

Courage in a Crisis

Acts 23:1-24:27

Paul thought he was doing God's will by going to Jerusalem. Instead, he found himself in the middle of a firestorm that nearly cost him his life. Religious leaders wanted him dead. Roman officials didn't know what to do with him. However, in the middle of that chaos, Paul learned something about God's faithfulness that sustained him through two years of imprisonment and uncertainty. **6 SNAPSHOTS** from Paul's crisis will show us how to be courageous, too.

I. THE POLARIZED COUNCIL (23:1-10)

- The Greek word translated "lived" (v.1) means "to live as a citizen." It gives us the English word *politics*.
- "conscience" - means "to know with" - that inner witness that either accuses or excuses our actions. Paul's conscience was his first line of defense against any accusation because he knew his heart was right before God.
- **"I did not know ... that he was the high priest" (Acts 23:5).** "Some suggest that Paul may have not known the high priest personally, even though he was previously a member of the Jewish Council. Others claim that Paul may have had poor vision (perhaps his 'thorn in the flesh') and not been able to see him clearly. Still others believe that Paul could have been lying to get himself out of a bad situation. Apostles sinned too (Gal. 2:11-13). In this case, Acts is simply giving us a true record of Paul's sin. It seems more plausible, however, to take Paul's statement as sarcastic but not false. In this case, his statement, 'I did not know ... he was the high priest,' could be translated something like this: **'This is the high priest of God's Law? I would never have known it by his unlawful command to strike me!'**¹
- Paul, ever the strategic thinker, operated on the old principle of divide and conquer. He recognized that the council was composed of two opposing theological camps: Pharisees (who believed in resurrection, angels, and spirits) and Sadducees (who denied all of these supernatural realities).

II. THE PROMISING CHRIST (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'" - Acts 23:11 NKJV

4 Encouragements:

1. **Recognition:** *"You have testified for Me in Jerusalem"* - What an encouragement to hear the Lord acknowledge his faithful witness!
 2. **Relationship:** *"the Lord stood by [Paul]"* - The Lord was with Paul. If God is for you, who can be against you?
 3. **Reassurance:** *"Be of good cheer"* - The same phrase Jesus used when He walked on water and calmed His disciples' fears (*Matthew 14:27*).
 4. **Revelation:** *"You must also bear witness at Rome"* - This wasn't just encouragement; it was God's guarantee that Paul would survive to reach Rome.
- St. Augustine once said, "Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence."

¹ Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 436.

III. THE PLANNED CONSPIRACY (23:12-22)

- "under an oath" (v.12) - The Greek text says they "anathematized themselves," meaning they called down God's curse upon their own heads if they failed to kill Paul. "God, if we don't kill Paul, then You kill us." This was the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that *"the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service"* (John 16:2).
- Paul's nephew overheard the assassination plot. The text simply says he "heard of their ambush" (v. 16). God sovereignly placed this young man right in the meeting where they plotted Paul's death.

IV. THE PROTECTIVE COMMANDER (23:23-35)

- (vv. 23-24) The commander mobilized 470 soldiers for one prisoner: 200 soldiers (foot soldiers), 70 horsemen (cavalry), and 200 spearmen (possibly light infantry or javelin throwers). They departed at 9 PM under cover of darkness for the 60-mile journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea.
- The letter reveals several important facts: Paul was found guilty of no Roman crimes, the charges were purely religious disputes under Jewish law, nothing Paul did was worthy of death or imprisonment under Roman law, and the assassination plot was credible enough to require immediate action.

V. THE PREJUDICED COURTS (24:1-23)

- Felix had "more accurate knowledge of the Way" - probably through his Jewish wife Drusilla. He understood enough about Christianity to know Paul wasn't guilty of sedition, but he also knew that acquitting Paul would anger the Jewish leaders. So Felix did what politicians often do when faced with a difficult decision: he postponed it indefinitely. Paul was given considerable liberty during his 2-year house arrest.

VI. THE POLITICAL COWARDICE (24:24-27)

- "Many sinners today are like Tertullus, who flatter and refuse to face the truth. Others are like Felix, who hear the truth and understand it, and are even convicted, but who refuse to obey. Still others are like Drusilla; she heard the Word and saw her husband deeply moved, yet the record says nothing about her own decision. Undoubtedly, her youthful sins had already hardened her heart. Historians tell us that she died twenty-one years later in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius."²

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:

1. **Maintain Your Integrity Under Pressure** - When critics attack you, they should have to resort to lies because your life gives them no legitimate ammunition. *"I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men"* (Acts 24:16).
2. **Expect Jesus in Your Crisis** - God's encouragement often comes when we need it most, not when we think we need it. Don't be discouraged if God seems silent during your trial.
3. **Trust God's Sovereign Protection** - God used a teenage boy, pagan soldiers, and corrupt officials to protect Paul. Divine protection often comes through unexpected sources. Don't limit how God might work in your situation. When God has a purpose for your life, nothing can ultimately stop it. The assassination plot, the arrest, the trials - all were used by God to position Paul exactly where He wanted him. Your current difficulties may be God's way of positioning you for His purposes.
4. **Don't Procrastinate with God** - Felix's story serves as a solemn warning against spiritual procrastination. *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 6:2). *"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:15).

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 347.