



THE STORY CONTINUES

UNDER GOD'S PROVIDENCE | ACTS 22:22-23:11

Over the last several chapters in the book of Acts, Luke has been unfolding Paul's journey towards Jerusalem and Rome. In Acts 19:21, Paul, resolved in the Spirit, expresses his desire to get to both Jerusalem and Rome.

However, the road leading up to Jerusalem has not been an easy one. Paul's friends urge him not to go for they feared for his life. In his goodbye to the Ephesian Elders Paul writes:

²² "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."

On arriving in Jerusalem, Paul greets and the brothers and sisters there. The church spends some time together, but it does not take long for Paul to find himself in the middle of an all out riot in the temple complex, only to be saved by the Roman commander. Paul asks to speak to the crowd and recapitulates his encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. He declares that God has sent him to the Gentiles. Again uproar ensues, and Paul has to be rescued again.

Now in the custody of the Romans, Paul is ordered to be interrogated and flogged. The Jews want this man dead and the Romans want to know why.

In all of this, God remains in control, and Paul remains under God's providence.

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PAUL'S LIFE AND DOCTRINE (v. 1)

Paul looks straight at the Sanhedrin and says, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."

1. Paul starts his statement declaring he has fulfilled his duty to God "in all good conscience to this day." Why might this have been a provoking statement by Paul?
2. By appealing to a good conscience, what was Paul claiming?
3. How does Paul's fulfilling his duty and having a good conscience validate the gospel before the Sanhedrin?
4. Richard Sibbes once said, "Conscience is either the greatest friend, or the greatest enemy in the world." How have you seen this statement to be true?
5. Why is it important to maintain a good conscience as we follow Jesus?

UNDER GOD'S WORD (vv. 2-5)

² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then 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!"

⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

⁵ Paul 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.'"

1. What is being declared by Ananias as he has Paul struck on the mouth?
2. What is the significance of Paul's statement after being struck on the mouth?
3. What other Scriptures come to mind by Paul's use of whitewashed wall?
4. What stands out to you about the contrast between Jesus's appearance before the Sanhedrin and Paul's appearance?
5. In what ways do we see the human-ness of Paul in this moment?
6. Luke presents a contrast between Ananias and Paul as it relates to the Scriptures. Ananias lives above the Scriptures and breaks the law by striking Paul. Paul, aware of what he has just done, comes under Scripture in repentance (Ex. 22:28). In what areas of our lives do we tend to live above the authority of Scripture?

7. What role does repentance play in living under the authority of Scripture?

CENTERED ON THE GOSPEL (vv. 6-10)

⁶ Then 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." ⁷ When 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.)

⁹ There 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?" ¹⁰ The 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.

1. What is Paul doing as he declares to be "a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees"?
2. For what reason does Paul claim to truly be on trial?
3. What role does the resurrection of the dead play in Paul's life and theology?
4. Up to this point in Acts, in what ways have we seen Paul's life centered on the gospel?

STRENGTHENED BY JESUS (v. 11)

¹¹ The 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."

1. In what ways would Paul be encouraged by Jesus in this encounter?
2. Luke uses the Greek word "*Tharse*" which means "Take courage!" or "Take heart!" The only other times we see this word is in Jesus's earthly ministry (see Matthew 9:2, Matthew 9:22, and John 16:33). What does this passage tell us about Jesus's heavenly ministry?
3. How does Jesus continue to encourage and strengthen us today?
4. What does this tell us about the sovereignty and providence of God?