

WHAT JESUS IS DOING TODAY

Working Good For His Witnesses

A Monolog of The Apostle Paul

Acts 21:26 – 23:10

Whew, two riots in as many days, and me at the center of both. I am glad to be somewhere both calm and quiet. I am especially glad to be somewhere where no one is trying to kill me.

Excuse me for skipping the introduction. **I am Paul, a follower of Jesus Christ and known as the apostle to the Gentiles.** And I have been told who you are. Some of you like myself have put your faith and your life in Jesus Christ, and you serve Him faithfully. Others of you have come today to worship God but you have not yet decided whether to commit your life to the Lord Jesus. But whichever you are, I trust that the Holy Spirit of the Living God might take my story of recent events in my life and use them to touch and bless you at the point of your need.

Sadly I must tell you that the account of these most recent days begins with a great mistake on my part. The error I made is quite ironic really because many know me as the teacher of grace. As God led me through Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, I have taught Jews and Gentiles alike that God's salvation comes as a free gift of His grace to all who by faith trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Repeatedly I have told and even written to them that no one can be saved by the keeping of the law or by the performance of good works.

Because God has so indelibly inscribed that truth upon my heart, I grieve all the more over my error. For when I came a few days ago to Jerusalem, I allowed myself to be persuaded by James to join four of his men in the completion of a Nazarite vow and in the rite of purification according to the Law of Moses. This we were doing in an attempt to placate those Jews who desired to destroy the gospel by requiring men to keep the law of Moses in addition to their faith in Christ. I knew their doctrine to be a lie, but I gave in to those who wanted peace and agreed to go through the rite of purification according to Moses' law, trying to prove that I, Paul, still kept the law.

Why, oh why, did I do that? I do not keep the law! I have been set free from the law. I am saved, purified, cleansed, and forgiven by the shed blood of my dear Savior. I have no need for the spilling of animal's blood or the rigidity of the old covenant. I am a part of the new covenant in Jesus' blood, which is the covenant I celebrate each time I partake of my Lord's Supper.

Well, my friend, I want you to know that I confessed my sin to my dear Master and He was faithful to forgive me as He always is. But while He is not vengeful, my error still brought me great distress. Far from being placated, the Jews were enraged concerning me. While I was still in the temple they began to yell wild accusations at me and before I knew what was happening they grabbed me. Some pulled at me one way, some another. Others slapped me with the back of their hand; still another hit me with a clinched fist.

I thought I would be beaten to death by the mob, but suddenly I heard the cadence of soldier's feet. The Romans had heard the tumult and had come from the garrison next to the temple courtyard to settle the crowd. Their intent was not so much to rescue me; but in quelling the riot, that is precisely what they did. In fact, they took me into custody. I never thought I would be glad to go back to jail; but in this case, it was better than being released to a bloodthirsty mob. The soldiers bound my hands and feet with chains, and in order to get me through the crowd, picked me up and carried me over their heads. As the soldiers marched me up the stairs to the barracks of their garrison, I thought, "I see it again! ... **All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28**"

- And I do love the Lord, with all my heart.
- I am called according to His purpose
 - to be a witness for Him,
 - to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all men everywhere.

And **the Almighty God has caused even this bad situation to work for good**, and I have again been rescued by His strong hand.

In fact, **GOD TRANSFORMED THIS RIOT INTO AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE MY TESTIMONY.**

I was nearing the top of the stairs, carried by the soldiers, with the commander just in front of me when I realized that God had not only worked my rescue, He also was giving me an opportunity that I never could have had without the Romans present to keep the crowd at bay. So in Greek, I asked the commander, "May I speak with you?"

Surprised he answered, "You speak Greek?" I assured him that I did. He at first thought that I was an Egyptian rebel who had stirred up unrest before. I told him that I was a Jew, born in Tarsus and a citizen of that great city. I then asked him for permission to address the crowd. Some of the soldiers who heard my request chuckled at my request. They were amazed when he granted me permission, but I was not at all surprised for I sensed that God was giving me an opportunity to share my testimony with the many unbelieving Jews who were even now clamoring for my death. You remember, "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Paul's Testimony

So I turned to the crowd from my high platform at the top of the stairs and called to them in Hebrew. The sound of their beloved tongue (for their everyday language was mostly Aramaic) quieted their spirits and they turned and listened intently to me.

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now."

³"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.

⁴"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,

⁵"as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.

⁷"And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

⁸"So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

⁹"And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.

¹⁰"So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'

¹¹"And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

¹²"Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,

¹³"came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

¹⁴"Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.'

¹⁵'For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

¹⁶'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

¹⁷"Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance

¹⁸"and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

¹⁹"So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.

²⁰'And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹"Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' "

²²And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"

²³Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, (Acts 22:1-23, NKJV)

Immediately the commander took me into the barracks for my own safety and to quiet the crowd. While the group as a whole soundly rejected my testimony, I trusted that God's Holy Spirit had convicted the hearts of certain individuals and that they in response to His leading would trust the Savior as I did years ago.

I learned a long time ago that I do not have to see the results to have confidence that God is working. **I know that whenever I share the good news of Jesus Christ, how He died on the cross to pay the price for our sins and rose from the dead, and how He offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who trust in Him, people will be saved.**

For the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to Jews and Gentiles alike!

Current Application

I am confident as I look at this crowd before me that many of you are believers. You have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior. And there are probably a number of you who have had fiery trials come upon you as I did when captured by the Jews in Jerusalem.

I wonder, **have you looked for the opportunity that God is giving you in the midst of your time of trial?** Have you seen how God wants you to respond and what God wants you to do? Have you found the blessing God has hidden in the folds of this trouble that has befallen you?

You can, and you should. Remember "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." For you can be confident that **our Lord never allows anything in our lives that is not for our good and His glory**. And as He had this opportunity to share the gospel hidden for me in the folds of my captivity, He has some good opportunity for you in your time of difficulty as well.

Although the opportunity to share my own testimony had passed only moments before, I quickly had another opportunity to see the mighty working of my omnipotent God in the midst of my captivity.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE PROVIDENTIAL CARE OF GOD

The commander ordered his men to bring me into the barracks, and ordered them to examine me with scourging. But as they tied me to a post I asked, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and who has not been condemned?"

Acts 22:26-29 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

²⁷ Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."

²⁸ The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

²⁹ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. (NKJV)

Early in my ministry for the Lord, I wondered why God allowed me, a devout Jew before I was saved, be born with a Roman citizenship which I inherited from my father. I knew that this was most unusual, almost weird. But several times now I have seen that **this was done in the providence of God both to offer me protection that was unavailable to others and also to open doors for the proclamation of the gospel**. "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Current Application

You will probably also discover, if you take time to prayerfully examine your own life and personal history, that **God has put some things in your background or heritage for similar reasons:**

- **Some things you may have despised** or wondered why God allowed them to be as they are, but
- **They became** or they will become **a means of blessing or protection.**
- **Some can be a means to further your ministry** in the name of Jesus, to help you in sharing the good news with those around you.

Already my capture had allowed me two opportunities to see God's continued working in my life: one, the opportunity to share my testimony with the Jews at Jerusalem; two, the opportunity to witness God's providential care for me personally. I did not know that the next day I would get to see yet a third opportunity come from my capture.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONFRONT MEN WITH THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 22:30 The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. (NKJV)

Acts 23:1-5 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

⁴And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

⁵Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.' " (NKJV)

Insight from God

Acts 23:6-8 But 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; **concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!**"

⁷And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

⁸For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection -- and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. (NKJV)

The Results

Acts 23:9-10 Then there arose a loud outcry. **And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."**

¹⁰Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks. (NKJV)

The Application

I have often found the resurrection to be what really divides men. Many people will agree about Jesus' wondrous birth, His exemplary life, His magnificent teachings, even His sacrificial death. **But the resurrection really separates those who give casual assent with the crowd from those who believe enough to commit their lives to Christ.** For if this Jesus really was put stone cold dead in a tomb and on the third day arose, if He really appeared as the Scriptures say to more than 500 individuals, if a great multitude saw this resurrected man rise off the earth and ascend back to the right hand of Almighty God in Heaven, then He cannot be dismissed as a prophet, a preacher, or the greatest man that ever lived. If the resurrection is true, Jesus is God, just as He claimed.

And if we really believe that Jesus is God, then He certainly has the authority to set the terms of our salvation. And He said, I am the way, the truth and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through Me.

Current Application

The resurrection divides this crowd today as well. Oh probably not right down the middle like when I met with the council.

- But while there are many who genuinely believe in the resurrection and therefore believe Jesus really is God and have trusted their lives to Him and been saved,
- there are others here this morning who have never really believed in Jesus as God and committed your life to Him.

Oh, my friend, may I invite you to believe in Him this morning and ask Him into your heart to be your personal Lord and Savior.

You will not only receive forgiveness of your sin and the gift of eternal life, but you will also discover God working in your life giving you marvelous opportunities just as He has to me, even in the midst of difficult times of trial.

You will find Him always present, walking with you through the dark valleys; you will experience His loving providential care.

If you want all of this to be your life then you must invite Jesus the Son of God into your life.

The Scripture says, **“He who has the Son has life, but he who has not the Son has not life.” 1 John 5:12**