


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
October 5 - 11, 2008
Acts 22:30-23:35

lion's den

1 I didn't realize he was the high priest

Read. Acts 22:30-23:5 NLT

The next day the commander ordered the leading priests into session with the Jewish high council. He wanted to find out what the trouble was all about, so he released Paul to have him stand before them.

Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!"

Instantly Ananias the high priest commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth. But Paul said to him, "God will slap you, you corrupt hypocrite! What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that?"

Those standing near Paul said to him, "Do you dare to insult God's high priest?"

"I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'You must not speak evil of any of your rulers.'"

Think.

- What is the Roman commander's purpose in sending Paul before the high council? What overall picture do you have so far of the commander's character? What contrasts do you see between him and the Jewish authorities in this story? Any surprises here?
- "I have lived before God with all a clear conscience until this day." How does Paul's initial comment strike you? Innocent? Bold? Maybe too bold? Why was he struck for the statement?
- "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, then turn to him the other." How does Paul respond to being unjustly struck? Would you say this was "turning the other cheek"? How do you typically respond to being wronged? Strike back verbally or otherwise? Just take it? Point out the wrong? Get back indirectly later? Or what?
- "I didn't realize he was the high priest." What do you hear in Paul's answer upon being informed that he had insulted the high priest? Contrition, sarcasm, or what?

Pray.

Lord, when I find myself in a tight spot like Paul let your heart shine through my words and deeds in love, wisdom, and justice.

Live.

"Bless those who curse you; bless and don't curse." Find a natural, practical way to bless someone at odds with you.

"There was also Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, a valiant warrior from Kabzeel. He did many heroic deeds... he chased a lion down into a pit. Then, despite the snow and slippery ground, he caught the lion and killed it."
2 Samuel 23:20

God-given opportunities often come disguised as man-eating lions. How we react when we encounter those lions will determine our destiny.
Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*

Kabzeel must not have been far from Tarsus.

I can't help seeing the face of Benaiah when I look at the face of Paul before the hostile council. Maybe it was how Luke put it — "the commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart." I see lions with big sharp teeth and huge claws, circling around the Jesus follower — a scene all too soon to be literally played out in Rome many times over.

Like Benaiah, Paul had quite literally chased these lions into this pit. Most of us run from lions. Everyone along Paul's path on his way to Jerusalem warned him to run away. But Paul ran right into the lion's den.

Only he had no spear.

Unlike Benaiah, Paul didn't enter this pit to kill a lion on a snowy day. He entered ready to be eaten by them if necessary. But Roman spears protected him, and the Lord of all lions stood by him. And locking eyes with the lion in the pit of that Jewish council ended up unlocking the opportunity his heart had longed after for years — to go and preach in Rome.

Mark Batterson in his book effectively makes the point that our greatest opportunities usually come in the garb of lions that would suck away our courage — and that the greatest risk is to take no risks at all.

I see that courage in Paul. And I see it in the wonderful tale of his nephew — a young man who appears like a prototype "youth with a mission." Was he 10, 15, or 25? We don't know — but when precious few probably had the courage to be associated with the hated Paul, and when 40 violent men were plotting his death, this young man likewise entered the pit and locked eyes with his own lion. With courage he played his part — and we are still telling his story...

2) This divided the council

Read. Acts 23:6-11 NLT

Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!" This divided the council—the Pharisees against the Sadducees—for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all of these. So there was a great uproar. Some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees jumped up and began to argue forcefully. "We see nothing wrong with him," they shouted. "Perhaps a spirit or an angel spoke to him." As the conflict grew more violent, the commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart. So he ordered his soldiers to go and rescue him by force and take him back to the fortress.

That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."

Think.

- What does Paul see in the council at this point, and what does he shout? What effect does it have upon them? What is the commander forced to do? Why do you think Paul did this?
- What confirming message does Paul receive from the Lord that night?
- What could be your next "Rome" — the next crucial step in your walk with God?

Pray.

Lord, as I find myself in the midst of conflict, help me to be wise as a snake and harmless as a dove.

Live.

Seek prayerful counsel about any current conflict in your life.

4) Get him safely to Governor Felix

Read. Acts 23:19-24 NLT

The commander took his hand, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information. But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to ambush him. They have vowed not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent." "Don't let anyone know you told me this," the commander warned the young man.

Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take 200 spearmen and 70 mounted troops. Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix."

Think.

- What further insights do you see into the commander's heart and character? Into Paul's nephew? What risks is this young man taking? What risk is the commander not willing to take? What steps does he take to provide for Paul's safety?
- How does the commander's treatment of Paul differ from Pilate's treatment of Jesus? How would you account for this?
- Paul was protected by a very large Roman "shield." Where in your life are you right now sensing the need for a "shield"? Who are you turning to? For whom can you be a shield in their need?

Pray. Lord, release me from expectations that I must carry the struggle on my own. As I seek you, show me how to trust others and not isolate myself.

Live. Be a shield of protection and support for someone who is particularly vulnerable right now.

3) We will kill him on the way

Read. Acts 23:12-18 NLT

The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty of them in the conspiracy. They went to the leading priests and elders and told them, "We have bound ourselves with an oath to eat nothing until we have killed Paul. So you and the high council should ask the commander to bring Paul back to the council again. Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way."

But Paul's nephew—his sister's son—heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul. Paul called for one of the Roman officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

Think.

- What is driving this fanatical oath to kill Paul (see John 16:2)? What made Paul so dangerous? How can we keep religious zeal from driving us to alienation and rage against our perceived enemies?
- What impresses you about Paul's young nephew? What does Paul do with the information his nephew shares?
- When most recently have you been called to stand with someone whom others dislike? Who has done that for you?

Pray.

Father, thank you for being my shield, my fortress and my strength. Let my life not be driven by fear of plots and conspiracies. Let me rest confidently in you, Most High God.

Live.

Read Psalm 46. Meditate on it's truths through the day.

5) Kept in the prison

Read. Acts 23:25-35 NLT

He wrote a letter as follows:

"From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings! This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. I soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you."

So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the mounted troops took him on to Caesarea. When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered. "I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.

Think.

- How does Paul's experience with these Roman authorities shed light on his teaching regarding earthly governments in Romans 13:1-7? How would you describe your relationship to human authority? As a Jesus follower, when is it to be supported and obeyed? When and how is it to be challenged?

Pray. Lord, give me a right heart and attitude towards those in authority — particularly when I don't agree with them. Deliver me from the extremes of blind patriotism and willful disobedience.

Live. Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 2:1-7...and pray!