*DEVOTIONAL*

April 23 - 28

*Paul and the High Council*

**Monday, April 23 Acts 22:30 - 23:5**

*“I have always lived before God in all good conscience”*

 The Roman commander was still trying to figure out what to do about Paul. As it obviously concerned a religious issue, he decided to order the Jewish High Council to look into the matter. Paul’s first statement to the Sanhedrin proclaims that he lives before God in all good conscience. The high priest Ananias orders that Paul be struck on the mouth for this statement, and Paul responds with a typically human reaction to this slap by calling the high priest a hypocrite and saying that God will strike him too, for he had violated the law in commanding this.

 It was a miscarriage of justice to strike a person before being convicted, and in this case he had not even been properly charged. Paul’s comment about Ananias proved to be prophetic, for within ten years the high priest had to flee to Herod’s palace, his house was burned, and he was eventually killed. He was known as a greedy, corrupt, and violent man. That Paul had not recognized Ananias as the high priest was probably due to Paul having been away from Jerusalem since before Ananias’ ascension to the position.

*Forgive us, Lord, when we neglect to turn the other cheek. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 24 John 18:19-24**

*“One of the temple guards struck Jesus”*

 In a formal Jewish trial, the judge never asked direct questions of the accused but rather called forth witnesses whose words determined the outcome. If two or more agreed with the charges, the verdict was sealed. What Annas was doing was more like a police interrogation of someone recently arrested. If Jesus utters something incriminating, it can then be used against him in an actual trial.

 Annas probes two things: Jesus’ teachings and his disciples. To what extent is he a genuine threat? Does he have a strong following? Is he promoting some sort of conspiracy? To what extent does he threaten their interests? Jesus’ sharp answer – pointing out that Annas should be talking to witnesses – unmasks the priest’s attempt to make Jesus incriminate himself. Jesus’ demand that Annas produce witnesses and evidence, reminding Annas of judicial procedure, is interpreted by the guards as insolence. Thus, one of them strikes him. Addressing himself directly to the soldier, Jesus asks why he has been struck for telling the truth.

*When bullied for our faith, Lord, we will seek to speak only the truth. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 25 Acts 23:6-11**

*“My hope is in the resurrection of the dead”*

 The issue at stake here was the resurrection of the dead, which the Pharisees accepted but the Sadducees rejected. Was this simply a crafty ploy used by Paul to divide the group? Certainly there is wisdom, possibly even shrewdness, here. But he was also using a strategy that pointed to the heart of the Christian gospel, which was indeed a fulfillment of Pharisaism. Paul agreed with the Pharisees that the Jews’ national hope depended on a future resurrection. Here he is saying that the first stage of this resurrection has been fulfilled with the resurrection of Jesus.

 Paul’s statement results in total confusion in the Sanhedrin, some siding with Paul and others against him. Some even consider the possibility that an angel or a spirit revealed Paul’s message to him. That night the Lord stands near Paul and encourages him by telling him that he is going to testify in Rome. Amidst all of his troubles, the apostle receives assurance that God is working out his purposes, and that one of Paul’s great dreams is going to be fulfilled – he will go to Rome.

*Encourage us, Lord, to be strong in our witness for you. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

April 23 - 28

*Paul and the High Council*

**Thursday, April 26 Mark 12:18-27**

*“A group of Jews who say there is no resurrection”*

 The Sadducees bait Jesus with a teasing conundrum based on a marriage law which prescribes what should happen when a man dies with no heirs: one of his surviving brothers is to take the widow in marriage to provide the deceased with an heir. The law was primarily motivated by the desire to keep the brother’s inheritance in the family. The Sadducees’ contrived case study is designed to ridicule belief in the resurrection, asking which of the seven brothers she would be married to after they all die.

 Jesus first corrects the Sadducees on their view of resurrection life. Resurrection does not mean the continuation of the same thing, only longer. The resurrected are transfigured into a new dimension of life that we have never experienced. Jesus then corrects their biblical ignorance by reminding them of the passage in Exodus that identifies God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (all who have died). Would God claim to be the God of those who no longer exist? He does not say, “I was their God,” but “I am their God.” God remains their God even in death.

*You, Lord, have overcome death by your resurrection and so will we. Amen.*

**Friday, April 27 Acts 23:12-22**

*“They have vowed not to eat or drink until they kill him”*

 The Lord not only gave Paul a reaffirmation of his will that Paul should witness in Rome (verse 11), he intervened in a very dramatic way to make sure that nothing got in the way. Luke’s description of the plot against the Apostle’s life shows the depth of the hatred for Paul among some of the Jews. Those who took an oath for a hunger strike until they saw Paul dead probably included the Jews from Asia who had begun the riot outside the temple a few days before.

 But the will of God was not about to be thwarted. Paul’s sister’s son hears of the plot, goes to the jail, and tells Paul. Paul’s nephew is then taken to the commander. This is the only reference we have to Paul’s family in the Bible, so we do not know what the relationship was like between Paul and his family. However, it is clear that at least one member of his family was on his side. When we remember that the Apostle went back home to Tarsus after his conversion, we can safely assume he shared the gospel with his family. Perhaps Paul’s witness led this young man to become a follower of Jesus.

*Your will be done, Lord, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 28 Acts 23:23-35**

 *“So that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix”*

 The commander took immediate action on hearing about the plot and made arrangements to transfer Paul to Caesarea, where the governor of Judea usually resided (he went to Jerusalem only at important times, such as during Jewish festivals). An unusually large military contingent accompanied Paul because of the group that was waiting to kill Paul. Once they were a safe distance from Jerusalem in Antipatris (about thirty-five miles away) and the danger to Paul’s life was diminished, a portion of the troops returned to Jerusalem.

 The commander sent a letter along to the Judean governor, describing the circumstances of Paul’s arrest and trial in Jerusalem. He makes it clear that, according to Roman law, there was no charge against Paul that deserved death or imprisonment. Rather, Paul was being sent to Caesarea for protection. Once again Luke has pointed out to his readers that Paul was blameless before the Roman law. Although Paul was from another Roman province (Cilicia), Governor Felix decided to hear the case himself.

*How unexpectedly sometimes, Lord, you work your will in our lives. Amen.*