

43b ACTS

We pick up our study now at the end, or actually in the middle of Acts chapter 22. I think I was sort of over optimistic when I said we were going to start in 23 because we had not actually finished 22, but like a good artilleryman I have set my bracket and now I'm splitting it and getting to where we need to be. Paul is giving the account to the people who have been trying to tear him limb from limb of his conversion.

This is his apologia, this is his defense. And when he says, he quotes the Lord Jesus, Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles. The Jews will not receive your testimony.

Well, this inflames all of these zealous Jews. Why? Why do they listen up to this point and then get upset? He has already mentioned Jesus of Nazareth several verses earlier. A whole paragraph earlier he mentioned the Lord Jesus.

That didn't set them off. What set them off? The idea that God has turned from them to the Gentiles. That God would come down and appear in the form of the Lord Jesus and commission an apostle and send him to somebody other than them.

What is the implication? There's something wrong with you. God says you're not in a position to receive it and the Gentiles are. This, if nothing else gets your goat, this gets your goat, right? Sends up all of our hackles, all of our defense mechanisms.

What do you mean there's something wrong with me? We don't want to hear this. That's the problem with the people in Israel. When he says the word, ethne, Jesus said they will not receive your testimony to me.

Go, depart. I'm sending you to the Gentiles. That's it.

That's it. You're saying the Gentiles are going to get this news from God and we're not. And they absolutely go nuts at that point.

They raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live. They cried out, they tore off their clothes and threw dust in the air. You just can't get any more graphically angry at somebody than this.

Just tear your clothes off, throw dirt in the air. I mean, they're an expressive people. So, once again, the commander in verse 24 here, the keliarch, as it says in Greek, ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

Once again, this is the second time that he's dragged away to safety by the Gentile commander. Ordered him to be brought into the barracks and said that he should be examined under scourging so that he might know why they shouted so against him. Now, you get the idea when he says, well, we'll beat the truth out of this guy and find out what's going on, that he's losing patience.

This is the second riot over this man. And he says, well, there must be something wrong with him for everybody to be so upset. So, we'll just beat the truth out of him.

That's basically what he says. We'll beat him until he tells us what's going on. He doesn't say we'll question him or, Paul, can you explain this to me? He just says, take the guy and beat him until he tells us what's going on.

As they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned? Well, the answer to this question is not only no, but it is a criminal offense to do so. In fact, under Roman law, it was a criminal offense to bind a Roman. Who was uncondemned.

Could not be bound, could not be chained, could not be beaten. Being a Roman citizen was almost better than being an American citizen in those days, which is why citizenship was so coveted and so valued and so prized and not taken for granted in the Roman world, because it afforded you privileges and protections that surpassed anything else in the civilized world. When the centurion heard that, actually when the centurion told it, he went and told the Ciliarch, saying, take care of what you do.

Literally, in Greek, it says, what is this you are doing? This man is a Roman. So, the Ciliarch, the commander, came and said to him, tell me, are you a Roman? He just can't believe it. The guy has been surprised at every turn.

First, he's surprised that he speaks Greek, and now, he was surprised that he wasn't the Egyptian rabble-rouser, and now he's surprised that he's a Roman citizen. Paul says, yes. The commander answered, with a large sum, I obtained this citizenship.

And the words here, when it says large sum, this is a lot of money. In our money today, this would be like up in the six figures is the implication. This was a huge sum.

The man spent a fortune to obtain this citizenship. Paul says, but I was born. You look at the italics there.

It doesn't say born a citizen. It says, but I was born. Then, immediately, those who were about to examine him withdrew from him.

They are now afraid, because they have already committed crimes by binding him with thongs, without a hearing, without questioning him, without ascertaining his citizenship. They know that they are already liable. If Paul chooses to, he can get them in a lot of trouble.

So, immediately, those who were about to examine him, and they're standing by with the scourge, and they've got him bound, and they lash him to a post, and then just beat him within an inch of his life, flay him. So, they withdraw, and the commander was also afraid, after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. This

was against the law.

This would be like these policemen, and they turn up a videotape that shows them doing some kind of illegal things to a prisoner. Well, this is the position that these soldiers are now in. So, the next day, because the Kelliarch is still wanting to know what is going on to create these two riots, he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews.

He released him from bonds, and this is not the same bonds as the thongs. This means he basically just released him. This is kind of all one word in Greek.

Released him from custody. Might be a better way of saying it. Released him from custody, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear.

The council is the Sanhedrin. Council of 70. And they brought Paul down and set him before them.

That begins chapter 23. Paul looking intently at the council. Looking steadfastly or earnestly at the council.

Now, people have speculated about this earnest look and why Luke makes a point of it. Why would it be? It could be that as a result of his previous physical abuses, Paul makes reference in another epistle to the thorn in the flesh. He says, I know that you yourselves would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me if you could.

And that perhaps he had a physical problem with his eyes at the end of an epistle. He says, see with what large letters I write to you with my own hand. And perhaps because his eyesight was bad, he had to write large so he could see what he was writing.

And for most of the epistles, he used an amanuensis. He would dictate, the secretary would repeat what he said as he wrote it down. Because remember in those days, they did not write without speaking.

They did not read without speaking out loud. Nobody read or wrote silently. At any rate, they wonder if Paul here looking earnestly at the council was straining to see them and had difficulty with seeing.

And this also might explain what is about to happen next. Another idea is that not so much from poor sight, but he was looking amongst the 70 to see how many were left from the old days. From 17 odd years earlier when he had been given letters by this same council to persecute the Christians and to see if he could recognize somebody after the passage of a couple of decades of time.

And so he's looking at them. Is he looking for a familiar face? Is he looking steadfastly just trying to focus his eyes? I can see far away better if I squint. And if I look steadfastly

at something, I can sharpen it up where otherwise it's blurry.

So for whatever reason, it tells us he was looking steadfastly, intently at the council. He said, Men, brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And at the point that he says this, the high priest Ananias commanded someone standing near him to strike him a blow on the mouth.

The word here for strike means to strike a blow. He basically says, Punch that man in the mouth. At the point that Paul makes this first statement.

Because to them, it is just patently false. How can you say that you have been striving to live in a good conscience before God up to this very day? He says, Punch him in the mouth. Paul says, God will punch you, you whitewashed wall.

God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. For you sit to judge me according to the law. And do you command me to be struck contrary to the law? This is supposed to be a lawful assembly and yet right off the bat, the first thing you do is break the law.

You don't strike a man without a cause. And so those who stood by, the ones who had been commanded to punch him and did not, said, Are you sassing God's priest? Are you reviling? The idea here is you're back sassing him. You're back talking.

You're giving him some lip. Are you giving lip to God's high priest? Then Paul says, I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest. And we don't know if this is sarcasm on Paul's part, if it's poor eyesight on Paul's part, or if the man was not sufficiently marked out by his clothing or badges of rank or whatever.

The high priest back when Paul had been operating in the area as a Pharisee was Caiaphas. Well, Caiaphas is out of the picture. Now you have Ananias.

He's somebody Paul evidently is not familiar with and does not know. It is also possible that Paul says, Well, I couldn't tell by looking he was the high priest. Somebody's saying punch the guy in the mouth.

How am I supposed to know he's the high priest? First words out of his mouth, break the law. Could be either one. But, Paul says, I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest.

For it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people. And Paul is sort of occupying the moral high ground here. He is quoting Scripture.

He's quoting the law. He's telling everybody what the law says. None of these people seem to be remembering the rules, even their own rules.

And so they're already at sort of a moral disadvantage. But when Paul perceived, and again, maybe this is part of his squinting at them, and there may be some that he knows

from the old days, these guys, it's kind of like the good old boys club once you get on. You know, you're there for life.

And he looks around and he says, I remember old Hey Dad there, and I remember old this guy and that guy, and there's this one and that one. And he recognizes that there is a split. And this is something that has gone back before Jesus' day.

The disharmony between the Pharisees and the Sadducees is of long standing. And Paul looks through, and as he's counting heads and recognizing different ones, he perceives that one part are Sadducees and the other are Pharisees. He cries out in the council, Men, brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees, concerning the hope of the resurrection, I am called to account here.

Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am being judged. Where did this come from? When did anybody say anything about resurrection? Well, first of all, let me tell you that your new King James there has a little bit of a problem when he says, I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. The word is *ton pharisaion*, it's plural.

The son of Pharisees. And I don't know why the new King James changed the number there, but it's *ton pharisaion*. This is the masculine plural genitive.

Son of Pharisees. His family, his father and grandfather at a minimum were Pharisees and possibly before that. He has a heritage that would be well known to the old gray heads there.

Oh yeah, this is probably... One thing we're never told is Saul's father's name. He could have been Saul, Ben, whoever. But we're not given that information.

But you can bet the people in Jerusalem knew his father's name and possibly his grandfather's name. Prominent family of Pharisees in Jerusalem. So he says, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees.

Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am being judged. Why does he say this and is it valid? Well, what has he just remarked? I saw a dead man on the road to Damascus. Right? I saw Jesus of Nazareth, the man that was crucified, some days, weeks, after, months, years after the fact.

He appeared to me. I saw him. The only way a dead person can appear is either resurrected or as a spirit, like Samuel coming up to speak to Saul.

When he said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say there is no resurrection. That is why they are sad, you see.

That's an easy way to remember it. They say there is no resurrection and no angel or

spirit, but the Pharisees confess both. So, once again, Paul shifts the ground of the accusation.

And this is... We've all been wondering, and we've talked on the breaks here in the last few weeks, about when did Paul realize that he goofed coming to Jerusalem? When did it finally hit him that he wasn't supposed to be there? And when did he sort of get a clearer view? I think it's when he looked intently. I think when it tells us at the beginning of chapter 3 he looked intently at that council. He saw the same hardness and the same lack of receptivity, and I think it finally dawned on him.

And he said, you know what? I'm not going to tell the Damascus Road story again. I nearly got torn apart last time. I think what the Lord said is true.

They will not hear your witness. So, what does he do? He looks at them and he perceives. Pharisees, Sadducees.

He says, you know what? This really is about a resurrection. And I know exactly... He knew this group. He grew up with them.

He knows exactly what they're like. And as soon as he says, I am here. I'm being judged because I believe in a resurrection.

I believe I saw a dead man on the road. It's not about him anymore. It's about this long-standing schism.

And so all he does is just throw a match in the tinder there. He does not notice. He makes no apologia here.

He makes no presentation of Christ. He makes no defense of his mission to the Gentiles. I mean, that's not going to wash in the Sanhedrin.

At least before, there were some Jewish Christians in the crowd. Here, it's all the council. These are the ones that detailed him with letters to persecute and to arrest in prison and lead to death Christians.

So, when he looks intently at them and he sees the Pharisees and Sadducees, he says, well, I can say a true thing and this meeting is going to be over. It is the hope of the resurrection of the dead on which I'm being judged. That's really what it's all about as far as you guys are concerned.

I believe I saw dead men on the road. Well, the assembly was divided. Sadducees, there is no resurrection and no angel in spirit.

The Pharisees confessed both. So there arose a loud outcry. Hey, wait a minute.

And the scribes of the Pharisees party arose and protested. Now, these are the scribes.

Why are there scribes within the Pharisee party? These are the text critics.

These are the men who know the chapter and verse. These are the ones that are going to bring up the Old Testament Scriptures about Elijah raising the dead, about Elisha raising the dead, about Samuel coming up, about Job. I will see my Redeemer from my flesh on the last day.

These are the scribes. They've got the chapter and verse. They've got the scroll.

And they stand up and protest. Wait a minute. We have no textual basis for finding fault with this man.

I've got the law right in front of me. I don't see that he's done anything wrong. He says he saw a dead man on the road.

Could happen. Saw a spirit. I've got no legal precedent for condemning him on that basis.

We believe that. It could happen. If a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

Does this remind you of anything? What did Gamaliel say way back there? What was it? Chapter 5 or so? If you resist Peter and John here, and you're wrong, you will be found to be fighting against God. Gamaliel is the one that put that principle out there. And 20 odd years later, they have not forgotten.

Better not be fighting against God. If a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God. So now there arose this great dissension.

And Achillearch, for a third time now, fearing that Paul would be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks. Three times. The number three is significant, isn't it? In Scripture.

Three times now, Paul has been exposed to the Jews. Three times now, a Gentile has had to come and rescue him from his own people. But I think this third time, Paul knows.

He doesn't exactly dissemble. He doesn't exactly prevaricate. He doesn't exactly abandon all hope.

But he doesn't boldly proclaim the name of Christ. All he does is say, you know what? I saw a dead man. I see dead people.

And that just breaks up the meaning. So the commander commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force and bring him into the barracks. Now look again.

The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul. All of this time, the Lord didn't appear. What about the previous night? There was a night between when the people tried to pull him apart and when he stood before the Sanhedrin.

The Lord didn't appear to him then. Why does the Lord appear to him now? Because when Paul looked intently, when Paul perceived that what the Lord had told him was right, that what the Holy Spirit told him in every city was right, that what Agabus rolled on his back and tried to show him with the girdle was right, now he's woke up and smells the coffee. And so now Jesus comes.

And Jesus doesn't rebuke him. He doesn't say, Paul, Paul, Paul. He doesn't say that.

He says, Paul, cheer up. You've testified for me in Jerusalem. You wanted to testify.

You testified. You wanted to talk to your people. You've talked to your people.

You've been here. You've done it. Got the t-shirt.

You're all set now. Forever after, you can say, Yes, I testified in Jerusalem. This is what I think.

Did you get it out of your system? You have testified for me in Jerusalem. You must bear witness at Rome. Jesus never came to Paul and said, You must bear witness of me in Jerusalem.

But he does tell him, You must bear witness before the Gentiles. You must bear witness at Rome. He says, you have testified in Jerusalem.

Not that I told you to. Not that I wanted you to. Not that it did any bleeding good at all to be here.

But maybe you got it out of your system. This is my interpretation. Be of good cheer.

As you have now testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome. Now that we've gotten this aberration out of the way, maybe I can get you where I wanted you to be in the first place. But, verse 12, When it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

This is a little bit of a bracket here, isn't it? A little bit of a chiastic sort of open and closed parentheses. What's the first thing that happened when Paul came to Jerusalem? Men took a vow. And Paul took one with him.

Right? Once again now, you have Jews banding together and taking a vow. This is the very same kind of thing. They bound themselves together with an oath.

This would have been accompanied by all of the accoutrements of a vow. They believe they're doing this for God. They would have gone to the temple.

They would have purified themselves. They would have shaved their head. They would have promised before God, O Lord God, I will not let food or drink pass my lips until I have killed this heretic who is an enemy of Your Word and an enemy of Your way and an enemy of the Jews and an enemy of the people and an enemy of the state.

And Lord, I'm going to do this for You. Bless my efforts. I will not rest until I have rid the world of this blight on society, this malefactor from within, this cancerous growth on the nation of Israel.

O Lord God, I promise, me and these guys, we are not going to rest, we're not going to eat until we slay him and spill his blood. This is the promise they make. So, of course, they all starved.

Right? They would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Well, they didn't kill Paul, so I assume these men all died of hunger. I'm sure they were of such integrity that they would keep their promise and they just wasted away to nothing.

And I say it serves them right. What a stupid promise to make anyway. Now, there were more than 40 who had formed this conspiracy.

More than 40. This is a room full of men that have made this oath. My question is, even if this had been fulfilled, did all 40 of them, did it have to be like an et tu Brute thing where everybody comes up and gets him? What if you're number 40 back there and number 1, 2, and 3 stab him and kill him? Do the other 37 guys have to? Or is it a group thing where if any one of the group gets him, all of us are off the hook? This is kind of like, well, I'll join because the chances are I won't have to do it anyway.

I don't know how this works. I assume it was some sort of a group thing where we as a group will make sure he's dead and then we can all have a meal. More than 40 who had formed this conspiracy.

They came to the chief priests and elders and said, we have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we... Not just an oath, a great oath. We crossed our hearts and hoped to die. We wrote it in blood.

We've promised each other. We've done this, that, and the other. It's a great oath.

We will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the Kiliarch that he be brought down to you tomorrow as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him, but we are ready to kill him before he ever gets here. We know the route.

We're going to attack the bodyguard. But, listen to this, Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush. Apostle Paul has a sister, who knew, who lives in Jerusalem.

Paul has a nephew in Jerusalem who is in the Jewish milieu there because he's part of this big, fancy Jewish family. Why does Paul never mention his family? He's a blight and a black mark on their name in the Jewish community, right? So Paul doesn't say, oh, yeah, I'm the son of Haydad back there in Jerusalem. Or I'm the son of... My uncle was Gamaliel or whatever.

He doesn't diminish his family in the eyes of the Jews by bringing them up and identifying himself with them. He keeps a distance. So his sister still lives in Jerusalem, evidently honored and not ill thought of.

And his nephew, his sister's son, is privy and is in the loop and is party to this and hears about it. And he says, well, even though old Uncle Saul is a bad egg and went nuts and got sunstroke and thought he saw God, he may think his uncle is completely nuts, but he's not going to let him be murdered in an illicit way. This is a bad oath.

Anybody who knows the law... Do you think Gamaliel would have sanctioned such a plot? Of course not. There are procedures. There are rules.

There are laws. But these guys are vindictive. They have appointed themselves as vigilantes, so to speak.

They'll operate outside the law, outside the council. And so this nephew went and entered the barracks and told Paul. There is a great story here.

If somebody wanted to make a movie and really, instead of just making stuff up out of whole cloth, use the details that are in the word of God. You'd think about it. Here's a guy that has been safely separate and distinct and Paul has been careful not to identify his family so they don't get tarred with the brush just because they don't hold with him at all.

He's not going to say, well, you're stuck with me and you're going to pay the penalty. They're in the clear, so to speak. But the nephew, when he comes down and enters the barracks, he outs himself.

What are you doing down at the barracks? What are you doing talking to the heretic? What are you doing talking to Saul, the nutcase with the sunstroke on the road to Damascus? What are you doing talking to him? This young man, you can tell that the family of Saul, Paul, had some starch, had some integrity, had some quality. And this nephew, I would suspect, probably eventually came to Christ. Look at the courage the young man has to out himself as a relative and go and warn his uncle that there is a murder on the way and he saves his life.

He saves his uncle's life. He told Paul, Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, take this young man to the commander. He has something to tell him.

And the young man is willing to go. So he goes to the ciliary, to the commander, and says, Paul, the prisoner, called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.

The commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, what is it you have to tell me? He said, this is the nephew, the Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow as though they were going to inquire more fully about him, but do not yield to them, for more than 40 of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you. So the commander let the young man depart and commanded him, tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.

Then he called for two centurions, saying, prepare 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen to go to Caesarea. This is a convoy, this is a major detachment of troops. How many troops does this guy have that he can detach this many and send them? There must have been a lot of trouble broiling and brewing around Jerusalem Egyptians popping out in the wilderness, and he's got like a quick reaction force here ready.

And so he calls a couple of centurions, he's got a lot of troops, and he's going to devote them to take this one man out of the city. 200 infantry, 70 cavalry, 200 artillery, spearmen, to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night. This is dark, the dark of night.

You can hear the troops grumbling, Caesarea. And provide mounts to set Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor. He's a Roman citizen.

It is their duty to safeguard him and make sure he doesn't get killed. And so you look at the reversal here. To Israel belonged the law, the promises, the covenants, the stewardship of the things of God, the privilege.

To be an Israelite ought to be the highest and best thing on earth. But you look at this, in this time, in this situation, the best thing you can be is a Roman. And in the hands of the Gentiles.

You're so much safer surrounded by how many hundred Gentiles than by your own people, the people of God. It's just an irony beyond description. Put him on a horse, send him to Felix the governor.

He wrote a letter in the following manner. Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix. Now we find out the man's name.

His name is Claudius Lysias. And it would appear that Luke, in his files, has the letter.

And so when he's writing Acts, he pulls out the letter and he just copies it into the inspired word of God.

Notice Ananias, all of the other Jews, the minutes of the various meetings of the Sanhedrin, none of that survives. A Gentile Kiliarch has his letter forever enshrined in the inerrant, infallible, eternal word of God. It's just enough to blow all your circuits.

Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix. Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them.

Coming with the troops, I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.

And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. So now, if they want to pursue this thing with Paul, they've got to send a deputation to the Roman capital of Caesarea. They're no longer on their home turf.

They don't have the kind of advantages and the kind of leverages in Jerusalem that they used against the Lord Jesus. Then he signs off. Farewell.

So the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul, brought him by night to Antipaterus. The next day, they left the horsemen to go on with him and return to the barracks. Got far enough away that the rabble is not going to be a threat.

So now you have the cavalry escort and Paul is on a horse as well. And they go all the way on to Caesarea. They deliver the letter to the governor.

They presented Paul to him. The governor read it. He asked what province he was from.

He understood that he was from Cilicia. He said, I will hear you when your accusers also have come. He commanded him to be kept in Herod's praetorium.

Well, that concludes chapter 23. But, again, what is the point here? Paul has, in my view at least, made a mistake in going to Jerusalem. It wasn't what he was supposed to do.

But God took it into account. And just as God allowed Paul to persecute Christians and to imprison and sponsor the death of Christians like Stephen, you ask yourself, why didn't Jesus appear to Saul just before Stephen? Or just before he imprisoned the first Christians? God let Saul run amok. And at the right time, and in the right place, he confronted him.

If I was one of the Christians that lost my life two days before the Damascus Road, I'm thinking, Lord, why couldn't you have got here a little earlier? But that's my assignment

as one who is suffering for righteousness. And I am heir to the kingdom of heaven because of that. That's my opportunity.

That's my test. God weaves all things together for good. Here, God says, I'm warning him.

He's not supposed to go, but I know he's going to go anyway. But he's going to be an example of someone who gets a zeal, not according to knowledge, who's going to go in a direction he's not supposed to go. He's going to have to learn the hard way what he could have learned the easy way.

And this, to me, is really the lesson of these chapters. They used to say, there's the right way, the wrong way, and the army way. Well, there is an easy way and a hard way to learn the things that God has for us in this life.

The easy way, the better way, is to see examples in the Word of God and be chastened by them. The Word of God is profitable for doctrine. It's profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

But there are other kinds of reproof and correction and instruction, aren't there? There is circumstantial reproof. There is discipline in time. There are things such as what happened to the Israelites in the land.

Oppression, economic adversity, military defeat, captivity. That wasn't the Word of God, was it? That was circumstance. That was God intervening to make His point because they were insensitive to the Word.

There is an easy way. Hear the Word. Heed the Word.

Be corrected, rebuked, and instructed by the Word. Or, go your own way and let God use the circumstantial hammer of divine discipline to thunk us on the head enough times that we finally wake up and turn. All in favor of the easy way, say, I. I. All in favor of the hard way, you're probably not listening to me anyway.

This is the point. God will work things together for good. Sometimes we learn the easy way.

Sometimes we have a particularly difficult area in our soul. We're blinded by something. We're just hard of hearing some area.

And we wind up having to learn it the hard way. The good thing is, it is never too late. If we are breathing air, it is not too late.

We are still here. God still has a plan for our lives. I think the Apostle Paul, as he stood before the Sanhedrin, gazing intently at them, suddenly got it.

It suddenly came clear. And he said, you know what? I am wasting my time here. We need to pull the curtain on this scene and get moving in another direction.

You know what? I'm here because of the hope of the resurrection. Then he just stands back and waits for the food fight to begin. He doesn't make any attempt to make any defense, any declarative statement of Gospel truth.

He just says, I see dead people, and it all just flies, and he leaves. Because now the Lord Jesus can appear to him. Now the Lord Jesus can say, alright, you've borne witness in Jerusalem.

Now let's go to Rome. Rome is the objective. You're the Apostle to the Gentiles.

I'll still work this together for good. And that's the good news. God can pick us up right where we are.

We can look and see where we've made mistakes. We can look and see where we have not been sensitive, not understood, not paid close attention, and we've gotten ourselves into some kind of a fix. It doesn't matter.

God knew it ahead of time anyway. He can now take whatever circumstances there are and work them together for good. God is not limited by our past decisions.

He is only limited by our present attitude. It's our attitude right now that determines what God will do for us. So as we look at where we are now and what our opportunities are now, don't be discouraged by the past.

Don't be worried about, well, have I gone down a road where God just can't fix it. Look at the Apostle Paul. As soon as he wakes up and realizes that he's in the wrong place doing the wrong thing, the Lord Jesus is at his side and says, alright, let's pick up with the plan.

Let's get you to Rome. And he's on the march. No recrimination.

No rebuke. Let's move in a positive direction. Let's get the mission done.

And God is going to work it out where Paul is still going to be a great witness. He's still going to write the books and do the things that God needs him to do before his life is over. He can do the same thing with us.

He can pick us up right where we are right now. It all depends on our attitude. Do we wake up? Do we see clearly? Are we hungry and thirsting after righteousness or not? Well, we'll pick up at chapter 24 next time.

Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your Word. Thank you for this great example in the life of the Apostle Paul. Thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross to give us the life and the opportunity that we have today.

We ask that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts, help us to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to our Savior. We pray it in His name. Amen.