

SBCOD Bible Study Notes

5-20-26

Acts 23

Paul's Response To The Punch In The Face – Verses 1-5

¹ Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” ²At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!” ⁴Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!” ⁵Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

23:1-5 Josephus, a respected first-century historian, described Ananias as profane, greedy, and hot-tempered. Paul’s outburst came as a result of the illegal command that Ananias had given. Ananias had violated Jewish law by assuming that Paul was guilty without a trial and ordering his punishment (see Deuteronomy 19:15). Paul didn’t recognize Ananias as the high priest, probably because Ananias’s command broke the law he was pledged to represent. As Christians, we are to represent Christ. When those around us say, “I didn’t know you were a Christian,” we have failed to represent him as we should. We are not merely Christ’s followers; we are his representatives to others.

The Council Is Divided – Verses 6-8

⁶Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” ⁷When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

23:6-8 The Sadducees and Pharisees were two groups of religious leaders, but with strikingly different beliefs. The Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection, but the Sadducees did not. The Sadducees adhered only to Genesis through Deuteronomy, which contain no explicit teaching on resurrection. Paul’s words moved the debate away from himself and toward their festering controversy about the resurrection. The Jewish council was split.

23:6-8 Paul’s sudden insight that the council was a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees is an example of the insight that Jesus promised to believers (Mark 13:9-11). God will help us when we are under fire for our faith. Like Paul, we should always be ready to present our testimony. The Holy Spirit will give us the courage to speak boldly.

Jesus Comforts Paul In The Night – Verses 9-11

⁹There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” ¹⁰The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks. ¹¹The following night the Lord stood near

Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

23:9 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: The commander removed Paul for his own safety, and left him in custody in the barracks. Paul’s clever ploy rescued him from the council, but he could not have been happy with the result. He had the opportunity to preach to a huge crowd of attentive Jews on the temple mount and it ended in failure. Then he had the opportunity to preach to the influential Jewish council, and it also ended in a fistfight.

23:11 Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell. We often demand that Jesus deliver us out of our circumstances, when He wants to meet us right in them. We sometimes think we are surrendering to Jesus when we are really only demanding an escape. God wants to meet us in whatever we face at the moment.

The Plot To Kill Paul – Verses 12-15

¹² The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

23:12 Saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul: In the days of Paul and Jesus, there was a secretive group of Jewish assassins who targeted the Romans and their supporters. They were dagger-men, because they often concealed daggers and stabbed Roman soldiers as they walked by. It seems that these same kind of assassins now targeted Paul. They were so zealous that they made a vow to not eat or even drink until Paul was dead. These men lacked nothing in commitment or zeal. But their zeal was not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Zeal and devotion by themselves never prove that someone is right with God.

23:14-15 When the Pharisee/ Sadducee controversy died down, the religious leaders refocused their attention on Paul. To these leaders, politics and position had become more important than God. They were ready to plan another murder, just as they had done with Jesus. But as always, God was in control.

Paul’s Nephew Learns Of The Plot And Warns The Roman Commander – Verses 16-22

¹⁶ But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸ So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.” ¹⁹ The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” ²⁰ He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.” ²² The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

23:16 This is the only biblical reference to Paul's family. Some scholars believe that Paul's family had disowned him when he became a Christian. Paul wrote of having suffered the loss of everything for Christ (Philippians 3:8). His nephew was able to see him, even though Paul was in protective custody, because Roman prisoners were accessible to their relatives and friends, who could bring them food and other amenities.

23:17-22 It is easy to overlook children, assuming that they aren't old enough to do much for the Lord. But this young man played an important part in protecting Paul's life. God can use anyone, of any age, who is willing to yield to him. Jesus made it clear that children are important (Matthew 18:2-6). Give children the importance God gives them.

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. **24** Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

23:23-24 The Roman commander ordered Paul sent to Caesarea. Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish government, but Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for the area. God works in amazing and amusing ways. God could have used any number of ways to get Paul to Caesarea, but he chose to use the Roman army to deliver Paul from his enemies. God's ways are not our ways. Ours are limited; his are not. Don't limit God by asking him to respond your way. When God intervenes, anything can happen, so much more and so much better than you could ever anticipate.

The Letter From Lysias To Felix – Verses 25-30

25 He wrote a letter as follows: **26** Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. **27** This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. **28** I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. **29** I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. **30** When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

23:25-26 Felix was the Roman governor or procurator of Judea from A.D. 52 to 59. This was the same position Pontius Pilate had held. While the Jews were given much freedom to govern themselves, the governor ran the army, kept the peace, and gathered the taxes.

23:26-30 How did Luke know what was written in the letter from Claudius Lysias? In his concern for historical accuracy, Luke used many sources to make sure that his writings were correct (see Luke 1:1-4). This letter was probably read aloud in court when Paul came before Felix to answer the Jews' accusations. Also, because Paul was a Roman citizen, a copy may have been given to him as a courtesy.

Paul Arrives In Caesarea – Verses 31-33

31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. **32** The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. **33** When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.

23:30-31 Took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris: The 200 soldiers only went as far as Antipatris because the most dangerous part of the road was only up to this point. Paul made it out of Jerusalem and to Caesarea on the coast. The plot of the 40 assassins failed.

Paul Awaits Trial In Caesarea – Verses 34-35

³⁴ The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

23:34 When he understood that he was from Cilicia: Perhaps Felix hoped that Paul came from someplace that required that someone else hear his case. Apparently, learning that he was from Cilicia meant that Felix would indeed be responsible to hear and rule on his case. I will hear you when your accusers also have come: This would be Paul’s first opportunity to speak to someone at this level of authority (the governor). 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 (Acts 9:15).

23:35 And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium: This began a two-year period of confinement for Paul in Caesarea. After that he spent at least two years in Rome. Taken together with travel time, the next five years of Paul’s life were lived in Roman custody. This was a striking contrast to his previous years of wide and spontaneous travel.

23:35 Paul lived many years with great freedom, and had to trust the promises of God through those years. Yet he also had to trust the promises of Jesus in his years of little freedom — and to know that God could work just as powerfully through those more difficult circumstances.