

Text: Acts 21:17-23:35, Title: A Daylight Fight and a Nightlight Flight, Date/Place: The Road, 10.29.17, AM

- A. **Opening illustration: Gladiator: lots of daytime fights, but mainly his “fight” with Commodus. His planned nighttime escape failed him and cost him his life, but Paul’s similar story only has a different end because of his different God.**
- B. **Background to passage:** After meeting with the Ephesian elders in Miletus and traveling down the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Paul finally reaches his destination of Jerusalem. It’s a whirlwind few days as events unfold over two and a half chapters that land him in another town in jail. It’s an account of the advance of the gospel, the providential hand of God, and His deliverance to demonstrate the delivering power of God and commitment to His purposes even through the suffering of His saints.
- C. **Main thought:** A look at the events that took Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea

A. **Reception and rejoicing (v. 21:17-26)**

- 1. Paul, as he desired to do, met with the church first. He told them of all the wonderful things that God had done through his ministry. The other thing that occurred here was the anticipation of division in the church. The rumors and misconceptions of Paul’s ministry had spread, and the wise elders at Jerusalem wanted to put to death the problem by having Paul affirm that believing Jews may continue to keep the law if they wanted, just not as a basis for justification. It was testimony that the law was good, and that the history of the God of Israel was not being forgotten.
- 2. Argumentation
- 3. **Illustration:** I love those videos of soldiers returning to unsuspecting loved ones, one this week on AFV
- 4. Testimony is important in the church today. The glorification of God has been done throughout the scripture as people hear about the wonderful works of God. The church is mutually built up and edified at how God is working in your life. It is helpful to share. It adds to our life together. Division within a church is fearful destroyer of people’s lives and the testimony of Christ. We must work diligently to prevent it. The gospel fuels unity in sanctified lives, and so it is the force to empower and call us to peace. Sometimes it means going the extra mile for a brother in Christ, or thousands of brothers. It also will mean for us that we overlook wrongs against us, forgiving as Christ forgave.

B. **Uproar in the temple (v. 21:27-36)**

- 1. Paul was doing what the elders advised, and some Jews that he had preached to in Asia saw him and tried to kill him by announcing that he was the one teaching against the law, the people, and the temple. Uproar and rioting followed (as usual) and the Romans had to step in for rescue. He’s just trying to do the right thing, not even preaching the gospel in this scenario. Satan is always trying to stop the gospel witness and advance. God is sovereign, using Satan for His own purposes. But we should expect hardship for the gospel.
- 2. Argumentation
- 3. **Illustration:** if you deny a sovereign God for people on the front end of a tragedy or trial, you have no sovereign to offer them at all on the bad end.
- 4. The gospel brought this on when it changed Paul’s life. Their anger was brought about because of their legalism and unbelief in the gospel. This is another testimony of God’s delivering hand that we have seen in the life of Paul (and other apostles). God’s providence covers every aspect of our lives. Even as Paul was being dragged away, God was orchestrating matters to precision. When things are in an uproar in your life, know that God’s providence reigns. Someone treating you unjustly at work? Health is failing? Crops failing? God’s in it. He is working it for his glory and good to those that love God and are following Christ.

C. **Speech from the stairs (v. 21:37-22:21)**

1. One of the 10,000 things that God was doing with the riot and rescue was to provide an opportunity for Paul to give his testimony as a witness to the gospel to the whole crowd! A short exchange with the tribune, and Paul was given permission to speak, and a short hand motion and use of Hebrew gained him a hearing. This is the second of three times that Paul recounts his conversion in Acts. Here he begins with his life as a Pharisee trained by the greatest of rabbis. He authenticates his testimony by the presence of men on the Sanhedrin who issued letters for imprisoning and killing believers. The story of Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the indication that the resurrected Jesus was the Righteous One to come was communicated with clarity to a mob that just tried to kill him. Of course, when he brought the Gentiles into it, the witnessing time was over.
2. Argumentation
3. [Illustration: Pray for Reuben, and my witness to him.](#)
4. Everyone has a story. We are called to meet people where they are in their story, and non-judgmentally, lovingly, but clearly intersect their story with the gospel. Sometimes that takes a while, sometimes it takes minutes. Your story doesn't have to be flashy or dramatic from sinner to saint in the eyes of the world, but the sinner to saint truth applies to every believer here. Share your story! Share the gospel! Love sinners! God does, and sent his Son to demonstrate it. Go be my witnesses. We must be bold. We must grow. Your story may not have come to the point where you have been changed by Christ. You may not have experienced being born again that comes with faith and repentance. As I told Reuben, there is nothing stopping you from trusting Christ right now, and beginning that relationship with him. His forgiveness and perfection is waiting to be exchanged for your faith in the cross as your only hope and your repentance from sin and fresh and continuing allegiance to him.

D. **Avoidance of flogging (v. 22:22-29)**

1. This is the second instance of God's delivering hand in this text. About to be laid open again (I suppose he has had enough by then), he played his Roman citizen card again. Roman citizens were not to be tortured or punished without due process. The "cat of nine tails" is not a toy.
2. Argumentation
3. [Illustration: Piper's book *Desiring God*, in retrospect he said that he would never even title something that those from another religion could rob, but always something that points directly to Jesus.](#)
4. There are times when God doesn't deliver us from our troubles. There are also times that he does. There are many times we are delivered and don't even know it. I would submit to you that in times that we are delivered that we give thanks even more so. We make trite statements like, "the Lord just wasn't done with me yet," then go on living as though he is. Don't just credit "the man upstairs" or "someone was looking out for me that day." Say, Christ, my deliverer rescued me from the jaws of death or great suffering. The crucible of hardship and pain shapes us, but look for ways to allow deliverance to shape us as well. Let it grow our gratefulness and our witness to his power and grace.

E. **Examination by the Sanhedrin (v. 22:30-23:11)**

1. Again, another deliverance. The tribune still not knowing what to make of the disturbance, brought Paul before the Sanhedrin to watch him be questioned by them. After Paul's first comments, he is slapped in the mouth. A little anger probably got the better of him here. Probably because it was an informal meeting, and poor eyesight, Paul really couldn't tell it was the high priest. Even after the admission of his error with accompanying scripture, Paul knew he was probably in deep trouble. So, seizing the opportunity, he started a theological dispute with a double meaning. Dispute turned into and off to confinement he goes with the Romans again.
2. Argumentation
3. [Illustration: A friend of mine put on his Facebook status last night that he had one of those "reading the bible with your kids at night, and God puts you in your place with the scripture" moments.](#)
4. We are supposed to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Anger is a form of selfishness in most cases, because we don't get what we want. Often some use anger to gain what they want through intimidation. As well, all of us have our pressure points, but when we cross a line of sin that we are prone to in our lives, we must be quick to let the gospel convict us, and repent. Christ came to bear all the wrongs that would be done against us. No need to feel like we have to be the element of judgment or retribution on God's behalf. He can take care of his own punishments. We also have done Christ injustice many times over vs what man has done to us. With this understanding of the gospel, that a perfect man took your injustice, and you being transformed by belief in this man, your love for him will propel you to make things right with those you offend as quickly and humbly as possible.

F. **Imprisonment and plot to kill (v. 23:12-22)**

1. After the fray, the Jews realized that they had been tricked, and were overcome by anger as well. When you swear and take an oath to not eat or drink until you kill someone, you are pretty angry, and pretty determined. Again, the providential hand of God put Paul's nephew somewhere to overhear of the plot, then have enough courage to come to the Roman guard and convey it, and the guard listen!
2. [Illustration: Kevin's life on the inside, email from this week about the ease of the Christian life in prison](#)
3. I am going to make to points that I think are reasonable, but speculative. You know that Paul was probably in the jail evangelizing so that all the guards and prisoners know why he is there, but we have talked about evangelism enough for this morning. You also know that the church in Jerusalem was praying for Paul, and doing everything in their power to keep tabs on the situation (that may be how Paul's nephew was able to get close). But you know they prayed for him. Paul believed that because of the prayers of the saints, imprisonment and suffering can be turned into deliverance. But how should we pray for those who suffer? Deliverance, yes. Suffer well, yes. Give a witness, yes. See the glory of God in the face of Christ, yes. Be transformed, yes. **"Prayer moves the muscles of omnipotence."** -Tozer

G. **Transport and escort to Caesarea (v. 23:23-35)**

1. The final deliverance came as the tribune ordered two centurions to gather up 470 trained Roman soldiers to march seventy miles to Caesarea starting at 9:00 pm. Don't you just love long, crisp nighttime walks that cover 70 miles. That's two long days of fast hiking. When God delivers, he does it in style sometimes. Wasn't anyone going to get to Paul that night. Of course, the tribune was in charge of Paul's safety with his own life on the line, so sending half of Jerusalem's soldiers was a sacrifice he was willing to take for a day or so. What a show of force for God's man.
2. [Illustration:](#)
3. Paul would be physically safe for that time. Caesarea Maritima was/is an absolutely beautiful beachside town on the cool, clear, blue water of the Mediterranean. So, in the space of about four days, Paul went from a free missionary machine, to a prisoner of Roman only for his own personal protection. However, this would offer more opportunity for witness, more opportunity for Luke to document eyewitness testimony for the gospel he was writing, and two long years of house arrest, then a boat ride, ship wreck, snake bite, and martyrdom in Rome.

A. **Closing illustration:**

B. Recap

C. Invitation to commitment

Additional Notes

- **Is Christ Exalted, Magnified, Honored, and Glorified?**