DISCOVER THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

A READING AND LISTENING SESSION
BASED ON ACTS 23



With Sister Paulette Morrison
on October 13, 2022



On Sunday evening October 13, 2022 Reading and Listening Session, we delve into the potent narrative of the Apostle Paul, a man whose life was a testament to the power and faithfulness of God's Word. Our journey takes us to the heart of Jerusalem, as recounted in the book of Acts, chapter 23, and we'll be focusing on Acts 23:2, 3, 6, 11, 12-13, 16-18, 20-22 and 33-35 (NIV). Let's open our hearts and minds to the scriptures, allowing God to speak to us through His timeless truth.

Paul Before the Sanhedrin

The scene is set in Jerusalem. Paul, having returned to encourage the believers, faces immediate hostility. He is brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. *Acts 23:1* reads, “Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’”

However, his declaration is met with violence. *Acts 23:2*: “At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.” This brings us to our first topic from our readers: **Ananias the High Priest**. Ananias embodies the hypocrisy that can creep into religious leadership. His actions directly contradict the Law he is meant to uphold. He is a reminder that religious office does not equate to righteousness.

Paul's response in *Acts 23:3* is sharp: “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!” A powerful rebuke against injustice, hinting at **Thou Shall Not** commit perjury, or command/commit violence. The incident reveals the deep-seated corruption Paul confronts.

A House Divided

Recognizing the division within the Sanhedrin between the Pharisees and Sadducees, Paul cleverly uses it to his advantage. *Acts 23:6*: “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.’” This statement ignites a fierce debate. The Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection, began to argue in Paul’s favor. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, vehemently opposed him. The council becomes a chaotic scene of infighting.

Amidst this turmoil, God's hand is evident. He uses the existing divisions to protect Paul, ensuring his safety, for a time at least.

God's Encouragement in the Night

The night following this tumultuous encounter, Paul receives divine encouragement. *Acts 23:11*: “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘**Cheer Up My Brother**! Just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’” This is a pivotal moment. Paul is weary, surrounded by enemies, and facing an uncertain future. Yet, God's presence brings comfort and a clear direction. The Lord reminds him that his mission is not yet complete. He is destined to preach the Gospel in Rome. This promise becomes Paul's anchor in the storms to come.

The Conspiracy

But the opposition is far from over. A deadly **Conspiracy** is hatched. *Acts 23:12-13*: “The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot.”

This is a display of **Liars (Zeal Not According to Knowledge)**. Their zeal for what they believed to be right (defending their religious traditions) blinded them to the fundamental principles of justice and morality. They were willing to commit murder in the name of God, demonstrating a dangerous distortion of faith.

A Plot Discovered and Thwarted

However, God’s protective hand remains firmly upon Paul. The plot is **Discovered Plot**. *Acts 23:16-18*: “But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.’ So he took him to the commander.” This young man, whose name we don't know, becomes an unlikely hero. He bravely risks his own life to warn Paul and alert the Roman authorities.

The centurion listens to the nephew, and then takes him to Claudius Lysias to report the plot.

Protection and Transfer

Acts 23:20-22 details the commander's caution, and his instructions to the nephew of Paul's sister:

‘“The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, claiming they want to get some more information about him. But don’t let them persuade you, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush to kill him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have

killed him, and right now they are ready, waiting for your consent to their request." The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."'

Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, acts swiftly. He recognizes the gravity of the situation and takes immediate steps to protect Paul. He understands that Paul has Thine Accusers and orders for a large contingent of soldiers to escort Paul to Caesarea, to be placed under the protection of Governor Felix.

Arrival in Caesarea

Finally, *Acts 23:33-35* describes Paul's safe arrival in Caesarea: "When the cavalry came to Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will hear your case when your accusers get here.' Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace."

Paul is now in the hands of Roman justice, awaiting **Your Next Assignment**.

The mention of **The Third Hour**, or 9am, shows the timeline that God's people were on and how God was using all the details of Paul's life for His purpose and glory.

God's Faithfulness

Through this gripping narrative, we witness the unwavering of **God's Faithfulness**. Despite the hatred, conspiracies, and near-death experiences, God remains in control. He uses ordinary people, like Paul's nephew and the Roman commander, to protect His servant and fulfill His purposes.

This story is a powerful reminder that God's Word is not just a collection of stories; it is a living, active force that shapes lives and directs destinies. When we read the Word, we encounter the power of God, the reality of evil, and the unwavering faithfulness of our Lord.

In Summary

We explored Paul's tumultuous experience before the Sanhedrin, highlighting the hypocrisy of religious leaders, God's comforting presence, the deadly conspiracy against Paul, and God's providential protection. This narrative reinforces the power of God's Word, encouraging us to diligently study it and trust in His faithfulness amidst life's challenges. Just as God sustained Paul, He will sustain us.