

a dissention between the pharisees and the sadducees and the multitude was divided

Acts 23:1 – 35

~ Our modern world is rampant with wars and rumors of war. Morality is regarded as subjective and relative. Rebellion against authority at all levels has become the expected norm. Youth questions any and all established, proven, historical and even scientific fact, truth and wisdom. Confirmed past experience with evidence to support it is dismissed as unreliable when that is convenient for an individual or cause. Business as usual means oppressing the poor until they are destroyed. The daily news is saturated with violence, deception, destruction and corruption. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a day to come in which no two men would agree: not father and son, not mother and daughter, no two individuals would agree. I used to wonder if that could even be possible. Now I know it will easily happen when its time comes in God's prophetic calendar.

Alright, despite that dismal forecast, let's remember God is in control and accomplishing His plan and purpose in this world. Some church members seem to think they are changing the world; but that's perfect nonsense. Jesus prayed to His Father and our Father, saying, "...I pray not for the world but for those who are in the world whom Thou hast given Me." God has no plan to renovate or reform this world in any way, shape or form. You cannot change what God has foreordained, my beloved. This world goes on into an unspeakable tribulation period before all things are made new again, which happens in the twinkling of an eye, by the way. God works in myriad circumstances; and that's what we will examine in this report.

As our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God continues in this section of Paul's life, he has returned to Jerusalem. We considered that event in our last report. We examined the controversial opinions on whether or not he should have returned to Jerusalem at this time; and considered several different views about whether Paul was in the will of God or not. Our safari takes the position that Paul was entirely in the will of

God and, as we move forward, that should become clearer and clearer. I believe you will agree this account reveals the very definite hand of God moving Paul's life; the same Hand that wants to move in your life and my life, also. That is certainly the glory and wonder of it all, friends!

Yes, it is true Paul has been arrested at this time and is not having an easy time in his life; however, that in no way detracts from, minimizes, limits nor does it negate the fact Paul is following the leading of the Lord. The place where you and I walk today is, in one sense, an inconsequential existence; and most of us have a very simplistic routine in said life. Even so, God is concerned and interested in us, and He desires to lead us and guide us into all truth; even if we are wrongly incarcerated for furthering the cause of Christ – and that's when we need His guidance the most. We can trust Him with the extreme complexities that dog and challenge our simple lives in this modern culture.

Our contemporary church has produced extremists who are incessantly attempting to achieve some new sensational and emotional experience. Well, only by simple faith can we come to Jesus and believe in His death, burial and resurrection for our sins as the Son of God. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Only when we submit every thought and deed to Christ for correction and reproof should we expect to receive the direct leading in His direct will. Only when we begin to esteem others better than ourselves and consider the welfare of others above our own can we expect to become rich with all spiritual blessings.

Also in our previous report, the captain of the guard had been intent to beat Paul half to death and let him go – and let that be the end of the matter. He quickly changed his mind when he discovered Paul was a Roman citizen. As a result, the religious rulers and high priest in the Sanhedrin wanted to put Paul on trial – although they didn't really know what for; and we saw Paul make a futile attempt to explain his position and conduct. As we read on now, the high priest Ananias didn't want to hear anything except what Ananias wanted to hear – and Paul wasn't saying that. That's when violence ensued. In this forum on which I teach, it is the equivalent of blocking people and deleting their comments. Many around here would get

violent if they had the opportunity. Well, that's where we left off in the last leg of our expedition....

1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

~ The arrest and detention of Paul granted Ananias no liberty to touch a Roman citizen; and Paul was a Roman citizen. Today, deleting comments and blocking people is the equivalent of this. It is contrary to any concept of "freedom of speech" everyone ignorantly clamors about. Those are typically the ones who do the comment deleting, too, by the way – those who want the freedoms of American speech are usually the first to deny others of the right. Well, Roman law granted a great deal of justice to its citizens. Of course, the trial of Jesus does highlight the manner in which Roman law could go horribly wrong, be twisted and turned into a shameful mockery.

See, systems and laws are not the problems. The problem is the debauched hearts of individuals responsible for executing justice in said systems; as well as the hearts of those who are subject to it. Many people feel that if we can change our form of government, or change our party affiliations, or the leadership thereof, then that would solve our problems. Friends, that never has and never will solve our problems. We are to respect and pray for our leaders in authority; pray that God will choose them for salvation. We should pray the Lord will work through our leaders to create fair and equal legislation. We seem to have lost sight that truth today.

Nero was on the throne at the time in which we are studying, and he was a literal madman. The men who began our American system had a very real consciousness of God. If you don't believe that difference, it's simply your

own proud and profound ignorance, because this nation was founded on Christian principles. Thomas Jefferson and many others could not be classified as “Christians” by our definition – but – they all had an honest conviction that the Bible was the Word of God; and respected it as such when structuring our present-day system. That’s the historical record. The secular liberal and conservative political concerns have perverted and bastardized our system of democracy until it doesn’t work anymore. It’s no huge mystery why we have the problems we are experiencing. We’re really not very smart in any capacity – in fact; we’re just plain stupid, for the most part.

Here, Ananias the high priest acts against Paul contrary to the law they are espousing. Paul could speak very strongly, friends. Of course, humility and meekness means we are doing the will of God – irrespective of the cost; but the idea Paul was constantly passive and humble is a huge mistake. To believe we always need to offer love and hope as Christians is simply contrary to the Word of God. Jeremiah, Daniel and Isaiah didn’t do that. I see Paul as a meek and humble man, but he isn’t about to accept this crime against him passively. When Paul says whited sepulchre – whited wall – that wasn’t very nice – in fact, it was disrespect at its pinnacle. They were judging Paul according to the Mosaic Law while totally and completely ignoring that same law! Paul just happened to know every detail of the Mosaic Law. A man was not to be condemned nor punished until a final judgment had been handed down....

4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

~ We learn more about Paul in this section of Scripture. We know he was a Pharisee; and now he announces his father was a Pharisee, also. The

Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection in any form, but the Pharisees did; so, Paul turns this into a theological argument between fundamentals and liberals – and, my friends, when they are forced together, they are going to argue. Well, Paul wisely uses this in his own defense. When the Pharisees discover Paul was one of them, they begin to defend him concerning resurrection....

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10 And when there arose the greatest dissension we have yet seen in the Book of Acts, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

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.

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. They are going to be very hungry and thirsty before this all over with – or – they will have to break their oath!

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.

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

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.

~ I would have you note there is a group of super-pious people today who think we should not go to the doctor when we are sick; and that we should just rely on trusting the Lord for all of our needs. Many very famous people take this position and, although I think they are sincere, their children have died as a result of their hypocrisy. Many good men suffer greatly because of the selfishness of not paying their Bible teachers and preachers, too, by the way. See, I trust the Lord, but I'm sure He uses doctors and medicine to work through – and I am equally certain God uses other people to provide material needs to His poor servants. They tell me to, “...just run along now and trust the Lord - He will deliver.” Well, maybe He would have, but this is

the way Paul did it; and I am more than positive that this is the only way God wants it done. I'm sure God intends for us to use every manner and means available to help others. We are to trust He works through other believers, uses other methods and other means in blessing us. That is what I understand it to mean when Scripture tells us we are to trust the Lord. Of course, those with abundant means typically argue this point vehemently...

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.

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.

25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

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.

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.

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.

~ It appears that Luke, who is writing Acts at this time, had access to the letter; so, he gives a narrative beginning with, "... it was after this manner." It would have been a very formal letter, to be sure. The captain in Jerusalem is only concerned with having the governor know he is performing his duties of protecting Roman citizens in Jerusalem. Of course, the captain never did figure out what the charge against Paul was; other than it pertained to the Mosaic Law. So, Paul is kept in prison in Caesarea as he awaits his accusers to arrive to face him. In the next leg of our Spiritual Safari, we will find those accusers were very quick to get there. God had struck a nerve in them through the apostle Paul. This is Paul witnessing for Christ. I'm sure he is in the will of God at this time, and this is where we'll pick up in our next report ~
