

Acts of the Apostles

Week 28: Acts 22:22-23:11

Paul, the Roman Citizen (22:2-29)

- The crowd that had been quietly listening to Paul's defense of his ministry erupted in anger at the mention of his ministry to the Gentiles (22:22-23).
 - o They tossed off their cloaks, flung dust in the air, a sign of anger, and called for his death.
 - o They may have torn their cloaks because they believed Paul was committing blasphemy (Paul and Barnabas did something similar in Acts 14:14).
 - o More likely, they took off their cloaks in preparation for stoning Paul like those who stone Stephen had done (see Acts 7:58).
- The commander ordered Paul to the barracks and directed that he be beaten until they figure out what Paul had done to create such a stir (22:24).
 - o The commander may not have understood Paul's speech since it was in Aramaic.
 - o He probably would not have followed the nuances of the argument anyway – since he probably cared little for the Jewish faith.
 - o He would want to figure out if Paul was trying to stir up a rebellion, a not uncommon occurrence among Jewish troublemakers.
- As he was being stretched out in preparation of a flogging, Paul asked the centurion if it was legal to flog a Roman citizen without a trial first.
 - o Flogging was a normal interrogation technique for Roman peacekeepers, but Roman citizens were not to be flogged prior to a trial and conviction.
 - o Fearful that Paul might be a citizen, the centurion went to his commander for guidance (22:26).
- The commander asked Paul to confirm his citizenship. When Paul answered in the affirmative, the commander noted that his own citizenship came at a high price (22:27-28).
- Paul responded that he was born a citizen, which meant he had higher status than the commander (22:28). Since Tarsus was a Roman city, Paul's birth there made him a citizen.
- This unexpected turn of events brought the interrogation to a halt and filled even the commander with alarm (22:29).

Paul Before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)

- Before he could proceed, the commander needed to understand the accusations against Paul, so he released Paul from confinement and gathered the Sanhedrin for a trial (22:30).
 - o The Sanhedrin was the governing Jewish body in Jerusalem over religious matters.
 - o It included both Pharisees and Sadducees who often were at odds with one another.

- Paul uttered only one sentence about having a clear conscience when the high priest, Ananias, ordered Paul to be struck (23:1-2).
 - o The high priest may have been offended that Paul called him a “brother” instead of addressing him as a superior.
 - o He also did not like that Paul was essentially saying, “I answer to God and not to you.”
- Paul responded to the violence with the strongest of judgements, “God will strike you; you whitewashed wall! You judge me a lawbreaker while you yourself violate the law struck!” (23:3).
 - o Both Ezekiel and Jesus used the metaphor of a whitewashed wall (see Ezekiel 13:8-15; Matthew 23:27).
 - o Paul’s words echoed Ezekiel’s words of judgment against false prophets.
- The others in the room were aghast that Paul would say such things to the high priest (23:4).
- Paul responded that he did not realize Ananias was the high priest (23:5).
 - o Paul may have been truly ignorant of the high priest’s identity.
 - o He may also have been implying that Ananias was not acting like a high priest, so how could he know?
 - o Paul quoted from Exodus 22:28 noting that he respected the office. Quoting this verse might have been a way of saying, “Since I don’t have anything nice to say about him, I’ll simply move on.”
- Paul begins his defense with a statement of faith, “I’m on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”
 - o This divided the Sanhedrin between the majority Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, and the Pharisees, who did.
 - o Paul claimed to be a Pharisee – “I am a Pharisee.”
 - o Paul’s defense is a reminder that he saw his faith in Christ as the faithful continuation of his life as a Jew. He, and not the members of the Sanhedrin, was walking faithfully in the Jewish faith by believing in Jesus.
- The division between Sadducees and Pharisees becomes so great that the commander is afraid Paul is going to get killed, so he once again arrests him for his own protection (22:9-10).
 - o The Pharisees, echoing another Pharisee Gamaliel (see Acts 5:39), wondered out loud about the possibility of Paul being correct. Or that he may have had a real encounter with an angel.
 - o They wanted to acquit Paul of all charges.
- That night, the Lord stood near Paul and promised that Paul would testify about the Lord in Rome, just as he has in Jerusalem (22:11).
 - o The fact that the Lord came to encourage Paul exposes the fact that Paul needed encouragement.
 - o Even though Paul bravely faced his opponents, each confrontation took its toll on his spirit.
 - o The Lord’s words remind us that God will equip us for what he calls us to.

Sources

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