

The Plot To Kill Paul

Acts 23:12-35

We have been following the story of Paul as he came to Jerusalem. Why he was up on the Temple Mount and the circumstances behind that. While he was up on the Temple Mount, we know that there was a riot and he had to be rescued by the Roman soldiers. Then they take Paul before the council and another riot or fight breaks out amongst them and Paul had to be rescued again.

But now the Roman commander that has been dealing with Paul's case has a difficult situation to deal with. He knows that Paul seems to cause a riot wherever he goes, and he now has to try and figure out what to do with Paul. He is also trying to figure out for himself if Paul is guilty or innocent of any crimes. Is he a threat of any kind to the Roman Empire.

Now of course, as you and I know from the story of Paul that we have been going over, that he was a devout man of God. He was in no way guilty of anything he had been accused of doing. However, we have to kind of put ourselves in the mind set of the Roman commander. He doesn't know Paul like we know him because we have the benefit of what scripture tells us.

So Paul, in probably a very discouraged, desperate, and depressed mood while in the barracks that night, had Jesus come to him and encourage him. This of course is where we ended last time but I like it so much that I want to read it again.

¹¹ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

The same Jesus that died on the cross to rescue Paul from his sin. The same Jesus that gave Paul a reason to live life for Him is now telling Paul that he has even more reason to go on. Be of good cheer Paul because I need you to go to Rome and bear witness for Me there. I still have more work for you to do My son. I am sure that when Paul heard that that he took that promise and he cherished it because now everything was different. Look at the start of verse 12.

12 And when it was day,

A brand-new day had come upon Paul. It was a desperate night but now a new day had awakened. A new beginning, a new day to serve the Lord. I don't know about you, but I love having a new day to do that in. It always makes me think of the verses in Lamentations 3:22-23.

*22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

How powerful is that? His mercies are new every morning. I have to wonder if this was not exactly what Paul was thinking. I often think about these verses in the morning and hold them close because I sometimes feel as though I may have worn out His mercies the previous day. But His mercies are new to you and I every single morning. So, I must think that Paul here was feeling renewed by this new day after having such a difficult night.

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

Now that's bad news. Do you see what's going on here? Paul wakes up to a brand-new, bright day and I am sure he is thanking Jesus for the encouragement he had received. However, he is unaware of the fact that there are 40 assassins waiting to kill him. Now that would be considered a bad day, wouldn't it? You wake up to a good day but behind the scenes it is actually a bad one.

In those days there was a secretive group of Jewish assassins that targeted the Romans and their supporters. They were known as Dagger men because they went around with daggers concealed under their cloaks. If these men were walking past a Roman in the streets, and they had the opportunity, they would pull out their dagger and slice the Roman across the jugular. Then they would just keep walking as though nothing had happened.

They were extremely feared by the Romans.

Now these men that have the plan to assassinate Paul seem to be a part of this group of Jews. These men were so zealous of this plan that not only were they not going to eat but they were not going to drink anything until they had carried it out. Wouldn't that give you some motivation to get the job done in a hurry? I mean, even if you could go a few days without eating, but to say I am not even going to drink any water until this happens. That would be tough to do and a big promise to make. So you have to understand that this is a high level of commitment by these men to kill Paul. We need to remind ourselves that it is entirely possible to be committed to our faith, to be zealous for our faith, and to be wrong in our faith, just as these men were. We have to be committed and zealous after the truth which can only be found in the Word of God.

So in verse 15, these assassins suggest to the council that they have Paul brought down to them the next day as though they want to speak to him again. They want the council to lie to the commander and have Paul brought to them in the hopes that Paul would somehow be exposed and they would have a shot to kill him. Now what I find interesting here is that if we had the opportunity to interview the council or these men and ask them, "are you committed to the God of Israel", I am sure they would all say yes. They felt as though the ends justified the means which of course is wrong. We can never think that the product justifies the process. That it is ok for us to sin along the way as long as the end result is ok. Or it is fine to do whatever, or live however, we want as long as we are happy.

If we were to end the story right here we would be sad but God always is working on our behalf, isn't He? Look at verse 16.

¹⁶ And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Wait a minute! When did Paul get a sister? Not only does he have a sister, but he has a nephew. Do you know that this is one of the few times in the Bible that we hear anything about Paul's family? But here we read about his sister and nephew and apparently, they live in Jerusalem. Here is something else we know about Paul's family. In his letters to the Corinthians, it mentions that he was single. I bring this up because it should be of encouragement to some of you. In churches we often teach about how good marriage is. The importance it can have in our

lives and having children. However, we often forget about the single folks. Well let me tell you that Jesus and Paul were both single and look how they were used by God. So I have to say that God can use you in a mighty way as well.

In Paul's case, what I find interesting is that at the time he wrote the letters he was single. However, I believe that at one point he had to of been married. I say this because if we recall, he was once a member of the Jewish council. He could not have been a member of the council if he were single. Also, Paul was a righteous Jewish man and in that culture it was unthinkable to be righteous and not be married. So what happened to his wife? Some believe that she died and others believe that she left him when he devoted himself to God. Scripture doesn't say.

Anyway, we don't know much about Paul's family other than he has a sister and a nephew in Jerusalem. Now when nephew heard about what these Jewish assassins were trying to do he runs and tell Paul. We don't know how it came to pass that the nephew heard about the plot against Paul. But let me just say that it was a miracle. Maybe a small miracle, if you can consider any miracle small, but a miracle non the less. Think about it. The arrangements of time, people, and location in order for the nephew to have heard this.

There used to be a word used in Christian circles for this kind of thing and it is providence. The word simply means, Gods guiding hand. This is what was at play here. God making everything line up perfectly so that Paul's nephew could hear what was going on. Don't you agree? How else could this have happened? I fully believe that God has a plan, and He works everything out for that plan to come to fruition.

Haven't you ever had a time in your life where it seems as though the moon, the planets, and the stars align so perfectly that something just falls right into place and a small miracle occurs? I know I have. That is exactly what is happening here. It was no accident that this happened. God had to protect Paul because Jesus promised that he would go to Rome to testify of Him. Let me just say that God can take a small miracle and turn it into a big promise. He can use it in a glorious way.

You see that as soon as Jesus told Paul that he had to go to Rome, in verse 11, he was under Gods protection. No harm could come to him. This is why the nephew overheard what was happening and ran and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

I want you to notice something in verse 18. The phrase, “Paul the prisoner”. Let me ask you a question. What crime had Paul committed? The answer of course is nothing. He had committed no crime and yet he was a prisoner. He was a prisoner simply because the Roman commander suspected that he might be guilty of something. So the commander had every intention of keeping Paul in custody until he could figure things out. Paul remains a prisoner until we reach the end of Acts.

19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

Now obviously the commander was very interested in this. But I like what it says in verse 19. It says, “the commander took him by the hand”. Why is that so fascinating? Well, it is because these small details emphasize that this was an eyewitness account. Think about it, if you were going to make up a story like this why would you include such a detail like the nephew being taken by the hand? However, if it is true then it would make sense to include this detail. To me it is just one of those things that can increase our confidence that the Word of God is true. We don’t know if Paul saw this happen or if the nephew said something about this. What we do know is that Luke recorded it after speaking to someone who was there.

Either way, in verse 22 the commander lets the nephew to leave but before he does, he tells him not to tell anyone that we have spoken. He doesn't want the nephew to be marked as a snitch and targeted by the Jewish assassins himself.

²³ And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; ²⁴ And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

Do you see what it says there? 470, heavily armed and trained soldiers, are going to escort Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. It is as though God was exaggerating His faithfulness to Paul. He is showing Paul that beyond any doubt that the promise of Jesus was and is true. Sometimes God will just do things like this as if to say, "Why did you ever doubt me". Here is 470 soldiers to protect you. Now I don't think that Paul was ever doubting God. I think Paul had a great big smile on his face. He was probably looking at all those soldiers and had a look on his face as if to say, "This is what my God can do". He can provide me with protection and on top of that give me a horse to ride so I don't have to walk this time. Not just a horse, but horses, in case one gets tired. Then they lead Paul safely to Caesarea to meet the governor.

So, you see that Jesus not only saves our souls, but God protects us. Just as He did for Paul. You could say that it is enough that He saves our souls. It was enough the work He did on the cross, the sacrifice He made for you and I, the shedding of His blood would be enough. Now you're on your own until you get to heaven. But that's not what He does. Jesus says "I love you, I care for you, I have my hand upon you and am going to guide you, and I am going to protect you all along the way.

I fully believe in heaven and what is awaiting us there but let me tell you that I am not waiting until that day to experience the fullness of God. I am not waiting for heaven to live the kind of life that God has for us. I believe that God wants us to experience the power and the glory of His kingdom right here right now. He is here to give us miracles, fulfill His promises, and to protect us. Now, when I say protect us that doesn't mean we won't go through anything. Just look at Paul's life. But let me tell you that He will see you through to the other side in the midst

of those troubles. His mercies are renewed, and He wants to work in you each and every day.

²⁵ And he wrote a letter after this manner: (This is the commander writing to the governor)

²⁶ Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. ²⁷ This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. ²⁸ And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: ²⁹ Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. ³⁰ And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

Here is the letter that was sent, along with Paul, to the governor. Here is a few things I would like us to notice. First of all, Paul is being sent to Caesarea to save his life from the people in Jerusalem. Secondly, he is being sent to speak to the Roman government. Which was Gods plan behind it all. Thirdly, there was no charge against Paul that was worthy of death or bonds.

I think that this was the most important part of the letter. The commander wanted the Roman government to know that Paul was guilty of nothing. That Christians were harmless. This letter in scripture is another one of those first hand accounts to the validity of the Word.

³¹ Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. ³² On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: ³³ Who, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

So, they took Paul, by way of night, as far as Antipatris. This was approximately the halfway point of the trip and the most dangerous part of it. After that they didn't see the need for all 470 soldiers to complete the trip to Caesarea so only 270 continued with Paul. So he was still well protected and when they arrived at Caesarea, they presented Paul to the governor, Felix, along with the letter.

The plot against Paul's life had failed. This kind of makes you wonder about the Jewish assassins that made the vow not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. Did they die of thirst or starvation? This was probably not the case. Ancient rabbis allowed for four types of vows to be broken: "Vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint" – exclusions allowing for almost any contingency.

God had performed a miracle in the midst of this crisis in Paul's life. However, for Christians today it seems as though we want the miracles but not the crisis. We want the miracles but we don't really want there to be a reason for the miracle to occur. That is simply not how it works. How can He show us who He is if we don't go through anything. If we don't have our eyes trained on Him.

Let's finish up ..

³⁴ And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; ³⁵ I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

Now maybe Felix had hoped that Paul came from some place that would require for him to be heard by someone else. When Felix had heard that Paul was from Cilicia, he knew that it was his job to deal with this matter. So, he tells Paul that he will hear him when his accusers get there. Paul must be thinking, wow, now I get to preach to a governor. This is the beginning of the fulfillment of what Paul was told back in Acts chapter 9. He was told that he would preach to kings and to gentiles.

Understand that Paul's arriving in Caesarea is the start of a 2-year confinement there. However, between now and the end of Acts, Paul will have been a prisoner for 5 years. So this man who was traveling all over the Roman Empire, going from place to place, is now locked up. As we continue to see though, God is going to use him in a great way as a prisoner.

This should show us that God can use us no matter where we are in life, no matter what we are going through, and no matter where we are in our walk with Him. Today, let us receive our small miracles and just watch what big promises God will fulfill in our lives.