

PRAY FOR HAITI: Gangs running rampant, causing so much poverty, violence, and death. Pray for the innocent people of Haiti and for the missionary friends we have there.

- I. Open your Bibles to Acts 23:12
  - A. Today is St. Patrick's Day, a day originally meant to honor the anniversary of Patrick's death on March 17, 461AD. Few actually know the story of St. Patrick.
    1. Born in modern-day Britain, under the Roman Empire that had been Christianized. Grew up in a Christian family but did not know Jesus.
    2. Was kidnapped by Irish raiders into slavery in Ireland. While there, Patrick surrendered to Jesus.
    3. He was miraculously freed from that slavery and made it back home to Britain, later to become a priest and bishop of the church.
    4. Had a dream of an Irish voice calling him back to Ireland. Couldn't shake this and so he went back to Ireland, the place of his slavery, now to bring the Gospel of Jesus.
  - B. But his convictions about the Gospel kept him from evangelizing the Irish in the same way that the rest of the Roman Christian church did.
    1. Roman Christianity believed that a culture needed to be culturally "romanized" first to be able to receive the Gospel.
    2. And so Rome's missionary strategy all over the world was to FIRST press Roman culture on people and THEN the Gospel.
    3. They were using worldly tools (Roman culture) to try to accomplish a spiritual task (making disciples).
  - C. The reason Patrick was so successful at evangelizing the Irish island was because he rejected this worldly tool of cultural imperialism and embraced the idea that the raw Gospel of Jesus was good enough for ANY culture at any time.
    1. In essence, he refused to use the broken and sinful patterns of this world to accomplish the mission of God.
    2. And this is precisely the lesson that we must learn from our text today!
- II. Context:
  - A. Paul has returned from his missionary trips and is now in Jerusalem.
  - B. He has made an effort to quell some rumors that had been going around about him in the Jewish world.
    1. Rumor 1: He brought a gentile unlawfully into the temple.
    2. Rumor 2: He has been preaching AGAINST the Law of Moses (Torah)
  - C. A riot breaks out and some Jews are about to kill him, but the Roman tribune (A Roman military commander of about 600—a cohort), sends soldiers who arrest him to save his life.
  - D. The Romans summon the Jewish leaders who question and abuse Paul, who then says something that ends up making the Pharisees and Sadducees in this council argue amongst themselves instead, and then once again Paul needs to be rescued by the Roman tribune.

- E. The last thing that happens before our passage today is that Jesus appears to Paul at night, stands by him and says, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." (Acts 23:11)
  - F. So now we have some very important information that gives us context for all that will happen next. The will of Jesus is that Paul go to Rome and have an audience for the Gospel there.
  - G. I want to give you a foundational truth that we see in the passage leading up to this and then is confirmed in our passage today: **God's will is unshakable.** If this is true, (and it is!) **we can trust Him enough to accomplish His will through our persistent obedience.**
- III. *When it was 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 made this conspiracy. (Acts 23:12-13)*
- A. Now, remember that the main allegation against Paul is that he is preaching AGAINST the Law of Moses.
    - 1. This group of 40+ Jewish people who are zealous for the Law of Moses conspire to murder Paul.
    - 2. Just so we all understand the situation: Paul has not had a fair or even complete trial, and no judgment has been made and no penalty for a judgment has been assigned. The Law of Moses demands these things among others. (Deut. 19, 25)
      - a. And so, very similarly to Jesus, Paul has had a sham trial with no conclusion, but the religious leaders and others determine he deserves death.
      - b. I can just imagine the leader of the murder party riling up his mob:
      - c. "What are we gonna do?" "Protect God's Law!" "How are we gonna do it?" "Break God's law!"
  - B. How ironic that in an effort to "protect" God's law they were willing to severely break it, And not just an obscure law buried somewhere in Leviticus, but one of the 10 commandments: murder!
    - 1. Not only the murder of Paul, but likely they would have to murder the Roman soldiers who transported Paul in order to get to him.
    - 2. **Breaking the commands of God will never accomplish the will of God.**
    - 3. The Jews were God's chosen people, given a covenant and His laws to guide them. Sadly, throughout history we see the very people of God ignoring His commands, thinking that they can somehow honor God by doing so.
  - C. And so now, as the Church of God, God's new covenant people, let us be wise and take a lesson from the past. Disciple of Jesus: **Guard your heart. Never attempt to accomplish God's will with the devil's weapons.**
    - 1. God understands how alarming and frustrating it can be for His people, living in a world that in so many ways is so opposed to His will and His Kingship.
      - a. But this is exactly where Satan knows we have a weakness in our armor.
      - b. He quietly whispers, "Your anger and anything you say or do is justified because what they're doing is worse!"
    - 2. Even when we stand against evil and injustice, we must honor Jesus in word and deed.
- IV. *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." (Acts 23:14-16)*

- A. This is so dark and feels eerily similar to the plot to kill Jesus. (Matthew 26) Same groups: "Chief priests and elders" (Matt. 26:3), though probably different individuals (this is 25+ years after Jesus' trial and murder)
- B. They plan a ruse: that they wanted to talk more to Paul to determine his case more exactly.
  - 1. They insinuate that they want to finish a "fair trial."
  - 2. But all the while their plan is to SUBVERT a fair trial by ambushing him before he can even get there (breaking another of the 10 commandments).
  - 3. Not only that, but they devise a cover up for those in power: "And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."
  - 4. If they kill Paul before he gets to the Jewish council, this gives the chief priests and elders plausible deniability. (Breaking yet another Law: Deut. 16:19)
- C. What warning would King Jesus give to His church in light of seeing this darkness?
  - 1. **Beware the hypocrisy of unChrist-like Christianity: attempting to obey one of God's commands by breaking another.**
  - 2. Paul himself wrote about this danger in Romans 2.  
*You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* (Romans 2:21-24)  
 (another example if needed):  
*With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.* (James 3:9-10, CSB)
- V. God has a history of thwarting the plans of those who resist His will in His name.
  - A. Look at how God subverts the plot of these conspirators:  
*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?" 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." So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."* (Acts 23:16-22)
  - B. This is so ironic. These Jewish leaders—the people of God who have God's law are the ones seeking to break it—and not only break it but break it GRIEVOUSLY.
    - 1. Subverting a fair trial
    - 2. Lying about their intention to question Paul
    - 3. Intent to commit murder
    - 4. Devising a premeditated cover-up for murder to protect those in power

- C. And while the people of God who have His law are conspiring to break His law grievously, it is the pagan Romans, who did not have God's law that seem to be at least trying to do the right thing by protecting Paul.
  - 1. Even the Romans had mixed motives, the contrast of the Romans' actions and the actions of the Jewish leadership is stark.
  - 2. And so God uses pagan Rome to pave the way for Paul to GO to Rome to testify to Jesus.
- D. Remember Jesus' words to Paul? "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." (Acts 23:11)
- E. SO God has a history of thwarting the plans of those who resist His will in His name, BUT ...
- VI. **God also has a history of empowering the assignment of those who bow to His will in humility.**
  - A. I want to read to you a passage that gets quoted a lot and is probably on a mug or kitchen magnet in your home right now, but I think it is especially poignant for what it says and WHO wrote it. I'd ask you to stand to honor and receive what is said in faith: In Romans 8, Paul writes this:  
 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God Who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One Who died—more than that, Who was raised—Who is at the right hand of God, Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-38)
  - B. My sisters and brothers: Take heart, obey courageously, move forward in your assignment! King Jesus will not fail.

## VII. COMMUNION

Jesus too was falsely accused, given a sham trial, and condemned to death. The prophet Isaiah foretold of this centuries before Jesus was born:

*He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,  
 yet He opened not His mouth;  
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
 so He opened not His mouth.*

*By oppression and judgment He was taken away;  
 and as for His generation, who considered  
 that He was cut off out of the land of the living,  
 stricken for the transgression of my people?*

*And they made His grave with the wicked  
 and with a rich man in his death,  
 although He had done no violence,  
 and there was no deceit in His mouth.*

*(Isaiah 53:7-9)*