



Explosive Impact • A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL • Acts 23:1-33 • 11/11/2018

## Main Point

A life changed by the gospel will steadfastly persevere and boldly share.

## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever been in a fight or a physical altercation? What was said or done that got you into it?**

**What do you think a typical response of a Christian should be to a physical altercation?**

When we think about violence and fighting, the typical Christian response is to think about Jesus' words to turn the other cheek. Images of non-violence, resistance, and protest during the civil rights movement may come to mind. In Acts 23, we see Paul making incendiary comments to the Jewish leadership. When he gets struck for his words, his response is anything but typical. But a life changed by the gospel will steadfastly persevere and boldly share.

## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Acts 23:1-5.

**Why was Paul struck specifically on the mouth?**

**What does Paul mean by referring to the high priest as a “whitewashed wall”?**

**If it were illegal to tell people about Christ, do you think you would be put on trial for what you have said about Jesus? How do you think you might respond when you were questioned?**

Paul was struck in the mouth because his comment to the council was out of order. Some argue whether Paul, who had poor vision, could see he was speaking to the high priest. Others argue that he did not recognize Ananias as a valid high priest because he was not in the line of Aaron. Paul responded to being struck by referring to Ananias as a white washed tomb. The tombs in Israel were limestone and were washed white so that the Jews could recognize them and not touch them, remaining ceremonially clean. The tombs were clean and attractive from the outside, but the contents on the inside were dead.

| Have another volunteer read Acts 23:6-11.

| How did Paul change his approach in verse 6? Why?

**Why did his statement about being a Pharisee cause dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees?**

**Why might Paul have wanted the Pharisees and Sadducees to fight?**

**How does the Lord's statement in verse 11 help Paul? Do you find these words typical or unusual? Why? Have you ever used similar tactics for the same purpose?**

Paul, knowing the strife between the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding the resurrection of the dead, brought up the issue to divide the council regarding himself. The Pharisees and Sadducees began to debate doctrines and the Pharisees claimed Paul as their own. Jesus came to Paul in a vision to encourage him knowing that he had a long road of trials and testimony ahead of him. Jesus' words affirmed Paul's work thus far by pointing him to similar work in the near future.

| Have another volunteer read acts 23:12-33.

**How many men plotted to kill Paul? Why did they want him dead?**

**Why was Paul sent to the governor Felix?**

**What types of trials do you go through because of your faith?**

Forty of the Jews plotted to kill Paul because of his teaching and ministry. Paul was spared after his nephew told Paul and the Roman authorities the plot to take Paul's life. The tribune, Claudius Lysias, protected Paul with 470 men and sent him to Caesarea Philippi to go before the governor, Felix. Paul had the right to such a trial because he was a Roman citizen. Through the Roman law, God made a way for Paul to be protected and ultimately to continue his ministry.

# Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Does your faith challenge people around you? Why or why not?**

**What are you doing to share the gospel?**

**What keeps you from sharing your faith and making disciples?**

**What actions can you take to make evangelism more important in your daily life this week?**

**Who is someone in your life with whom you can share the gospel this week?**

# Pray

Close by thanking God for His protection and His love that sustains us. Ask God to help your group take on the spirit of Paul's mission and to live a gospel-centered life that makes disciples and spreads the gospel. Pray that God would reveal people in the community and workplace who need to hear the gospel, and pray that you would have the boldness to share with them.

# Commentary

| ACTS 23:1-33

23:1. We already know Paul has been brought to the Sanhedrin by Claudius Lysias. We are as surprised as they when, rather than waiting for some invitation, Paul immediately begins speaking. He used the common formal address for assembled Jews and affirmed his commitment to godly duty as a Jew (Rom. 15:19b; Phil. 3:6b; 2 Tim. 1:4–7). As innocent as this line may seem, we must understand it in light of what the Sanhedrin knew full well about this man from Tarsus: an outspoken Christian, totally convinced of the messiahship of Jesus.

23:2. Ananias, son of Nedebaeus, was appointed priest in A.D. 48 and held that office for approximately ten years. Famous for bribery and plunder of temple offerings, he was assassinated by Jewish guerrillas in A.D. 66. His order to strike Paul on the mouth was illegal since, before the Sanhedrin as before our own western courts of law, the prisoner was innocent until proven guilty.

23:3. Paul's response astonishes us as much as Ananias' order. We look for Paul to act like Jesus: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats" (1 Pet. 2:23). Instead, Paul spoke the truth prophetically (though probably not consciously on this occasion), for God did smite Ananias. The phrase whitewashed wall accused Ananias of hypocrisy (Matt. 23:27).

23:4-5. We can infer from Luke's remark about those who were standing near Paul that the high priest sat some distance away. Seventy-one people in addition to Paul would have occupied the room if all the Council showed up for this hastily-called meeting. Upon being challenged regarding his words, Paul retreats to his opening line and calls the Council, Brothers, once again. He explains his behavior by saying, I did not realize that he was the high priest. The question of why Paul did not know Ananias was high priest is much debated.

23:6-8. Time to change tactics. Exchanging ill behavior with the high priest would achieve nothing in the Sanhedrin. Paul knew the group's makeup, since he had once been part of it. The controlling Sadducees (including Ananias) were constantly besieged by the Pharisees, particularly on the issue of the resurrection. If Paul could create a doctrinal civil war, he might divert attention away from himself to an ongoing internal debate. For the third time Paul addresses the group as brothers. This time he states his sterling religious credentials: I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. Then he cuts to the bottom line—the resurrection. Some argue that Paul could no longer have called himself a Pharisee because he spent his life spreading the gospel to Gentiles.

23:9-10. A minority group of the Sanhedrin argued vigorously for Paul's release. In the latter part of verse 9 we find out why Luke raised the point of angels and spirits in verse 8. Either he has not given us a full account of the discussion up to this point, or these Pharisees have already heard the story of Paul's Damascus Road experience. In the spirit of Gamaliel (Acts 5:39), they warn of the possibility that a spirit or an angel has spoken to him. Obviously, that enraged the Sadducees even more, and the meeting became complete bedlam. In the typical pattern of the Sanhedrin, they could not contain their arguments in words alone and apparently pulled at Paul from two sides until Lysias intervened and had him taken back to the barracks.

23:11. Not that night, but the night following the next day Paul experienced the fourth of five visions he received in Acts (16:9; 18:9–10; 22:17–21; 27:23–24). This message emphasized God's control over all these events and offered courage. Mainly, Jesus informed Paul that these trial appearances have not been defenses for his life, but rather witness of the truth. Furthermore, this witness would continue all the way to Rome.

23:12-15. The radical Jews took an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. This kind of oath in Jewish custom carried wording such as: "May God do to us the same and more" or perhaps: "May we be cursed if" Paul was no stranger to such plots (9:24; 20:19). They went to the chief priests and elders. Avoiding the minority Pharisees who had spoken in Paul's behalf, they approached Ananias and his cohorts to involve them in this "pretext." Though Luke does not specifically say so, the passage intimates strongly that the Sanhedrin hierarchy agreed and, thereby, entered into a murder conspiracy with anarchists.

23:16-22. Any plot so well known in the city had little chance of success. We get the impression from Paul's letters that family ties had been broken (Phil. 3:8), but such connections do not die easily. Furthermore (the

forty henchmen notwithstanding), preservation of life was the greatest value in Judaism. So God used a hitherto unknown nephew as an agent of deliverance. The mention of this nephew is all we know of Paul's family.

23:23-24. At 9:00 p.m. under cover of darkness, 470 Roman soldiers escort Paul to the provincial capital at Caesarea, headquarters of Governor Felix. The Romans were nothing if not efficient. Lysias called up two centurions with their two hundred infantry, seventy cavalry troops and two hundred dexiolaboi, a fascinating word which appears only here in the New Testament. Obviously it means "spearman," but it comes from a root meaning "right-handed" because in the Roman army spears were commonly thrown with the right hand. Some scholars scoff at this account because of the overkill escort, but Lysias would take no more chances with these Jewish anarchists.

23:25-30. How could Luke possibly have known the content of private and official correspondence between a Roman commander and the procurator of Judea? Of course, he could not; that is why verse 25 says, He wrote a letter as follows. Luke's summary obviously came from Paul who also only learned it from whatever Felix revealed in the questioning of chapter 24.

23:31-33. This is the third time Paul sneaked out of a city at night. The foot soldiers stopped at Antipatris, doubtless resting there for awhile before returning to the barracks. On his horse, Paul accompanied the cavalry all the way to Caesarea, about sixty miles from Jerusalem and thirty miles northwest of Antipatris.

## Reading Assignment for next week

Acts 26:1-32