

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on April 18, 2021:**

**"Transformation of the Early Church Series on
The Book of Acts – Paul's Arrest and Self-Defense [Part 2]
(Acts 21:17- 23:35) (Part 22)"**

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us again how Paul and the early Christians went through so much effort, stress and sacrifice to bring forward the Gospel message of grace and faith, which is so precious.]

Introduction:

- We'll continue from last week reading about Paul's arrest and his self-defense.
- Again, we'll ask, why did Luke spend over 3 chapters about this topic?
- And what impact does this have on us today in the church?
- One fact was that we need to consider this account of such struggle precious to bring the gospel to the Roman world back then and then to our world today.
- It's important for us to see how much effort, stress and sacrifice it took for the early Christians to bring about the gospel.

- Now the 2nd thing that Luke brings out is that the Roman commanders stood up for Paul, which ultimately unofficially endorsed the Christian church in the Roman world as long as it was were for peace.
- Now this whole account reminds us that what looks bad or negative on the surface is something which God can turn around into something positive.
- We'll see God working through all of these disruptive, negative events to strengthen the church and to spread the gospel further and further into society.

Overview outline of last week's and today's message:

1. James and Jewish customs (21:17-26)
2. Paul's assault and arrest (verses 27-36)
3. His defense before the crowd (verses 21:37-22:22)
4. How Paul was protected by Roman law (verses 23-29)
5. Paul before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:11)
6. The Jewish plot to take Paul out (verses 12-35)

Acts 21:40, After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: Acts 22: 1 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense." 2) When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

- Paul speaking to them in Aramaic aligned himself with his audience for the moment.

2b) Then Paul said: 3) "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4) I persecuted the followers of this

Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5) as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

- Saul was a zealous anti-Christian.
- On the road to Damascus to persecute believers, Saul/Paul was dramatically converted into a believer and follower of Jesus.

6) “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7) I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ 8) “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

- This is the great question that we should always ask when we’re at the crossroads of life.
- And secondly, a solid rule of Biblical interpretation is that we always interpret a passage in light of “who is Jesus.” and how does He impact this verse?
- It’s only after we know who Jesus is and how much He loves us, and recognize how much he has a relationship with us, do we ask, “What shall I do?”
- Doing always follows relationship.
- And if it doesn’t, doing can tend to get twisted and legalistic.
- This is a critical passage here – not only because it represents this amazing conversion of Saul to Paul.

8) “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. 9) My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

- And what’s the next question after we know who Jesus is and we’re in doubt?
- It’s – “What shall I do, Lord?”
- Everything always begins by getting up, getting up out of bed, getting up off the couch or chair.

10) “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ 11) My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

- Now, in all fairness, Jesus did get Saul’s attention by blinding him, but Jesus could have made it much worse.

12) “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

- Ananias was highly respected by others living there and Jesus had set up the right person to restore Saul’s sight.

14) “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15) You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. 16) And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

17) “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18) and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

- Here we see the common practice of repentance and baptism.
- Again, it’s important to remember that relationship with Jesus should always come before our actions.
- It’s our relationship with who we are in Jesus that our actions and activities flow out of us and spiritual fruit is born.

19) “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20) And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ 21) “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” 22) The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

- Once again, the Jewish crowds turn on Paul, but Jesus is going to protect him.

23) As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24) the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25) As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

26) When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.” 27) The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered. 28) Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

- To be a Roman citizen at that time had a lot of benefits.
- And because of this, many people would outright buy their citizenship, which was a 2nd tier citizenship than being born into it.
- Paul was a real deal.

29) Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. 30) The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

- We now have the Roman commander bringing Paul before the Jewish religious leaders, because he wants to find out why Paul is being treated this way.

Acts 23:1, Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” 2) At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3) Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!” 4) Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!” 5) Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

- Paul had been gone from Jerusalem for several years and didn’t know that Ananias was now the high priest.

6) Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” 7) When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8) (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

- Paul got the two groups of religious leaders to start arguing about the resurrection with each other to take the pressure off himself.
- The resurrection is very important to us as Christians.

9) There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” 10) The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

- If it weren’t for the Roman authority, Paul might have easily been torn to pieces.

11) The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

- God lets us go through certain trials and certain fears and then comes to our side, as he did with Paul.
- Jesus is always there to let us know that He is with us.
- So, let’s not be fearful in troubling times.

12) The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. 13) More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14) They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15) Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

16) But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

- It appears that God was working through the Paul's nephew to help him out.

17) Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." 18) So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." 19) The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?" 20 He said: "Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. 21) Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

- It's interesting that the commander listened to this young man and believed him.

22) The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me." 23) Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24) Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix." 25) He wrote a letter as follows: 26) Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.

27) This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. 28) I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. 29) I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. 30) When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

- The Roman commander wanted to pass off Paul to a higher authority because he was tired of dealing with him and all the trouble he was causing with the local Jewish community.

31) So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. 32) The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. 33) When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. 34) The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, 35) he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

- This is where we end the story of Paul's troubles in Jerusalem.
- Luke shows us how God worked through people to protect Paul and works through others to protect us today.

Poetic Summary of last week's and today's message: (Let's say this together):

*A Paul meets in Jerusalem with leaders, James and the Rest,
Issues over Moses, law, Gentile & Jew, and purification no Jest.
Once again, at the temple this time, crowds began to Shout,
They began beating Paul wanting to throw him Out.*

*Commander of Roman troops came to Paul's Side,
Placed him in chains assuming wrongs he couldn't Hide.
Paul requested a hearing so he could present his Case.
Began speaking Aramaic they quieted providing him Space.*

*Paul began his defense by sharing his Story,
How he persecuted believers not to God's Glory.
Then how he was blinded when he met up with the Lord,
A voice and bright light led to grace being Outpoured.*

*What shall I do Lord? Was the question Saul Asked,
He went on to tell how with the Gospel he was Tasked.
It was time to include Gentiles into the people of God,
Now the crowd cried out wanting him beat with a Rod.*

*One more time they created such a Stir,
About to be flogged, to his Roman citizenship asked they Defer.
Now the Roman army became a little Perplexed,
Uncertain what to do with this authority Paul now Flexed.*

*Being born a Roman citizen carried some Clout,
The kind the commander couldn't just Flout.
So he gathered the Sanhedrin to join in the Mix,
Hoping with them this problem had some Fix.*

*Paul addressed the Sanhedrin and was struck on the Face,
He then responded and railed at this Disgrace.
Paul not knowing he was the ruler and high Priest,
He then relented and his railing he Ceased.*

*Seeing the Sadducees, Paul appealed to his Pharisaic Line,
The assembly now divided; his strategy worked so Fine.
Pharisees against Sadducees and Paul in the Middle,
Turns out the commander was played like a Fiddle.*

*So Paul was removed, and God spoke to him that Night,
Take courage to testify in Rome without any Fright.
Another group of Jews formed, bound with an Oath,
Paul can't exist, not with us Both.*

*Their plot for his death was revealed to Paul,
Then safely taken to Governor Felix avoided it All.*

*Felix received the letter and provided a safe Place,
In Herod's palace, awaiting accusers they received God's Grace.*

(Closing prayer)