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ACTS

Chapter 23

A 40 TO 1 DEATH PLOT

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In our last teaching – of **Acts Chapter 22** - Paul had asked the commander if he could speak to the people and was granted permission.
 - 1. He shared his testimony and they listened until he mentioned the word Gentile and they went “ballistic” and demanded that he be beaten.
 - 2. As that was about to be carried out, Paul asked the Centurion standing by him if it was lawful for them to beat a Roman Citizen without a trial.
 - a) Paul of course, knew that it was not, so they brought him - once again - before the commander for interrogation.
 - (1) The commander had purchased his citizenship and was more than a little “freaked” when he found out that Paul was a natural citizen and he had treated him so badly.
 - (2) The commander suddenly had a change of heart and released him from his shackles and commanded the Sanhedrin to appear before him so he could determine just exactly why they were so upset with Paul.
- B. That is where we pick up our study.
 - 1. ...Paul has returned to Jerusalem, where, following two riots and one near scourging, he finds himself standing before the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court.

II. **ACT 23:1-5 NKJV** THEN PAUL, LOOKING EARNESTLY AT THE COUNCIL, SAID, "MEN **AND** BRETHREN, I HAVE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD UNTIL THIS DAY." (2) AND THE HIGH PRIEST ANANIAS COMMANDED THOSE WHO STOOD BY HIM TO STRIKE HIM ON THE MOUTH. (3) THEN PAUL SAID TO HIM, "GOD WILL STRIKE YOU, **YOU** WHITEWASHED WALL! FOR YOU SIT TO JUDGE ME ACCORDING TO THE LAW, AND DO YOU COMMAND ME TO BE STRUCK CONTRARY TO THE LAW?" (4) AND THOSE WHO STOOD BY SAID, "DO YOU REVILE GOD'S HIGH PRIEST?" (5) THEN PAUL SAID, "I DID NOT KNOW, BRETHREN, THAT HE WAS THE HIGH PRIEST; FOR IT IS WRITTEN, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

- A. Please note that it was customary when addressing the Sanhedrin to call them “fathers”, but Paul calls them “brethren”.
 - 1. He does this because he used to be one of them!
- B. As Paul begins his speech - his words are barely out of his mouth – when Ananias, (although he doesn’t dirty his own hands), commands Paul to be struck in the face.

1. History tells us that Ananias was a very rich man (multimillionaire by today's standards) and most of that wealth came from exploiting his office as High Priest. He was corrupt.
 - a) Specifically he had a deal going with the Priests where they would inspect the offering that was presented and call it "flawed" or blemished – then sell them one of their own at an inflated price! (Jon Courson)
 - b) When Paul realizes that it is Ananias that commands it - he humbly submits even though Ananias' action was still wrong!

III. ACT 23:6-10 NKJV BUT WHEN PAUL PERCEIVED THAT 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; CONCERNING THE HOPE AND RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD I AM BEING JUDGED!" (7) AND WHEN HE HAD SAID THIS, A DISSENSION AROSE BETWEEN THE PHARISEES AND THE SADDUCEES; AND THE ASSEMBLY WAS DIVIDED. (8) FOR SADDUCEES SAY THAT THERE IS NO RESURRECTION—AND NO ANGEL OR SPIRIT; BUT THE PHARISEES CONFESS BOTH. (9) THEN THERE AROSE A LOUD OUTCRY. AND THE SCRIBES OF THE PHARISEES' PARTY AROSE AND PROTESTED, 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." (10) NOW WHEN THERE AROSE A GREAT DISSENSION, THE COMMANDER, FEARING LEST PAUL MIGHT BE PULLED TO PIECES BY THEM, COMMANDED THE SOLDIERS TO GO DOWN AND TAKE HIM BY FORCE FROM AMONG THEM, AND BRING *HIM* INTO THE BARRACKS.

- A. Paul now knew who he was up against so he plays to 2 groups against each other.
1. These 2 factions had been fighting over the same issue (resurrection of the dead) for years and years – so Paul got lost in the barrage of arguing.
 2. Claudius Lysius – the commander feared Paul might be torn to pieces by these guys, so he rushed in and rescued him from the mob and took him back to the Antonia Fortress.
 - a) The following night the Lord pays Paul a visit.

IV. ACT 23:11 NKJV BUT THE FOLLOWING NIGHT THE LORD STOOD BY HIM AND SAID, "BE OF GOOD CHEER, PAUL; FOR AS YOU HAVE TESTIFIED FOR ME IN JERUSALEM, SO YOU MUST ALSO BEAR WITNESS AT ROME."

- A. Paul didn't have a clear picture what his "tomorrow" would bring although he knew that bonds and chains awaited him.
1. This visit from the Lord would get him through the next attempt on his life.
 - a) You see no matter what happened – he knew he must go to Rome.

V. ACT 23:12-16 NKJV AND WHEN IT WAS DAY, SOME OF THE JEWS BANDED TOGETHER AND BOUND THEMSELVES UNDER AN OATH, SAYING THAT THEY WOULD NEITHER EAT NOR DRINK TILL THEY HAD KILLED PAUL. (13) NOW THERE WERE MORE THAN FORTY WHO HAD FORMED THIS CONSPIRACY. (14) THEY CAME TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS, AND SAID, "WE HAVE BOUND OURSELVES UNDER A GREAT OATH THAT WE WILL EAT NOTHING UNTIL WE HAVE KILLED PAUL. (15) NOW YOU, THEREFORE, TOGETHER WITH THE COUNCIL, SUGGEST TO THE COMMANDER THAT HE BE BROUGHT DOWN TO YOU TOMORROW, AS THOUGH YOU

WERE GOING TO MAKE FURTHER INQUIRIES CONCERNING HIM; BUT WE ARE READY TO KILL HIM BEFORE HE COMES NEAR." (16) SO WHEN PAUL'S SISTER'S SON HEARD OF THEIR AMBUSH, HE WENT AND ENTERED THE BARRACKS AND TOLD PAUL.

A. This is the only place in scripture where Paul's family is mentioned, but it was no "coincidence" that his nephew was there to hear of the assassination attempt.

1. Please notice also that 40 to 1 doesn't make any difference either – when the Lord has promised you safety!

VI. ACT 23:17 NKJV THEN PAUL CALLED ONE OF THE CENTURIONS TO HIM AND SAID, "TAKE THIS YOUNG MAN TO THE COMMANDER, FOR HE HAS SOMETHING TO TELL HIM."

A. Now Paul knew from the Lord that he would not die because he had to go to Rome, but he sent message to the commander anyway.

1. I think this is evidence that the Lord expects us to use common sense even in divine situations.
2. Sometimes a Christians, we can spiritualize things to such a degree that we do not use common sense.
 - a) It was common sense for Paul to tell the commander of the attempt on his life!

VII. ACT 23:18-24 NKJV SO HE TOOK HIM AND BROUGHT HIM TO THE COMMANDER AND SAID, "PAUL THE PRISONER CALLED ME TO HIM AND ASKED ME TO BRING THIS YOUNG MAN TO YOU. HE HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU." (19) THEN THE COMMANDER TOOK HIM BY THE HAND, WENT ASIDE, AND ASKED PRIVATELY, "WHAT IS IT THAT YOU HAVE TO TELL ME?" (20) AND HE SAID, "THE JEWS HAVE AGREED TO ASK THAT YOU BRING PAUL DOWN TO THE COUNCIL TOMORROW, AS THOUGH THEY WERE GOING TO INQUIRE MORE FULLY ABOUT HIM. (21) BUT DO NOT YIELD TO THEM, FOR MORE THAN FORTY OF THEM LIE IN WAIT FOR HIM, MEN WHO HAVE BOUND THEMSELVES BY AN OATH THAT THEY WILL NEITHER EAT NOR DRINK TILL THEY HAVE KILLED HIM; AND NOW THEY ARE READY, WAITING FOR THE PROMISE FROM YOU." (22) SO THE COMMANDER LET THE YOUNG MAN DEPART, AND COMMANDED HIM, "TELL NO ONE THAT YOU HAVE REVEALED THESE THINGS TO ME." (23) AND HE CALLED FOR TWO CENTURIONS, SAYING, "PREPARE TWO HUNDRED SOLDIERS, SEVENTY HORSEMEN, AND TWO HUNDRED SPEARMEN TO GO TO CAESAREA AT THE THIRD HOUR OF THE NIGHT; (24) AND PROVIDE MOUNTS TO SET PAUL ON, AND BRING HIM SAFELY TO FELIX THE GOVERNOR."

A. Because Paul told the commander, and the commander being very aware that Paul was a Roman citizen – he provided 470 men to make sure that Paul made it to Caesarea safely!

1. But of course, we know that Paul is far from being out of danger by human hands.
 - a) Felix was the Roman Procurator and had become so - by politics.
 - (1) He was a base, corrupt and wicked man and it is to this man that Claudius Lysias – the commander passed Paul off.

- (a) With a letter explaining the situation:

VIII. **ACT 23:25-30 NKJV** HE WROTE A LETTER IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER: (26) **CLAUDIUS LYSIAS, TO THE MOST EXCELLENT GOVERNOR FELIX: GREETINGS. (27) THIS MAN WAS SEIZED BY THE JEWS AND WAS ABOUT TO BE KILLED BY THEM. COMING WITH THE TROOPS I RESCUED HIM, HAVING LEARNED THAT HE WAS A ROMAN. (28) AND WHEN I WANTED TO KNOW THE REASON THEY ACCUSED HIM, I BROUGHT HIM BEFORE THEIR COUNCIL. (29) I FOUND OUT THAT HE WAS ACCUSED CONCERNING QUESTIONS OF THEIR LAW, BUT HAD NOTHING CHARGED AGAINST HIM DESERVING OF DEATH OR CHAINS. (30) AND WHEN IT WAS TOLD ME THAT THE JEWS LAY IN WAIT FOR THE MAN, I SENT HIM IMMEDIATELY TO YOU, AND ALSO COMMANDED HIS ACCUSERS TO STATE BEFORE YOU THE CHARGES AGAINST HIM. FAREWELL.**

- A. Notice that he never mentions his treatment of Paul or the beating he was about to give him, or the slap in the face!
1. Basically this is a “he is now your problem” letter!
 - a) But, once again, we must keep in mind that Paul must go to Rome and give his testimony. This is all part of God’s plan.

IX. **ACT 23:31-35 NKJV** THEN THE SOLDIERS, AS THEY WERE COMMANDED, TOOK PAUL AND BROUGHT *HIM* BY NIGHT TO ANTIPATRIS. (32) THE NEXT DAY THEY LEFT THE HORSEMEN TO GO ON WITH HIM, AND RETURNED TO THE BARRACKS. (33) WHEN THEY CAME TO CAESAREA AND HAD DELIVERED THE LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR, THEY ALSO PRESENTED PAUL TO HIM. (34) AND WHEN THE GOVERNOR HAD READ *IT*, HE ASKED WHAT PROVINCE HE WAS FROM. AND WHEN HE UNDERSTOOD THAT *HE WAS* FROM CILICIA, (35) HE SAID, “I WILL HEAR YOU WHEN YOUR ACCUSERS ALSO HAVE COME.” AND HE COMMANDED HIM TO BE KEPT IN HEROD’S PRAETORIUM.

- A. Paul is sent to the very “compound” where Herod himself lived.
1. So, he spent the next 2 years under “house arrest” on the beach on the Mediterranean Sea.

X. CONCLUSION

- A. Often unrepentant sinners are the most legalistic and cruel as we see in **verse 3** with Ananias the High Priest.
1. They are quick to want to carry out the law in someone else’s life but not willing to see their own sin!
- B. Even people who don’t ordinarily like each other will join forces to “crucify” someone else. (**Verse7**)
1. The Pharisees and Sadducees couldn’t stand each other, but they were willing to join in condemning Paul (at least at first).
- C. Did you notice that the Jews decided that it would be easier just to kill Paul rather than listen to him? (**Verse12**)

- D. And we see that even in this very dark hour for Paul – the Lord was there for him.
(Verses 11 & 16)