this crowd!

Prov 25:11 A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver.

v7-8 Immediately there is confusion in the camp of the enemy and, “losing sight” of Paul, they turn on themselves

Sadducees

- without hope...not believe resurrection from the dead
- anti-spiritual...not believe the existence of angels and spirits/demons (Luke 10:17-20)
- not believe the Word of God
- Woke

v

Pharisees

- believe the resurrection of the dead
- believe in the existence of angels and demons...”spiritual”
- believe their (Rabbis) interpretation of the Word of God rather than the Author’s interpretation
- “Moses nationalists”

The perfect gift for the situation and the perfect words from the Holy Spirit destroyed the unity of the enemy and divided them...Jesus-style

Matt 10:34 **Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.**

Luke 11:17 **Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth.**

v9-10 There was a great cry by the audience

The Conservatives (Pharisees) stirred up the confusion by

- striving/”fighting fiercely”
- declaring Paul’s innocent of any wrong-doing
He is one of us!
If he is guilty, we are all guilty!
- playing the “Gamaliel card” (also one of their own)

Acts 5:38-39 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Which obviously infuriated the Liberals (Sadducees) because the chief captain had reason to believe Paul would be torn in pieces unless he intervened again to rescue this Roman citizen under his protection

So into the Antonia Fortress goes Paul...into safety on Roman ground

John 18:28 Then led they (the Jews) Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall (in Antonia Fortress), lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

Paul's desire of his heart to bear witness of Jesus Christ to his kinsmen the Jews has not gone well, the results are nothing like what he had hoped for

No revival among the Jews
Only trouble and violence
Unfinished...ready to share so much Truth with love, but abjectly rejected

v11 Paul is embroiled in an intense spiritual battle

The devil is screaming at him,

- telling him that he is a failure
- discouraging him
- trying to make him fearful

But God...Jesus is there with him

Matt 28:20

Heb 13:5

And Jesus silences the voice of the enemy

Be of good cheer Paul

do not listen to the liar and slanderer!

fear not and be not discouraged but encouraged

for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem

faithfully done what I sent you to do

the center of the Jewish world

so must thou bear witness also at Rome

faithfully do what I am sending you to do

the center of the Gentile world

per My plan (Rom 1:16-17)...the "driver" being persecution

Paul has no fruit to show for his witness to the Jews

But the Lord Jesus Christ did not think Paul was a failure!

Bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, being told in every city by the Holy Spirit that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem, Paul was faithful to obey his Master

(Acts 20:24) and (Acts 21:13)

Paul was not responsible for the results of his witness, he was responsible to be faithful to be a witness – he was greatly successful!

As was Samuel,

1 Sam 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

of whom God Himself testified

Jer 15:1 Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, *yet* my mind *could* not *be* toward this people: cast *them* out of my sight, and let them go forth.

Our calling is not to save the world...for we cannot

Our calling is not to establish a Christian nation in this world...for we cannot

Our calling is not to save souls...for we cannot

Our calling is to be faithful to witness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the parts of His Body whereby His work of seeking and saving the lost continues

I've had a very interesting text and voice exchange with my atheist-since-9-years-old sister this morning

Wishing me a happy birthday, led into The Golden Rule and a little of my personal testimony

She has always shut me down hard and fast but did not this time

But when I asked to sit down and share our perspectives on why things are they way they are (she knows the world is all messed up and that mankind cannot fix it), she gently said she just couldn't do that, she is "one way"... not open to another perspective different than hers

Note: read *Left Behind*...

To be continued or are my siblings my "Jerusalem"?

The results belong to Jesus because He alone knows the hearts of men and He alone can change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh

The world measures success by numbers

The Lord of all the earth measures success by faithfulness

So don't listen to the liar whose *m.o.* is fear and discouragement, listen to the voice of Jesus!

Be comforted and encouraged by the voice of Jesus, as was Paul.

Now Paul knows what is next in God's plan for his life – Rome

Another desire of his heart, after going to Jerusalem

Rom 15:23 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you

Is the trouble over for Paul?

- v12-15 Forty Jews formed a conspiracy (evil plot) to murder Paul, a man of God, binding themselves with an oath/vow to not eat or drink until they did
They went to the high priest and the elders with their conspiracy, essentially giving them orders to be accomplices in this plot:
- deceive the Roman chief captain by asking for some clarification from Paul
 - “bait” to lure Paul out of the Roman fortress so the conspirators can kill him

Hard to imagine a more easy sale than this one!

This kind of thing was right in the corrupt high priest’s wheelhouse!

“You want to do dirty?! Oh, I am all in!”

But God...

- v16-19 By the Providence of God, Paul’s nephew overheard the entire plot and went straight to Uncle Paul with information about the devil’s scheme to kill him
Paul asked one of the centurions to take his nephew to the chief captain with something “for his ears only”

The centurion did as asked by Paul and the chief captain obliged the request

Why do anything this prisoner wants?

Paul is a Roman citizen, a free-born Roman citizen

Acts 22:29 still looms in Antonia Fortress

- v20-22 Paul’s nephew spills the beans on the Jewish conspiracy to deceive the chief captain and to murder his uncle
No doubt grateful to have this info, the chief captain quietly dismisses Paul’s nephew, exhorting him to keep all this on the down low so the conspiracy can be thwarted

And the chief captain, a man of action, jumps into action

- v23-24 The chief captain summons

- 2 centurions
- 200 soldiers
- 70 horsemen...a cavalry attachment
- 200 spearmen...guards armed with “shoulder artillery”

to smuggle Paul out of Jerusalem at 9am

and escort him to Caesarea, Roman HQ for Judea, and Governor Felix

v25-30 And the chief captain composed a letter for Felix explaining what this was about to be carried to Caesarea with Paul

It is a rather self-serving, self-promoting account of the events by the chief captain, whose name is Claudius Lysias

v27 I rescued him when I learned he was a Roman citizen
("Yeah me!" but a lie)

v29 I knew something was not right, I perceived this was a Jewish matter and not a Roman matter

("Yeah me!" but embellishing on the truth
or a lie if they were speaking Hebrew)

v30 I've told his accusers to come to you, I've got everything buttoned up here
("Yeah me!" but a lie because he has not yet spoken to the conspirators)

v31 Paul is whisked away under the cover of darkness, as far as Antipatris

- Roman city built by Herod the Great and named in honor of his father Antipater
- 40 miles from Jerusalem and 20 miles from Caesarea...2/3 of the way

So begins Paul's journey to Rome, a journey ordained by Jesus Christ Himself (v11)
And he will get there, no matter how much trouble lies along the way because
a man of God
in the will of God
is immortal
until his work is done

v32-33 The following morning in Antipatris, the 2 centurions task the 200 spearmen to deliver Paul and the letter to Felix while they, the 200 soldiers, and the 70 horsemen return to Antonia Fortress

v34-35 Mission Accomplished

Paul is delivered safely from harm
Felix will adjudicate the problem

Now, Paul is

- a prisoner
- waiting on the Lord in the safety of Herod the Great's courtroom in his palace
(very nice digs right on the Med Sea)

Thoughts regarding our walk with the Lord in these last of the last days

1. Conspiracies

Are conspiracies real or imagined?

Very real...starting in Gen 3 and lasting until Rev 20:15

Is “But God” (the Providence of God) real or imagined?

Very real...in many more ways and times than we even know

The Living God is well aware of every conspiracy and they will all fail, even be used by God to accomplish His purpose

Don’t get wrapped up in conspiracies...don’t waste valuable time and energy when time is short as the fashion of the world is passing away

Get wrapped up in Jesus Christ and in His work of seeking and saving the lost

2. Persecution...not an ear-tickling truth

Trouble/Persecution does not mean we are not in the will of God (i.e. a punishment of God)

Trouble/Persecution usually means we are right in the center of God’s will!

John 15:18-20 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;*

2 Tim 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Phil 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake

Going against the flow of this world (in which we are strangers simply passing thru as citizens of the kingdom of God) by following Jesus comes with trouble/persecution

Expect it

Get used to it

God does allow His children to be put in jail because He has work to do there too

3. Roadmap in dark times in the Days of Noah and the Days of Lot (entire chapter in view)

When confronted by trouble, when in dark times, take the High Road where Jesus walks,
the scenery and companionship is much better!

Be discerning, spiritually aware and alert

Covet the best spiritual gift for every situation

Exercise that gift by faith

Look to Jesus, not to the results

Listen to Jesus, not to the liar

Know that Jesus is literally standing with you even if you cannot see Him as the will of God
is accomplished

Trust the Lord with all the details

His hows, whens wheres and whys will be radically different than yours

He is Almighty and we are pathetically weak

Heb 6:12 ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience
inherit the promises.

Ps 27:14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine
heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Be faithful i.e. successful in the eyes of God

Be of good cheer

Finish well your course

a man of God

in the will of God

is immortal

until his work is done