

'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #32

Acts 22:23-23:11^(NASB)

Acts 22:23-30

And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,²⁴ the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating **that he should be examined by scourging** so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.²⁵ But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman."²⁷ The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."²⁸ The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen."²⁹ **Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.**

³⁰ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

Q: Most people under the Roman Empire were not Roman citizens; so how could Paul have been both a Jew and a Roman citizen? And how could he have proven it to this commander?

- Paul inherited his citizenship from his father, but no one knows for sure how Paul's father received that citizenship.
 - Originally Roman citizenship was only given to those who were from the Roman heartland. But later, citizenship was granted to certain provinces because of some special service to Rome, such as those who helped Antony in his military campaign in the 1st century B.C. .
 - There is some historical evidence for a Jewish presence in Tarsus as early as the 170's B.C.; and also for some Jews there becoming Roman Citizens at least 100 years before Paul's day.
 - It is certainly possible that Paul was a 2nd or even 3rd generation Roman citizen.
- It is possible that Paul carried with him an official badge, a double-faced tablet, most likely made of bronze, which was known as a "diploma."
 - These diplomas functioned as both a birth certificate and a citizenship token. Our modern equivalent might be a passport.
 - Luke doesn't mention this, but that is likely because it was a "you understood" scenario... much like we may not mention showing our passport as we went through customs.

Q: We already saw that Luke drew attention to Paul's being a Roman citizen in Philippi (Acts 16), and how much trouble people could get into for punishing a Roman citizen without a trial. Luke makes this point again here in verse 29. The original reader would have known all this without Luke pointing it out; so why does Luke lean into this point so heavily?

- Luke wants to point out that, every time Paul is accused of something, the Romans end up vindicating him, and are very careful to treat him properly.
- Most people didn't experience this kind of treatment from the Romans... especially when they were branded a "troublemaker"!

Acts 23:1-5

Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."² **The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.**³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"⁴ But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"⁵ And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

Q: Why did the high priest have Paul hit in the mouth?

- It probably wasn't so much about being offended at what Paul had said, as it was to put Paul in his place.
- It was like saying, "You're blaspheming!" or "You're obviously a liar" or "You have no right to speak up in your own defense."

Q: Why does Paul accuse the high priest of being a "whitewashed wall" that God is going to strike?

- A "whitewashed wall" was a wall that had been painted to make it look all right, but was rotten and about to fall down.
- Paul calls him this because the high priest is actually breaking the law by having him hit in the mouth.
 - Paul knew the law better than most... maybe even better than this high priest, since his position was political and not based on merit.
 - Paul was saying: "You're supposed to be judging me according to the law, but you're cutting off the legal branch you're standing on by ordering me to be hit... because that's against the law!"
- Ananias was high priest from 47 to 66 A.D. when the Jews assassinated him because of his support of the Romans during the Jewish uprising that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
 - Paul was right!

Q: Why would Paul not recognize Ananias as the high priest? And why did he apologize when he found out who he was?

- We have to assume that Ananias was not wearing any distinctive sign of his office.
 - It had been 20 years or more since the last time Paul had contact with a high priest, and he wouldn't have known which member of the ruling clan was holding office at that time.
- Paul doesn't apologize for his sentiment, but for expressing to someone whose office should be respected.

Q: What important lesson should we learn from Paul about how we should relate to corrupt politicians, agents of government, or governments?

- We should always respect the office, even if the person holding it is not respectable ([Rom 13:1-7](#)).
- Respecting the office **includes** the responsibility to remind the people currently holding that office of what they ought to be doing or not doing!
 - For Paul, especially as a Pharisee, calling rulers to do justice was grounded in his belief that, in the future, God would judge the world and set everything right.
 - From his perspective, all judgments between now and then should anticipate God's coming judgment, and seek to serve God's purposes, not their own politically expedient purposes.

[Acts 23:6-11](#)

⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" ⁷ As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹ And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" ¹⁰ And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

Q: Why does Paul play the “resurrection card”?

- Possibly because he realized he was never going to get a fair hearing from a group ready to hit him in the mouth for defending himself.
- This was a shrewd move!
 - The Sadducees were the elite, well-to-do religious aristocracy.
 - They were very political, and held most of the seats of power.
 - They also had a very pragmatic religion which denied life after death.
 - The Pharisees were the “blue collar” majority; fighting for the little man, with strict loyalty to the Word of God.
 - They believed in life after death... that God would ultimately set everything right, restore all things, make a new creation, and raise the dead to live in it.
 - When Paul says, “This is all about my belief in the resurrection”, he is releasing his biggest cat into a room full of self-important political pigeons!
 - He was, in effect, saying, “I’m on trial for standing up for what we Pharisees have always stood up for... resurrection of the dead!”
 - This immediately caused some of the scribes from the Pharisees to take his side... and then they all started fighting along party lines.
 - Suddenly Paul wasn’t on trial anymore... it was Pharisee against Sadducee.

Q: Just like He did when there was the uproar in Corinth ([Acts 18:9-10](#)), Jesus comes to Paul again to encourage him and give him some clarity. What is so important and clarifying about what Jesus tells Paul?

- Paul is NOT going to die in Jerusalem!
- His dream of going to Rome ([Acts 19:21](#)) was going to come true; maybe not the way Paul planned it... but nonetheless, it wasn’t a pipe dream. It was going to happen after all.

Q: What is so striking about Jesus telling Paul he was going to be His witness in Rome?

- The word Luke uses for “witness” here, is the Greek word “*martureo*” (*mar-too-reh'-o*). It is the same word we get our word “martyr” from.

Follow Up Assignment

Q: How do you relate to politicians and/or government officials?

- Do you show proper respect for their office, and God’s use of that office for His plans?
- Does your respect also include reminding these officials of what they should or shouldn’t be doing, in light of God’s coming judgment?

Q: In Matt 10:16-20 Jesus said,

*“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. **Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.** ¹⁷ Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ **But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,** ²⁰ **for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”***

Jesus said this to His disciples, but Paul obviously lived it too. And so might you!

- So how can you be “shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves”?
- How can you not worry, and be sure that The Spirit will give you the right words to say?

Q: How can *being a martyr for Jesus* be the same thing as being His witness?

- How are you doing at being Jesus’ witness wherever you go?