**ACTS AND US**

**Previously on Acts and Us:**

**Acts 22:29-30** “the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. **30**The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

**The Jerusalem Jews Plot to Kill Paul**

**Acts 23**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?”

The high priest who ordered him to be struck was ANANIAS BEN NEDEBEUS who was high priest at the end of the Second Temple period. Ananias served as high priest for 12 years (47–59 c.e.), longer than any other high priest after the fall of the Hasmonean dynasty (*Maccabees / Hanukah*), with the exception of *Joseph Caiaphas* (the High Priest during Jesus crucifixion).

Paul was unaware that he was High Priest or he would not have spoken evil of him.

**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.’ ”

**6**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.”

Paul recognized the rift between the two groups who were accusing him and strategically exploited it. He clearly sided with the Pharisees, reminding them that he was one himself, and calling into play their shared belief in the resurrection, angels and spirits, things that the Sadducees vehemently disagree with.

**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.

So Paul remained in protective custody. He was not free to go because the Romans knew that he may be murdered by the angry mob if he were to leave the barracks.

**The Plot Against Paul**

**11**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.”

Remember, much of the passion and conviction behind Paul’s beliefs is the fact that he witnessed Jesus alive when spoke to him on the road to Damascus proving that there is a resurrection. Different places throughout Acts the Lord spoke to Paul as we see here. This time He tells Paul that he will be a witness in Rome. This comes to pass in *the final chapter of the book of Acts where Paul arrives in Rome and preaches the gospel for two years under house arrest.*

**12**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. **17**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.” **18**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.”

Paul apparently had family in Jerusalem, even though they were from Tarsus in Cilicia (over 500 miles away). Likely at least one married sister lived in town, possibly married to a man who was involved in the temple in some way, because their son was present there and overheard a conversation about the ambush of Paul that took place among the chief priests and elders.

This young man may have saved Paul from attack by the assassins by telling the commander of their plan even though the Lord would probably not let them kill Paul, because he was destined to be a witness in Rome according to the message given to him by the Lord at night.

This *was,* however, the mechanism God used to get Paul to Rome. This level of threat on Paul’s life in Jerusalem, prompted the Roman commander to send Paul to the port city of Caesarea, where he would eventually sail for Rome.

**Sent to Felix**

**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.”

The threat was so serious on Paul’s life that the commander sent Paul with an entire army of nearly three hundred men to transfer him to Caesarea in the middle of the night.

***25****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.*

This excess of security and concern for Paul’s safety may have been an effort on the part of the commander to cover-up or atone for the illegal treatment that he subjected Paul to at the end of last chapter.

**Acts 22:29** “the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”

The governor whom Paul was sent to would likely be impressed with the proper treatment of given him as a Roman citizen and likely *overlooked* the fact that Paul was wrongfully arrested, bound and stretched to be flogged unlawfully.

**31**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.

Paul is being kept safe, living in a fortified city by the sea, but is *not free to leave*. Felix delays Paul’s official trial continually and keeps him waiting there for *two years*.

SO, what is happening here? From the moment Paul arrived in Jerusalem it’s been chaos. Crowds rioting against him, Romans shackling him and about to flog him, high priests having him punched in the mouth, put in the Roman barracks to protect him from being “pulled apart” by the mob, and 40 assassins on a pledged hunger strike until they kill him.

It would have been easy for him to succumb to fear thinking that there is no way he could get out of this situation alive…

Except for the promise of the Lord’s word to him…

**Acts 23:11** “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.”

“Be of good cheer”?

He did not just say, “*Don’t worry*”, or “*do not be afraid*”, it was “be of good cheer”

I’m not sure if I would be able to be *cheerful* in such circumstances.

But Paul had been trusting the word of the Lord every step of this journey through Acts and God has *always* been faithful.

It was not a surprise that he was experiencing these trials. The Holy Spirit promised him that he would back in Miletus;

**Acts 20:22-24**“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. **23**I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. **24**However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”

The same Spirit that told him that *prison and hardship await him* in Jerusalem, is now telling him “*Be of good cheer because you’re going to Rome*”.

Paul did not fear and was able to have *cheerful confidence* because he knew that he could trust the Lord, despite circumstances. He could endure hardships because he knew that God had a specific plan for him every step of his journey, and that would not be halted or altered by any adversaries that he faced.

**Acts & Us**

How are we with that? How do we respond when the road gets rough, and things seem hopeless?

DO you sometimes find it hard to have confidence that the right outcomes will take place in your life?

Do you worry that someone or something can stop God’s will from taking place in your life?

When trials and tribulations come, do you find yourself fearful or discouraged or overcome with doubt?

The truth is, we all do, from time to time.

That’s why it’s important to meditate *on*, and trust *in* God’s word.

*“Jesus told us there’d be days like this”.*

**John 16:33** “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Personally, I know that my faith gets put to the test when I am forced to trust God for provision. When we first started the church, I left a job where I had a steady income for twelve years and planted a church from scratch with only *half of a year’s provision*. If it didn’t work, I would not be able to pay my bills and provide for my family.

I knew it was God’s will for my life to continue to move forward and in times of doubt needed to remind myself of that.

I often quoted the saying from Chuck Smith; “*Where God guides, God provides*”, and I knew that God was guiding me in this way.

I hung on to one of my favorite verses in Philippians about God’s providence;

**Phil 4:19** “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

As hard as it is at times to believe these words, I have found time and time again that *His word is always faithful and he never fails*.

**2 Cor. 1:20**For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

**Josh 21:45** “Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.”

But what about those times where like Paul, He asks you to go somewhere, or do something that is difficult or dangerous. Or if he tests your faith to a measure that you don’t think you can hold up?

It’s those times when we need to trust Him for His strength, His wisdom and His providence, not our own – AND rely on His word and His promises.

Think about Abraham. He was a wealthy man living comfortably with his family in a safe place when a God told him to pack up everyone and move to a land that you do not even know.

**Heb 11:8“**By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. **9**By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.”

Then years later when he had settled in the promised land, he had land, flocks, peace with his enemies and a loving family, God tested him *again* in Gen. 22. It was a huge test of faith where God asked him to do the unthinkable; Be willing to sacrifice his own son Isaac whom he *loved*. (Gen. 22, the first time “love” appears in the Bible)

Wow what a test!

How could he even think about doing that? …

He had faith in God!

He had faith that God would provide.

Abraham knew that God’s promise was that Isaac would have children and grandchildren and those would be the children of the promise,

SO, Abraham thought that even if he DID slay his son there on Mount Moriah, God would raise him back up from the dead. !?!?!?

How do I know this?

**Heb 11:17**By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, **18**even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” **19**Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

We must each learn to know the will of God for our lives, in big and small matters. And once we understand his word and promises to us, never doubt them. Be obedient to follow them, faithfully and cheerfully.

Because, His promises to us are yes and Amen!

**2 Cor. 1:20“**For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”