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Acts 23:12-24:27

Acts 23:12-13 *When it was the next day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who make this conspiracy.*

Acts 23:14-15 *They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”*

History is filled with stories of people who would stop at nothing to accomplish their religious goals.

Acts 23:16-19 *Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.” So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.” The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?”*

Acts 23:20-21 *And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent.”*

Acts 23:22 *So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, “Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.”*

Like many of us you may feel like you trust the sovereignty of God theoretically, but find it hard in the moment to trust His sovereignty experientially.

We can think that God is not working when we don’t see visible signs, but the lack of the spectacular does not mean He is inactive.

Acts 23:23-30 *Then he called two of the centurions and said, “Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.” And he wrote a letter to this effect: “Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued*

him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.”

Lysias is certainly not above putting himself in a favorable light.

He neglected the bit about almost torturing a Roman citizen

Felix was a freed former slave who rose up in the ranks of government through his connections. By this time he was on his third wife, Drusilla, known for her beauty, who had herself divorced her former husband to marry Felix. Felix later got recalled to Rome because he made such a mess of handling the riots in Caesarea. Historians write of him as being incompetent and a snake.

Acts 23:31-33 *So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him.*

Antipatris was not far from modern day Tel Aviv. Caesarea was just to the north on the coast

Acts 23:34-35 *On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.*

Acts 24:1-3 *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: “Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude.”*

Felix had been brutal in how he handled Jewish uprisings, so everything being said is a lie

Acts 24:4-9 *But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.*

The Romans had given the Jews a lot of freedom to police their own temple policies

That's why they had the authority to seize Paul

Acts 24:10-13 *And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me."*

Acts 24:14-16 *"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."*

Paul worships the same God (God of our fathers), believed the same truths (Law and Prophets), shared the same hope (the resurrection of both the righteous and the ungodly) and cherished the same ambition (clear conscience before God)

Acts 24:17-21 *"Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia - they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'"*

Paul defends himself saying 3 things:

My religious record is clean - I haven't broken any religious laws

My civil record is clean - I haven't started any riots

My personal message is the issue - saying Jesus was dead and is now alive

He is a loyal citizen of Rome and a loyal son of Israel

And where were the Asian Jews who originally had accused Paul?

It was a breach of Roman legal law for accusers to not show up for a trial

Acts 24:22-23 *But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.*

Acts 24:24 *After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you." At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for*

him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Felix couldn't convict Paul, since neither Lysias nor the Sanhedrin had convicted Paul
Felix couldn't release Paul, because he wanted to keep favor with the Jews
The only option left was for him to postpone any decision about Paul
Ultimately, Felix left the question of Paul to the next guy to deal with

And he hoped, even assumed a bribe was coming - illegal, but very typical for Roman citizens

You'd think Paul would be more motivated to defend himself in these many conversations he had with Felix (?)

But Paul is centered on the gospel. Therefore, regardless of circumstances he continues to use every opportunity to share the gospel

Would you want to be Paul's friend, if all he ever did was talk about Jesus?

All of what Paul reasoned with Felix had to do with Felix, and why he needed Jesus:
God's holiness (and His universal moral demands on mankind)
Man's sinfulness (and how self-control can only come through the Spirit)
and God's coming judgment

This all alarmed Felix, he was afraid
When he sent Paul away, his own moral soul died in a way

The way Paul attempted to reason with Felix is no different than how we all need to be reasoned with

Nobody wants their sin exposed and challenged
But not all of us are willing to come trembling for rescue from Jesus

So someone can hear the truth of Jesus, but truths not acted upon hardens any of us so that we cannot understand them

But Paul wasn't in Roman custody or on the receiving end of death threats from the Jews because of righteousness, self-control, or coming judgment

He was where he was because of Jesus, and his claims that Jesus had risen from the dead

And Felix chose to procrastinate, to put off responding to Jesus, that unbeknownst to him had tragic and eternal consequences.

To believe it to obey