

ACTS – Lesson 23

Acts Chapter 23

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Memory verses for this week: *Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Introduction: In Chapter 22, we saw Paul giving his defense to the Jews there in Jerusalem. He told of his conversion when Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Many listened until he spoke of being called to preach unto the Gentiles, and at that point they went into a rage. We closed with Paul being taken in to be scourged, but due to being a Roman citizen, they did not beat him. The captain called the religious leaders in to find out what evil Paul had done, and we pick up with that meeting in Chapter 23.

I. Paul Before the Sanhedrin

Acts 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Acts 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

The chief priest and the seventy elders of Israel made up the council whom Paul stood before. We see that he immediately points out how that he had lived in all good conscience before God until this day. We all need to do our best to live worthy of our calling. Paul did not say he had lived with a good conscience since he was saved, but all of his life. Even when he was binding the Christians and bringing them to Jerusalem, he truly thought he was serving God.

Acts 26:9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

Acts 26:11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Acts 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

1 Tim 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

*1 Tim 1:13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.
1 Tim 1:14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.
1 Tim 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

We should learn from Paul that even our conscience can fail us when we look to it for our guide. The only true and reliable point of reference is using God's Word with the leadership of the Holy Spirit to direct our daily actions.

Some verses concerning conscience:

*1 Tim 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
1 Tim 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
1 Tim 4:3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*

*Titus 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.
Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.
Titus 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:*

1 Cor 8:7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

We see the conscience is truly not reliable, whereas the Holy Spirit will never lead us to do things contrary to the Word of God. We see in verse 2 that Ananias commands them to smite Paul on the mouth. He was the leader of the people, and he should have show responsibility and upheld the law in the high court of the Jews.

*Acts 23:3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?
Acts 23:4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?
Acts 23:5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

Paul is outraged and says that God will smite the ones who had gave the orders to have him struck. In verse 4, they rebuke Paul for speaking in such a manner to the high priest. We see Paul acknowledges his error in doing this. He goes to the Word of God and acknowledges that we should have respect for those in rule. Paul was not acquainted with this high priest, and we also suspect that Paul could not see very well. With poor eyesight, he most likely could not tell which person had spoken out.

Gal 4:13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

Gal 4:14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

Gal 4:15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

Gal 6:11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

Gal 6:12 As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

II. Paul Appeals to the Pharisees

Acts 23:6 But when Paul perceived that the 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: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

Acts 23:7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

Acts 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

Paul was wise in recognizing that the crowd was divided between Saducees and Pharisees. These where two of the leading religious orders of the day. The Pharisees were strict followers of the law, and many could quote the first five books of the bible by heart. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, while the Saducees denied both the resurrection, the existence of angels, and the belief in spirits.

Acts 23:9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

Those gathered here against Paul were divided on the question about the resurrection. It was doctrinal beliefs that divided the people, and it is the stand for true doctrine that divides people still today.

In John Calvin's commentary, he makes a good point about how these people turn against one another. "We see here the Nature of the wicked: although they disagree among themselves, they forget their own struggles when they have to fight against the Gospel. Satan, the father of discord, manages to make his followers agree on just one thing: the destruction of godliness. Christ's disciples must join together in fostering the truth, so that they may resist Satan better. Christ says that the peacemakers are God's children (Matthew 5:9), and It is true that they must do what they can to grow together like brothers under the Lord. But even if we fight together under the banner of the same Lord, that does not stop us from stirring up the wicked to run on each other as the Midianites did (Judges 7:22), provided we are led to do so by pure zeal and the wisdom of the Spirit."

It is ironic how I agree so much with what Brother Calvin said, and yet on what he is most known for, the doctrine of Calvinism, I totally disagree. Our decisions should be based wholly and totally on scripture, and that is where it is so crucial for us to study to be sure that nothing contradicts what we believe in the Word of God. While I agree that the only ones that can be saved are those who acknowledge their lost condition and are drawn by the Spirit to God, I can not agree that our efforts mean nothing in spreading the Gospel.

I do believe God is omniscient and knows all things, so He can and does know when we will witness and when we will not. But it still comes down to a decision that man must make, and salvation is totally of grace by God.

2 Tim 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Tim 2:16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

So doctrine was the dividing factor here. One of the main reasons that many of the disciples quit following the Lord was his doctrine.

John 6:48 I am that bread of life.

John 6:49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

John 6:50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

John 6:52 The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

John 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

John 6:56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

John 6:57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

John 6:58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

John 6:59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

John 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

John 6:61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

John 6:62 What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

John 6:65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

John 6:66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

John 6:67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

John 6:68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Acts 23:10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

In verse 10, we see they bring Paul into the castle to keep his enemies from killing him.

III. God's Promise to Paul

Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

We find that God encourages Paul and tells him that he is going to have to opportunity to bear witness of the Lord at Rome. Satan and all his army could not stop Paul from going to Rome.

Acts 23:12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

Acts 23:14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

Acts 23:15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

We find certain men decide to band together and decide that what ever it took, they would kill Paul. They are so driven by their zeal that they do not consider that killing another person was in direct conflict with God's Law. Beware of people who will do anything to get their way. We see they go to the religious leaders, and tell them what they intend to do. You would think that religious leaders would have nothing to do with a plot of murder. But they say nothing evil about it, and agree to go along with the plan.

The vow the forty some odd Jews took was that they would not eat nor drink until they completed their goal. By God's providential care, Paul's nephew overhears their plans and goes and tells Paul. We may not always understand the methods that God uses, but we can acknowledge that His plan for our life is the best. Not all things are good that happen to us, but God uses all of it for our good. What these men forgot is that it is God who gives us life, and no one goes out without God's knowledge.

Deu 32:39 See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.

Deu 4:35 Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.

Acts 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

Acts 23:18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

Acts 23:19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

Acts 23:20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

Acts 23:21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

Acts 23:22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me.

We see Paul's nephew coming to the chief captain (At Paul's request), and telling him what the Jews had conspired to do. I believe this captain was a fine man, looking only to do what was right. When he finds out what is about to happen, he takes action.

IV. Paul is Sent by Night to Felix

Acts 23:23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

Acts 23:24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

This captain calls in two centurions, and has them prepare 200 soldiers along with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen at the third hour of the night to leave with Paul to go to Caesarea. He was taking no chances of the men overthrowing the soldiers and taking Paul from them.

Acts 23:25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

Acts 23:26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

Acts 23:27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

Acts 23:28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

Acts 23:29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

Acts 23:30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

Acts 23:31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

We see the captain explains to Felix that he feels that Paul was accused of some question of the Jewish law, but he had done nothing worthy of death. And that when he found out that they lay in wait to kill him, he sent Paul to the governor. The soldiers do their job and brought him to Antipatris.

Acts 23:32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

Acts 23:33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

Acts 23:34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

Acts 23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

We see that they leave the next morning and come to Caesarea and deliver the letter and Paul to the governor. Felix asks him what province he was from, and when he was told it was Cilicia, he promises to hear both Paul and the accusers when they come.

J. Vernon McGee said the captain of the centurions never truly understood what Paul was accused of due to the nature of the mob. "It is clear Claudius Lysias never did know exactly what the charge was against Paul. He knew it pertained to their law. Under Roman law Paul was not guilty of anything worthy of death or of imprisonment. When Paul arrives in Caesarea, we find his accusers were quick to follow. As we move along, I think you will detect that Paul is not defending himself as much as he is witnessing for Christ. The Lord Jesus had said he would witness before governors and rulers and kings. He is being brought before them. This is God's method. Paul is in the will of God, and God is carrying out His purpose."

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.