

Text: Acts 23.6-11

Today we are going to look at the rest of Paul's hearing before the Sanhedrin. Last week we saw where the high priest ordered someone to strike Paul in the face, with Paul offering an angry retort.

This week, we will see the whole assembly erupt into uproar. The result is Paul still held in custody by the Romans. I think Paul hoped the Romans would release him and let him carry on with his plans. I think as we waited in custody, he was very discouraged.

The thing is, he was exactly where God wanted him.

As we consider this fact, let's consider our own lives. God gave each of us special gifts.

- We all have a certain amount of physical strength for each day.
- We all have a mind that can process information, make decisions, and act to further our ministries for the Lord.
- We all have the Holy Spirit (if a believer), and with the Spirit come spiritual insight and spiritual gifts.
- We all are growing in wisdom as we walk with God, so our insight and decision making should improve the longer we live for God.

Yet with all of that, we can find ourselves stymied in our plans, what we want to do. Others just don't see things the way we do, and we don't have control of all events in our lives.

Has God abandoned us? Or are we missing his will somehow?

Remember what I said earlier: **Paul was exactly where God wanted him.**

In our passage, I think we see the apostle doing everything he can to affect his release from custody. Nothing works. Instead, what he gets is what I am calling:

How to Get to Rome on a Budget

Paul was exactly where God wanted him, and Paul was going to get to Rome, just not the way Paul had planned.

Read Ac 23.6-11

Proposition: We must use the gifts God gave to serve him, but even more importantly, we must live by faith alone.

I. Paul's expectations

A. Looking back to Paul's plans and expectations

1. Paul's plan to visit Rome

- a. Paul mentions his plan in Ephesus before the Ephesian riot (Ac 19.21)
- b. Paul's mentions his plan to the Romans (Rm 15.24-29) [written in Corinth, Ac 20.1-3]

2. Paul's expectations heading to Jerusalem

- a. "Bonds and afflictions await me..." (Ac 20.22-23)
- b. Prophecy of Agabus in Caesarea (Ac 21.11)

B. Looking back at Paul's experience in Jerusalem

1. Suggestion that he participate in a vow (21.23-24)
2. Paul begins the process; the vow is seven days (21.26)
3. The vow is almost over, and here comes trouble (21.27)
4. The Romans show up, Paul is bound by chains (21.33)
5. We have the chaotic crowd response to Paul's explanation (22.1-23)
6. The Romans take him away, plan to scourge him (22.24-29)

All of this would seem to fulfill "bonds and afflictions" (Ac 20) and the words of Agabus (Ac 21).

C. Consider Paul's attempts to address the Jews

What is he trying to accomplish?

1. With the crowd, I think he wants to identify his Jewishness and faithfulness and bring about *calm* and release
2. With the Sanhedrin, his goals are the same: he wants the Romans to see there is no need to hold him any longer

In Paul's mind, the prophecy is "fully fulfilled," he needs to get on with his plans for Rome.

II. Paul's efforts

- A. Last week, Paul initiates the same kind of defense he tried to make to the crowd
1. Compare 23.1 with the speech in 22.1-21
 2. Yet here, the high priest shows no tolerance for speech of that sort
 3. Paul can see the trial is stacked against him
 - a. Recall my mention of "looking intently" in verse 1 last week: "sizing them up"
 - b. Now look at the first verse of our text today: "but perceiving"
 - c. The hearing is majority Sadducees (priests), with some Pharisees (Paul's former crowd while in Judaism)
 4. Paul's first effort, to convince them of his reasonable views, fails: on to effort two
- B. Divide and conquer
1. Paul's "rabble-rousing" cry: "I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"
 - a. Some commentators (even conservative) criticize Paul for this tactic
 - b. Clearly, Paul's intention is to identify himself with the Pharisaic element on the counsel

Question: Is Paul under any illusions about what will happen?
 2. The furor that develops
 - a. The two sides erupt into argument and division (σχίζω = schizo, divided, "scismed") (7)
 - b. The reason: doctrinal difference (8, more this afternoon)
 - c. Great uproar (κραυγή - "a crying, outcry, clamor"¹) (8)

¹ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889), BibleWorks, v.8.

- d. Pharisees rise in Paul's defense (8)
- e. A great *dissension* ensues (10)
 - 1) "Dissension" is the word "standing"
 - 2) Lit meaning simply means "standing," but comes to mean "taking a stand, take a position, rebel"
 - 3) One lexicon interestingly:

"Hostility between those who belong together is στάσις, while hostility between enemies is πόλεμος..."²

f. Again, from this, I think Paul intends to divide them — why?

3. Paul's objective (focused on release)

- a. If Paul can show that Judaism is divided over him
- b. And that some in Judaism will support him in some way
- c. And that the argument is theological, not political
- d. Then the Romans might be willing to release him, as the victim of a religious squabble

C. The unfortunate result (10)

- 1. The tribune (*chilarch*) takes him "by force" (afraid for Paul's well-being)
- 2. The tribune is no further in understanding the complaint
- 3. Paul remains in custody "into the barracks"

My view that Paul thought the Romans would see that "it is nothing" is speculative, but some commentary support:

"Paul recognized that he could not get a fair trial in a court that did not even observe the law it purported to defend, so he changed his tactics."³

² Gerhard Delling, "στάσις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed., vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 569.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 23.6.

“Paul quickly saw that his cause was ruined before the Sanhedrin by his unwitting attack on the high priest. It was impossible to get a fair hearing.”⁴

“Given the lack of a just hearing, Paul likely framed the charge around the central evidence for Jesus as Messiah (the resurrection) to create both witness and chaos.”⁵

III. Paul’s encouragement (11)

A. Paul’s state of mind after all this turn of events

“Paul’s worst apprehensions of what might happen to him in Jerusalem bade fair to be fulfilled. Where now were his plans for carrying the gospel to the far west, and visiting Rome on the way? After the events of these two days, he might well have felt dejected and despondent.”⁶

“Paul was undoubtedly wondering how he would ever get out of the mess in which he found himself. At this critical moment, during the night of the next day (Gr. *te epiousē nykti*), the Lord appeared to him again.”⁷

B. The Lord appears to comfort him

1. Take courage

- a. Same word Jesus used to the Paralytic, lowered through the roof “take courage, your sins are forgiven you” (Mt 9.2)
- b. And used by Jesus when walking on the water, as he spoke to the disciples “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Mt 14.27)

2. You have solemnly witnessed of me in Jerusalem

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 23.6.

⁵ L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 261.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 430.

⁷ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 23.9.

3. Just so must you witness of me in Rome also

The Lord has a plan – everything in the experience is according to the Lord’s plan.

4. The Lord’s plan included

- a. The rough treatment by the Jews
- b. The arrest by the Romans
- c. The disappointment of this hearing

“Paul had borne witness to him in Jerusalem (a reference this, no doubt, to his speech at the top of the steps to the crowd in the temple court), and he would live to bear similar witness in Rome. This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which from now on marks him out as a master of events rather than their victim. His plan to see Rome, he now knows, is certain of fulfilment; with that he is content.”⁸

Conclusion:

Proposition: We must use the gifts God gave to serve him, but even more importantly, we must live by faith alone.

Paul had great gifts, which allowed him to size up the situation, and which he used to hopefully bring about his release.

Yet the message of this passage from the Lord is: “Trust me.”

In the end, that is what we must do.

God gives us gifts, we should use them, but in the end, we must trust him, even if it means beatings and imprisonments!

⁸ Bruce, *Acts*, 430.