

The Theater - Acts 23:1-16

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[0 : 0 0] Open to Acts 23. We all know where Paul is in Jerusalem. It's about 59 AD, 20-some years since Jesus has returned to heaven. Paul is done with his missionary journeys, as far as Acts will record them. It's been quite a journey. We could spend a whole evening reviewing just some amazing characteristics from Paul's journey, but we won't.

One of the things that struck me is just, you know, we're going to start, this will begin Paul's political career tonight, much different than you might think of a political career. But it just struck me as it's going through this section and preparing how Paul traveled all over the known world, and we don't have any account of what was happening in society beyond how the gospel was affecting society or society was interacting with the gospel. Paul doesn't go into an area and be like, oh man, they just had elections, and let me tell you, or oh, we just really need to mobilize and get out there because society is going downhill. They got these temples and these prostitutes, and where's the church? What is the church doing? Why aren't they out there? That just doesn't seem to be his wheelhouse or the gospel's wheelhouse or God's wheelhouse.

So, my message title for tonight is The Theater. The Theater, The Theater, right? We're going to see a lot of theater, the stage being set. My outline, I think I've watched too much Batman from the 60s, because like everything comes across, I realize all my outlines are like, you know, at the end of an episode of Batman, where it's like the stage is set. The politics thicken. Will Batman make it out alive? This is the end for him and Robin, and that's kind of in my mind when I do outlines. I hear those one-liners, so that's how I put it. Verses one through five is the stage is set. Six through ten, the politics thicken. Eleven, an intermission, right in the middle of this four-part act. Twelve through fifteen, a conspiracy afoot.

And then sixteen, the truth wins out. So, we'll cover sixteen verses tonight. So, Paul, if you remember, we'll back up into chapter 22 a little bit. He was on the stairs of the Antonia Fortress. He starts this whole, I guess you could say riot, as he begins to speak to the people. And he's then there in the Antonia Fortress. And it says that in verse 30, on the morrow, because he, being the captain of the guard, the Roman guard there in the fortress, and we know that he was captain over probably about 500, because he had centurions under him. So, this is a pretty important person. That on the morrow, because he, the captain, would know the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews, where Paul was being accused. He wanted to know what was going on.

He loosed him from his bands and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them. It's so easy to miss the little things that's happening to Paul in the midst of this. The big picture is, Paul has a chance to preach the gospel to the Jews. There's a lot happening there. I mean, he was beaten. They had to go and rescue him, they carried him up the stairs. Here it says that on the morrow, they loosed him from his bands. So, that means all night that he's chained. The things that probably would have knocked me off my game and not made me think, when's the next opportunity for ministry, Lord? I would be putting out the, you know, please pray, please pray I get out of here. This is not the Lord's will.

[4 : 05] But Paul's just kind of rolling with this. So, he commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them. So, the chief priests, they're not going to go up into the Antonia Fortress. They're not going to go into that place of the Gentiles. It's unclean.

So, he brings Paul down again into the temple precinct and they all come around to hear Paul. And they set him before him. We pick up in verse one. And then Paul, the diplomat. Remember last time we said he was a diplomat, an official representing a country abroad. This open door that God has given Paul. The stage is set and Paul earnestly beholding the council. That word earnestly beholding means to fix his eyes. So, he's looking around at the Jewish council. He's boring his eyes into them. He's looking at them and staring at them. And how fun is it when someone just looks at you, right? You're like, where else can I look? Paul earnestly beholding the council said, men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And then the whole place explodes. And we'll get to that in a minute. Paul starts out by telling these men, these Jews, if you remember, the church had wanted him to go into the temple and take some of the believers, the Christians, but who were Jews.

They kept a vow and he wanted them, they wanted him to be the sponsor to prove his Judaism, to prove his loyalty to the Jews. And that didn't work too well. But Paul still says, men and brethren, I'm one of your brothers. I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. What is a conscience?

Well, conscience, it's a long definition. We're going to do a bunch of definitions tonight, guys. But conscience is the faculty, power, or principle within us, which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections. So it's that thing within us, power or principle, that is deciding that if our actions are lawful or unlawful. Something within me that says, is it lawful or unlawful? And instantly approves or condemns them. When you've done something that violates your conscience, it's not like that afternoon, you know, four hours later, you did in the morning, you did something in the afternoon, you're like, you know, I think my conscience is troubled. No, it's like, oh man, it comes out, you know, I shouldn't have done that. My conscience is troubled by that. But there's a problem here because Paul tells us that about his conscience, he says, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. Well, Paul, does that mean you had a clean conscience while consenting to Stephen's death? Paul, how can your conscience guide you and affirm you in something like that, Paul? What Paul is declaring to the Jews here is he's saying that he did not knowingly violate the law that they're accusing him of violating. That before God, he has kept the law.

That his conscience affirmed him. So conscience is our, like our internal moral compass, right? Well, aren't we always to let our conscience be our guide? Weren't we taught that in a little song?

[7 : 17] But a conscience, like a compass, so a compass, how does it work, right? It points to magnetic north. There's an outside influence pulling upon that compass, pulling it in that direction, right?

So we have a conscience. We have an internal compass that is being pulled in a direction. But just like a compass, if I'm following my compass north and I'm walking through the woods, and then I come across something that has a greater magnetic pull than magnetic north, well, that compass then is going to get pulled off to the side. Something of greater draw or greater potency or magnetic pull will pull that compass off. And you can depolarize a compass by allowing it to stay in the presence of a stronger magnetic force than magnetic north.

And so if my compass is being drawn off, my internal moral compass, if something of greater influence than the thing that's telling me this is right or wrong, well, oh, well, now my own will, my own desire, or my flesh, or my sin all of a sudden has a greater influence and is pulling that compass in a different direction.

So can our conscience always be our guide? Well, no, because according to the definition, it's that power of principle within us. Well, what is the power of principle within you?

If the power of principle within you, if the basis by which you're making decisions is already off, we talked a little about that Sunday. If your morality is already off, Jesus said, you know, that if your eye be dark, if the light that is in you be dark, then how great must be your darkness?

[8 : 58] If you look at the dark and you think, oh, that's light. Oh yeah, it's light. Well, then how great is darkness if the light is already dark? So we can't allow our internal compass. We can't trust it, can we? Conscience is our internal compass. And we see that in Romans 2, the scripture bears that out, verses 14 through 15.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having no law are a law unto themselves. So they kind of prove that God's law, that God has put his law in our hearts. Nobody has to be taught that lying is wrong. We know it's wrong. You have to be taught that lying is right. We all lie. We all are born liars. And then we feel guilty about it.

Some people lie more easily than others. But we have to be taught that lying is right and proper and good and acceptable in certain situations to then go along with that. We have a stronger then pull upon our conscience than what God's written on our heart. Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. And so he's saying that God has written his law on our hearts.

But there's something that can happen to a conscience, a seared conscience, scripture says. That's where the magnetic north, there's that stronger magnetic pull and whoop, and now your compass is just always askew. It says you're going north, but you're actually going northeast.

1 Timothy 4, 1 through 3. Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies and hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron. No longer has any effect. It no longer works as it should. It's been nullified. Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them, which believe and know the truth. It's the most basic of things that God has put into creation. Men and women. It's been built into us that marriage is part of our nature. A man and a woman are to marry. He says, well, a doctrine of demons is forbidding to marry.

[11 : 10] And those with a seared conscience think all of a sudden, their conscience points them in that direction, that that is a virtue. To not be married in today's society is a virtue. Do you know there are more, there is a greater percentage of same-sex marriages happening than traditional marriages.

They're just coupling up and living together. But there's a huge push right now for same-sex couples to take over marriage, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats.

If you had read that like in the 1800s or, you know, well, maybe a little further back, you'd be like, what is that? Well, today it's our society is awash with that. That comes from Hinduism, that it's more spiritually cleansing to only eat plant matter, to not eat meat. Well, God says, that's a, these are definitions of doctrines of demons, that those who's with seared conscience.

Now, I'm not saying if something's more healthy, you determine that, okay. But the vegetarian and vegan craze did not start in health. It started with a purifying of the soul by abstaining from meats. And then they stuck onto it, this idea that, well, it could be more healthy.

So conscience is not our guide. Well, what is our guide? What do we, what's our guide? Proverbs 11, three kind of gives a picture, another picture of the conscience.

[12 : 27] The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. Well, how do I know which is which? How do I know if my conscience is true north, is magnetic north? How do I know where I'm going? What's better than a compass? If I'm in the woods with a compass, it can be, you say, well, maybe a map. Well, I need the compass to use the map, right? Well, what's better? A guide. Someone who knows where they're going. And I can just follow them. And they've already been there. I don't have to be like trying to make, boy, I hope this compass is right. It keeps kind of jumping to the side over here. You know, maybe it's because I'm holding this big magnet, but I don't want to let it go because I really like it. And it satisfies me and it feels so good. And, but then someone comes along and says, are you lost? Yeah, I'm lost. Well, follow me. You know where you're going? Yeah, I've been this path a hundred times. How much better to have a guide? John 16, 13, how be it when he, the spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth. So as we follow our guide, guess what direction our compass has got to point? It's going to point towards him. When our internal conscience aligns with God's word, we have such confidence and such assurance in the way that we're walking. When my conscience affirms, like we read in Romans, affirms and confirms my direction, man, I have such confidence. And guess what is the strongest force acting upon that compass, acting upon my internal compass with the Holy Spirit.

So all of a sudden then, as I continue to align with that over and over and over, well, it gets so strongly attracted to that, man, I passed by something that before I might've pulled that needle the other direction. It doesn't even flicker it anymore. It's like, well, I don't even know what that is anymore because I'm following. Always let your conscience be your guide. No, always let the word be your guide. The Holy Spirit is our guide. I don't have to know, how do I know right now I'm feeling this? And there's times where, man, your conscience is going to tell you, you are wrong. You are in, this is, we don't do it this way. And the Bible is going to say that is not true. That's, that's the flesh. That's pride. That's self-righteousness. You need to let that go and follow the word. There's times where your conscience is going to completely affirm and say, you're fine. You're perfectly fine. And then you're gonna read a verse and be like, Bible says no. Which are you going to follow at that point? We do not follow our conscience.

And so Paul here says to the religious Jews and to the Pharisees and the scribes, he says, I have lived in good conscience before God until this day. And I think he's kind of throwing them a bone. Look, you may be in the same place, guys. I'm not condemning you. Maybe you're in the same place I was when I thought it was a good thing to abuse and persecute Christians.

And the high priest commanded them that stood by him to slap him in the face, to smite him on the mouth. He didn't get any, he didn't get, he didn't say Jesus. He didn't say Gentiles. He didn't say anything. He just says, I have lived in good conscience before God until this day. And he slapped him. Ananias, the high priest. Ananias means whom Jehovah has graciously given. How sad that this man's name and his potential was there to be a great man of faith. And we see what he was.

He was considered, it was said of him that he was vicious, gluttonous, and self-serving, that he took the tithe from the junior priests. He would go in and steal it. And they were poor, and they had no food, and they had nothing, but he used it for his own gain. He was tight with Rome.

[16 : 02] He was ruthless. He would take people out that got in his way. And he was a man not to be messed with. So he commands that he had slapped on the face. So Ananias's conscience led him to take the law into his own hands. His conscience was like, get this, shut this guy up. Then Paul said unto him, God shall smite you, you whited wall. For sittest thou to judge me after the law and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? I don't think he turned and lost his temper. I think he just, with that look, just bored into him and said, God's going to smite you. And God did. This man was killed pretty brutally. He says, God will smite you, you whited wall. Matthew 23, 27, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and says, woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like, you are like unto whitest sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. And so the sepulchers, the limestone sepulchers, they would put the bodies in so that then it would decompose the flesh and the bones would be left.

They take the bones out, ceremonial bury them. And then you have the box used for your next relative, right? But they painted them white so that you would know that they're there. Because if you touched a dead body or a tomb or whatever, you'd be unclean. So they painted them white so the Jews could see them. They're kind of pretty on the hillside, you know, this thing white. And Jesus is saying, look it, it doesn't matter how nice you make it, it's still a tomb. It doesn't matter how much, how pretty you make the mausoleum, it's still where dead bodies are. That's still the point of it.

The interior is always going to be unclean. And Ananias is the same way. He was no substance apart from the show of his position. He had a position. It looked like something, but the man had no substance.

And Paul said that. He says, you're a whited wall. It was not contrary for him to be smitten. And Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 25 verse 1. He says, if there be a controversy between men, or the law says, if there be a controversy between men and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them. So they're coming to judgment to be judged by the judges.

Then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Okay? You justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. What was left out here? Well, we could read it like this. If there be a controversy between men and they come unto the judges, then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Well, they left out the middle part, that the judges may judge them. Paul says, I've not been judged. You've not determined whether I'm righteous or wicked. You've already condemned me. And that is not lawful. Never be afraid to stand against hypocrisy. Paul recognizes the hypocrisy here. Just like Jesus said, woe one to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Now, did Paul stand against their hypocrisy by throwing it in their face? By yelling at them? By pointing out all the dirt in their life? No. What did he do?

[18 : 55] He stood against it with the truth. We stand against hypocrisy with truth. He just gave the truth. And they that stood by in verse 4 said, do you revile God's high priest? Revilest thou God's high priest? I have written in my Bible, revilest thou God's apostle? They were okay with reviling God's apostle. And like, do you revile God's high priest? One person had all the show of substance, and one person had all the substance. The high priest's position was null and void after the cross.

And he says, do you revile God's high priest? That's not God's high priest. Who's God's high priest? Who's entered into the heavenlies with the blood of the everlasting covenant? That's the high priest.

It's funny. You know, they say to Paul, you, you, you broke the law. You reviled God's high priest.

How could you do that? Exodus 22, 28 says, thou shall not revile the judges nor curse the ruler of your people. But wait a minute. It was okay for them to break the law and slap Paul in the face.

But now they're accusing him, but not willing to own their own wrong. It's because a hypocrite never sees his own hypocrisy. He'll always see your hypocrisy. He'll always put upon you his own hypocrisy, but he never sees his own. Then Paul said, well, I'm sorry, brethren. I didn't know that he was the high priest. For it is written, thou shall not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

[20 : 29] That's that scripture in Exodus. Did Paul not know that this was the high priest? Well, think of it. Paul's been out of Jerusalem for a long time, a long time. I don't think he was up to date on who's who in the political sphere. And that's what I like about that. As I see this and look back over Paul's missionary life, Paul's here for the gospel. They're like, don't you know who this man is?

Don't you know? And he's like, sorry, guys, I don't got a clue. I'm not judging him by his position. I'm judging him by the fact that he broke the law. And so did Paul know? I don't think so.

I don't, Paul's not going to lie here and say, oh, and be sarcastic. I didn't know. But you see, Paul judged himself by the same standard that he judged others, didn't he? Because humility owns what hypocrisy denies. So Paul's like, man, I'm sorry, guys, you're right.

That was so wrong of me. I didn't know. I'm sorry. I did break the law. And hint, guys, now it's your turn. I'm sorry for slapping you in the face. No, that didn't happen. Because there's no humility. So the word there, evil. Paul said, I knew not, brethren, he was the high priest. It's written, you shall not speak evil of the ruler. That means miserable.

You shall not speak miserable of the ruler. Even if the ruler's miserable, you can't speak miserable of the ruler. We are not to speak improperly of leaders. But what are we to do?

[21 : 51] We're to pray. We're to speak the truth. We're always to speak the truth. Right? We live in a world full of hypocrisy and miserable leaders. Okay? What do we do? We speak the truth. We may get slapped in the face for it. We may be reviled. We may be called the hypocrites. But we speak the truth.

Ephesians 4.15, but speaking the truth how? In love. Speaking the truth in love is a sign of maturity. It's a sign of growth. And it leads to maturity. That we may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. Speaking the truth in love. It's not an option. Paul didn't say, hey, you do this once in a while. We're always to speak the truth in love.

1 Timothy 2.1-4, Paul says, I exhort, therefore, that first of all, this is where the prayers come in, supplication, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

And, you know, you think next would be like for the church, for the apostles, for your family. Be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who will have all men, excuse me, to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Why are we praying for our leaders? Because God would see them saved. He would have all men to be saved. And that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life. Now, is that I'm praying that they would treat me well so I can live a quiet and peaceable life? No. I'm praying for them because the effect of my prayer is that in my life, I live a quiet and peaceable life. Because I'm not, when I'm praying for them, it's changing my attitude towards them and my heart towards them. I'm not speaking miserable of them. I'm now speaking of them to the Lord. Maybe I'm telling the Lord of how miserable they are. But as I do that, God reminds me about how miserable I am. He says, but I saved you.

[23 : 48] And Lord, that you would bless and save them. What is the best way to correct a miserable ruler? Make him a believer. Lord, save him. Save his miserable hide. Turn quickly over to Romans 13. We're going to do the first eight verses very briefly. Because Paul here is kind of making it out like, whoa, Paul, I don't know about this. He says that it's not lawful that I should speak, that I should revile or speak evil of a ruler of the people. What about when the people's ruler is evil? What do we do? Romans 13, verse 1.

Let every soul be subject under the higher powers. The word subject means to arrange under or to be subordinate. Let every soul be arranged under the higher powers. And that word means the power to choose. Those that have the power to choose, the ones that have been put in a place where they're the ones that make the decisions, we are to arrange ourselves under this arrangement that God has made.

For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained, are put in place, are stationed. They're placed in their station of God. All of them? Not in a democracy. We the people vote. No, all of them. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whoever therefore resists, that literally means to arrange in battle. Whoever therefore arranges themselves in battle against the power resists the ordinance or the arrangement of God. So we are to arrange ourselves underneath those that God has put in that station and in that place. We are not to arrange ourselves in battle against those positions because when we do, we arrange ourselves in battle against God. This is not about the person. This is about God. And they that resist or set against shall receive to themselves damnation or will the judgment or sentence that will be due when you resist that authority that God has put in place. There will be a sentence that's carried out. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil. Will thou then not be afraid of the power or the authority? Do that which is good and thou shall have praise of the same.

Really? What about when I do that's good and they don't praise me for that, that I'm condemned for that? Well then what? For he is the minister of God. That word is deacon. He's God's deacon. He's God's servant.

For he is the minister, the deacon of God to thee for good. God has placed him there for your good, to serve you for your good. Is he upholding that? Is he fulfilling that responsibility, that person?

[26 : 36] That's not my place. That's not my part. That's his. And he will be judged for it. So when we look at an authority, when we look at someone that God has put in place, when he sets up a king or a ruler and we go, wait a minute, that's a wicked man. Yeah, but God placed him there. And he will answer for his wickedness because God has specifically placed him there for this reason, to serve God's people for good. But if you do that which is evil, verse 4, be afraid, for he bears not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that does evil. This is the purpose of government, to execute wrath upon him that does evil and to affirm those that do righteousness. Wherefore, because of that, you must need to be subject, not only for wrath, not just because you're afraid that if you break the law, he's going to chop off your head. Don't just be subject out of that reason, but also for conscience sake. And here we are back to the conscience.

Conscience sake in what way? Well, that goes back to first verse 1. For there's no power but that which is of God. Our conscience answers to God. For we are subject for conscience sake before God. For this cause pay you tribute also, for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. What thing? That goes back to verse 4. The thing where he is the minister of God to thee for good. They are attending on this very thing. Render, or get, that word literally means to give away for your profit. The reason I am giving this is for my own profit and gain. Render, therefore, to all their dues, their debt, whatever indebtedness you have. The tribute, toll, or tax, to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything but to love one another. For he that loves another has fulfilled the law. So there's two parts in there. There's the part of the person, the power or authority, as it says, that this is God's arrangement. He arranged this, and he puts him in his place and station, that person. And then we arrange ourselves underneath that. And God says it's for our good.

Now, if I choose not to arrange myself underneath that, and I rebel, then I'm outside God's order, and I'm against his will, and I'm in sin. And I will answer for that. If I stay underneath that, and I'm within God's arrangement, and this person up here goes outside God's order, and rebels, and is in sin. And he is then responsible for that to God. I am still responsible for my part, which according to this is to do what? To do good. To live righteous. Knowing that God has placed this man there to execute wrath upon him that does evil. So I don't do evil just because this guy has decided he's going to flip the script, and he's going to be God in place of God, and he's going to rewrite the rules, and he's going to call evil good and good evil. I'm not gonna. So when someone says, well, Romans 13 says we must always obey. It doesn't say that at all. It says to subject, to arrange under, to be subordinate. Yes, we're not going to arrange ourselves against. We're not going to take up arms.

Why? Because this world's not our home. Jesus before Pilate, he said, this isn't my kingdom. If this was my kingdom, then my servants would fight for me. He goes, but this isn't my kingdom. This world's not my home. I don't really care in the, you know, what happens. I know what's going to happen to this world, right? Guys, I hate to break you to you. There's no hope for America.

There's no hope for this world. None. It's going down the tubes, and nothing we do will ever stop that because the Bible promised that. Don't you see that's part of our hope? The hope is for the people of America and for the people of this world, that Jesus has promised that he will take us out of this world. And then he will come, and he will set up the correct kingdom, and he will renew things and make all things new, and then there'll be a kingdom worth living in, right? So I'm not looking for America to get better. It's not gonna. This nation, this world's going down. Nothing I do is going to prevent that. Does that mean I then rebel against this system? No, because it's God's system. Do you see Paul in any of the places he stopped rebelling against the system? He worked within the system for the sake of the gospel. It didn't really matter to him. He wasn't like, I can't believe it's not a capitalist country. I just can't do ministry here. What did that matter, right? Love is sacrificial, not selfish. Owe no man anything but to love one another, right? And so as we are arranged under this arrangement of God, that's what we're called to do. We're called to love, but we only do that in the truth. Truth and love can't abide apart from one another. So we maintain the position that God has placed us in this arrangement, which is to live in that which is good, to reject that which is evil, whether we are supported by the guy above us or not. Romans 9, 17, speaking of Pharaoh, Paul writes, for the scripture says unto Pharaoh, even for the same purpose, if I raise thee up, that I might show my power in thee and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Here's a wicked ruler.

[31 : 32] This guy was a pagan, wicked ruler that God says, I placed him in that station for a purpose. The administration we have is placed by God for a purpose in this day and age. I don't have to worry about how it's all going to fall out because I know, I know. So look up. Moving into verse six, the politics thicken. So Paul realizes, he perceives here, it says in the beginning of verse six, when Paul perceived that 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, and of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called into question. We're going to find out why Paul says this, because the Pharisees and Sadducees were quite opposed ideologically to one another. But Paul also perceived at this point, he wasn't going to get a fair trial. Paul's not trying to be divisive or stir up division.

All he's going to do is reveal the division that's already there. If you remember, they didn't let him speak and they slapped him in the face. So he's like, okay, they're not going to, they're not going to give me much of an audience. Now that we're going to find out later in the chapter, not tonight.

Oh no, we will. Yeah, we'll get to him in verse 16. We have two family members, well, three of Paul's we didn't know about. Paul has a father. I mean, of course he has a father, but we've never met his father. And it says his father was a Pharisee. And Paul then was a Pharisee, continuing the family business, right? What did his dad think of him after he came to Christ? Was he still alive?

Did he know? You know, was he a big disappointment to Paul? We know Paul probably had a wife because of his position in the Sanhedrin. And we're going to find out Paul's got a nephew and a sister living in Jerusalem. Were they believers? I don't know. It's just interesting that it's just thrown in here that Paul's father was a Pharisee. So Paul had also perceived that he would receive no fair trial at the hand of these men because the verdict was already in. But he says something interesting here. He says, the reason I'm here and the reason that I'm on trial is for the hope and resurrection of the dead. Am I called? And he says, it's because of the gospel. I'm here because of the gospel. And look what he titles the gospel, the hope and resurrection of the dead. I'm called into question.

The gospel is not for the living, but for the dead. You say, you got that wrong. The gospel is for the living, not the dead, right? No, the gospel's not for the living. The gospel makes the dead alive, but only the dead can receive resurrection. A living person can't go through resurrection.

[34 : 04] You have to die. Jesus in John 5 39 says, search the scriptures to the Pharisees. In them, you think you have eternal life and they are they which speak of me. And you will not come to me that you might have life, indicating they don't have life. They're dead. John 14 6, Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the father, but by me. I am the way, the truth, and the life. That means outside of him, there's no life. And then going all the way back to the beginning of John with Nicodemus, he says, he that believes on the son has everlasting life. And he that believes not the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. So the gospel is not for the living, but for the dead. And Paul here declares the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Our hope is not in this life. Our hope is in the resurrection to the life to come. The hope of the gospel doesn't stop here. It continues on. And when he had said so, there arose a dissension or literally an insurrection between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the multitude was divided. The

Pharisees and the Sadducees here, they're divided against one another. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Pharisees, they were more of the people of the people. They were the middle class. The Sadducees were kind of like the upper class. The Pharisees believed in the Torah, the complete Torah, the Old Testament, the prophets, the five books of Moses. The Sadducees only held to the five books, and that was it. The Pharisees believed in resurrection. The Sadducees did not. And the Sadducees were more of the elites. So when Paul declares here that for the hope of the resurrection of the dead, was he called into question? It says, and when he had said so, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the multitude was divided. Dissension means an insurrection.

Paul was not looking to cause a division. All he was doing was exposing one that was already there. False unity is exposed by truth. Why did Paul need to do this? Was he just trying to mess with them? Was he trying to just create problems? No. Think of what was going on. You had all of these men down here in the temple precinct, the council in Jerusalem, and you had the captain of the guard of the Romans looking on. This whole thing is being painted as if Paul was the bad guy. Complete lie.

It was a lie. And so Paul, recognizing he wasn't going to get a fair trial, exposes the lie just by offering the truth. He just says, well, I'm just going to give you the truth, and we're going to see what happens. And all of a sudden, this unity, this false unity between the right and the left, between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, this false unity is just divided instantly. It's exposed for what it is. True unity is spiritual. Ephesians 4, 3, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. The unity that's true unity is only found in the spirit. The world's unity is simply a facade. It's just, it's part of that stage play. It's just a costume to hide the dissension that's behind it. See, the Pharisees, the right and the left, the left and the right. The more liberal, the less, less liberal, liberal. But together, it's just dissension. For the Sadducees say that there's no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees confess both. 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 have spoken to him, let us not fight against God. A clamor there is a great cry. And to strive, they strove to fight it out fiercely. So they rose, and they start this fight. All of a sudden, there's this huge division, and they begin to use Paul. Paul, who was their enemy. I mean, a moment ago, they slapped him in the face, and now they're like, well, this man is of God.

God is on our side. But the Pharisees were only interested in Paul when he could be used for their political advantage. And they realized, oh, well, we can use this to gain one up on the other side.

[38 : 18] And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. Paul, representing the church in this moment, representing the believers in the midst of this political turmoil, what happens? He's torn into pieces, right? They want to tear him apart. You're with us. No, you're with us. No, you're... And whenever the church enters in to politics, it just gets torn apart.

Politics, political, what does that mean? I'm going to teach you, the scripture is going to teach us tonight how to run a successful political campaign as we finish out this chapter. We're going to find that out. But politics, politic, and political, another long definition, is ingenious in devising and pursuing any scheme of personal or national advancement. So it's being ingenious to devise or pursue a scheme that advances you personally or nationally. But it is without regard to morality.

It's cunning. It's artful. It shrewdly adapts its means to the end, whether good or evil. So I'm trying to advance something personally or nationally, very shrewdly, very artfully.

But I'm doing it with no thought of what's good or bad or to morality. The whole point is what? The end. A political campaign. A campaign means an organized course of action to achieve a goal.

So a military campaign, you're going in to achieve a goal. So when you put these together, you have this ingenious way to devise and pursue your own end, this campaign you're on, but without any regard to morality. Shrewdly adapting your means to the end. Hey, I'll just shift to whatever I need to to get to the end. And a person like this, when you say, well, that's wrong.

[40 : 10] They say, well, wrong. There's no wrong. The end is what's right. It doesn't matter how we get there. So how to run a successful political campaign? Well, in this verse, what do we see?

There arose a great cry, a great cry. So if reason doesn't work, at least be so loud, no other voice can be heard. They tried reason and that didn't work. What is reason? Reason is to allege by words, the ground principle or motive of a cause. I'm going to give you the motive, the principles, the reason behind this cause. I'm going to give you a reason. And then your mind takes in that reason. And by reason, you are enabled then to infer from the reason I give you certain, from the facts or propositions, you can infer an outcome. So I'm going to give you a reason of what I'm doing. You're going to take that reason and you're going to infer an outcome.

I can reasonably look at what's happening in our culture today. If you think of what's happening currently in the, on the campuses right now, universities in our culture, and I can infer an outcome, this is not good. That is not good. But wait a minute, what if, what if I don't want you to infer that outcome? What if I want to get to my own end by some cunning means and I can't use reason? Well, if reason doesn't work, then be loud. At least be so loud that no other voice can be heard.

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the castle. And Jesus said, give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under feet and turn again and rend you. So Paul, and that's why Paul knew he wasn't going to get anywhere with the gospel here. Now we have this intermission right in the middle of this. We're just getting into this final closing act and everything kind of just goes dark for a moment. All of this excitement. And that night, the Lord stood by him and said, be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome. Paul was discouraged. How do you know Paul was discouraged? Because the Lord said to him, be of good cheer. The Lord says, do you be of good cheer? Probably not being of good cheer in that moment. I think Paul thought he had just blown it. The opportunity of a lifetime, two days in a row to preach the gospel, and it just all fell apart. He's probably thinking, why did I say that? Why did I say that? I shouldn't have said the truth about the situation. I could have been more finessing there.

I could have been more politic. So the word of God comes to him. And what does it do? It encouraged him, be of good cheer, Paul. It affirmed him, you've testified of me in Jerusalem. You did a good job, Paul. And it refocused him. Paul, you're going to bear witness of me in Rome. If you remember, Paul, when he was in Ephesus in Acts 19, he said, hey, I have to go to Jerusalem. And after that, I must also see Rome. He knew where he was headed. He's like, I have to get to Rome.

[43 : 12] Verse 12, a conspiracy afoot. And when it was day, certain of the Jews branded together, so over the next day, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul, noblemen. Acts 24, 27, after Paul has been kept at the Antonia Fortress, he eventually goes up to Caesarea. It says this, that after two years, Prochius Festus came into Felix's room. And Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. We'll figure out who all those are eventually. The point is, is after two years, this was a miracle. These guys haven't eaten or drank anything for two years, and they're alive.

Jesus says in Matthew 5, 33, again, you have heard it been said by them of old, you shall not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it's God's throne, nor by earth, it's his footstool, neither by Jerusalem, for it's the city of the great king, neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou cannot make one hair white or black, but let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these comes of evil. Say yes, or say no. Why? Because if you swear, making a vow places us at the mercy of conditions beyond our control. Just don't swear by heaven. You have no control over heaven, Jerusalem, the earth, or even the own hairs on your head. You have no control over them. And when you make a vow, you link yourself to something that's now outside of your control. You know, we are going to kill Paul, and we won't eat or drink until then. Well, you've now just linked yourself to something totally outside your control. Just yes, yes, no, no. So here we see that these men, they are going to put Paul to death because killing a person kills an idea. Has that ever worked in history? Never. In fact, it usually does the opposite. It's like throwing grease on a fire. So how to run a successful campaign, political campaign, if reason doesn't work, justify your position by taking the moral high ground. That's what these guys do. They take the moral high ground. They say, we will not eat or drink until we've killed Paul. This is a noble thing. And they were more than 40, which made this conspiracy. If reason doesn't work, affirm your position with as many other people as possible.

Well, you know, let's get a bunch of us together. I'll feel a lot better about what we're going to do if there's a lot of us doing it. I don't know if you've seen some of the videos that have come out from interviewing some of these kids at these universities. Like, why are you protesting?

Why are we protesting? You know, I don't really know. I probably should find out. But, you know, we want the world to know that we're here and we're protesting. Like, that's good. So if reason doesn't work, affirm your position with as many other people as you can find. And they came to the chief priests and elders and they said, we have bound ourselves under a great curse that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. So here are these men seeking validation for their actions through false spiritual authority, right? They're coming to these men and saying, hey, we need a reason because reason didn't work. So we're going to seek out a source of authority to validate my position. We're going to get a lot of fact checkers and experts together that are going to tell us that climate change is real. By golly, it is because all these people said so. And that's a good enough reason, even if there's no reason. Now, therefore, you would the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow as though you would inquire something more perfectly concerning him. And we, wherever he come near, we are ready to kill him.

Dun, dun, dun, dun, dun. So they couldn't beat Paul with the truth. So they would try the next best thing. And last, if reason doesn't work, hey, there's always murder and deception.

[47 : 11] You just can't get that political end. The left and the right, Pharisees, Sadducees, dissension. It's all the same, guys. It's all this world system that fades.

The truth wins out. One boy, one child with the truth had a greater impact than any political scheme.

One kid, Paul's nephew. When Paul's sister's son heard of their laying in wait, he went out and entered into the castle and told Paul. So simple. Just went in and just told the truth. He said, the emperor has no clothes. And that's how it is. One child with the truth has a greater impact than any political scheme. Proverbs 16, 6. By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged. And by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. How do you get a man to depart from evil? By the fear of the Lord. How do you purge out iniquity? By mercy and truth. Not through politics. How to run a successful spiritual campaign. If you try and reason with them, and they don't want to listen to reason.

If you say, a man's a man and a woman's a woman, and they say, well, I don't see any reason for that. You say, well, you're a sinner and you're going to die. Well, I'm just going to trust that afterwards it's all going to turn out good. If reason doesn't work, try truth. Just give them the truth.

Just give them the gospel. Like Paul said, hey, I'm here because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead. The world is unreasonable, but they cannot reason against the truth. They may, like these men, decide to kill you and me. It may come to that day. But we have the truth. And one little child with the truth absolutely destroyed all these arguments.

[49 : 03] Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Man, we live in a country that once valued freedom. But we can still live in a kingdom that values freedom. 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 8 through 10. At the end of his life, Paul writes this to Timothy.

He says, The truth can't be bound, guys. The truth can't be bound, no matter what they try, no matter what political scheme.

John 16, 13 says, How be it when he, the spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth. We have a guide. We don't have to rely on our internal compass.

We don't have to rely on someone's ideas or political schemes or whatever. And as the church will just cause division and tear us apart. Right? That's the world. That's not who I am.

[50 : 22] I have a guide. I know how to get there. Well, I don't know how to get there, but he does. And I can just follow him. That's great. And he will guide us into all truth. Father, we thank you that the truth is not hidden. It's not bound.

This young man just spoke truth about the situation and took it to Paul and just eradicated every scheme and plot and idea, Lord.

And Lord, even greater than the factual truth about a situation is the truth that we have of the gospel. The hope of the resurrection of the dead. Lord, there are those questioning today whether the resurrection is valid.

Whether the resurrection out from among the dead, just as you, Lord Jesus, when you rose from the grave, Lord, you have promised that. It's not that when we die, we go to heaven.

It's that Jesus comes to receive the living and the dead. The hope we have is that the dead in Christ shall rise first. And then we which remain and will be caught up to be with him in the air. That is the resurrection we look forward to.

[51 : 23] That is the promise and hope of the gospel. Lord, we want to speak the truth in a world full of lies and hypocrisy. Lord, we want to speak the truth in a world that's, forget reason.

They don't even go, they don't even have any reasons anymore, Lord. Lord, it's just schemes and plots and plans with no thought toward right and wrong. Just an end in mind.

Lord, how wonderful to know the end. Lord, to have the end in our hands in the word of God. And then to be able to go out and to take that to a world, a dying world, Lord. A world that's not going to get better. It's not going to get fixed.

But Lord, a world that can be saved. The people of the world. And Lord, we know that your desire is not for any man should perish. So use us, Lord, just to simply speak the truth.

And not to shy away from it. To do it in love. But Lord, whether it causes someone to be saved. Or whether it causes someone to reject us. Or whether it causes division. Or whether it causes a plot and a plan and a conspiracy.

[52 : 21] Whatever. We have a guide. Lord, keep our hearts, our internal compass pointed towards you. And keep our direction and our will and our desire towards you.

We love you so much. Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen.