

Introduction (Acts 23:1-35)

How many of you like to work puzzles? As I prayed about the message, I saw a puzzle. Acts 19:21-22 is the cover picture of the puzzle. In Acts 19:21-22, the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul, giving him direction for the next four years of his life. He said that he must go to Macedonia, Achaia, Jerusalem, and then Rome. Paul received clear direction from the Holy Spirit. When you are working a puzzle, it helps to look at the picture to see where all the colors, and figures go.

(Acts 19:21) “Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”

Over the past few weeks we have seen Paul go to Macedonia, Achaia, and then head towards Jerusalem. On his way back he stopped at Troas and Assos before going to Miletus, where he met with the Ephesian elders. One of the things that he told them is that in every city he goes to the Holy Spirit tells him that bonds and afflictions await him. Not only that, but in every city the believers tried to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Nobody wanted to see him suffer.

After leaving Miletus, Paul sailed to Patara, and then caught another ship to Tyre. After stopping in Tyre, they went to Caesarea, and then on to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, he met with James and the elders in the Jerusalem church. Then, the unbelieving Jews grabbed hold of him in the temple, and dragged him out, and then shut the doors to the temple. They intended to put Paul to death, and they did not want him to re-enter the temple. The Commander of the Roman cohort heard that there was a disturbance in town, and so he grabbed some of his soldiers and ran to the scene. They rescued Paul, and brought him back to the barracks. At the barracks, Paul asked the commander for permission to speak to the crowds. Paul used every opportunity to preach the gospel to people. His message was not received, and the Commander had Paul carried into the barracks.

The Commander wanted to know why the crowds were so upset with Paul, and because he was not able to establish any facts, he ordered Paul to be examined by flogging. Paul asked the centurion if it was lawful for him to flog a citizen who was not condemned. Upon hearing this, the centurion immediately went to the Commander and notified him that Paul was a Roman citizen. It was unlawful to put a citizen in chains and to punish him without being condemned in court. The Commander then orders a court appearance with his accusers, which is where our account starts today.

(Acts 22:30) “But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

In this Acts 19 puzzle, we have been finding and putting in the various pieces. Most of us put together the outside pieces first, and then work on sections at a time. Paul is in Jerusalem, and the only pieces left are the ones taking Paul to Rome. We will put in another piece this morning. There are three different events represented in our piece of the puzzle today. First, Paul meets with the Sanhedrin Council. Second, there is a plot devised against Paul. Third, Paul will be taken to Caesarea, which is his last stop before being taken to Rome. This morning, we have a lot of verses to cover, so we will read them as we go along.

Another Piece in Place

1. The Meeting
2. The Plot
3. The Transfer

1. The Meeting

Paul looks intently at the Sanhedrin Council. There was a lesser Sanhedrin Council that comprised of twenty-three men. Then, there was the Greater Sanhedrin Council, which had seventy-one men. They did not meet as often, but they met when doctrinal or other major decisions needed to be made. The Sanhedrin Council was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, but the Sadducees were in the majority. In our passage today, Luke gives us a good understanding of the differences between the two groups. In verse eight, he says that the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit. They did not believe in the supernatural. The Pharisees, on the other hand, acknowledged all of these things. Paul tells the Council that he has lived his whole life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. This upsets Ananias and he orders Paul to be struck on the mouth. **Paul lived his whole life with a perfectly good conscience before God.**

(Acts 23:1) “Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. {2} The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.”

There are twenty-nine references to the word conscience in the New American Standard Bible. Twenty-one of the references are given by Paul. There are three references to conscience given by Peter in the book of 1 Peter. There are four references in the book of Hebrews. If Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, then twenty-five of the twenty-nine references would be from Paul. We could spend three weeks talking about this first verse on conscience, but I only have a few minutes to talk about it, so I will try and be very brief. We will spend some more time in the book of Hebrews talking more about our conscience.

First, I want to define our conscience. Some have defined it as the internal voice that sits in judgment over your will. Still others have defined it as the internal moral witness found in all human beings. The Greek word for conscience is *suneidesis*. It means co-perception or moral consciousness. *Sun* means to join together or to unite. *Eido* means to see, perceive, or be aware of. Based on this, conscience is an awareness of a moral standard that we have established in our own lives. I believe **a good conscience is when your actions and convictions agree with one another.** A bad conscience is when your actions do not match what you believe to be right in your heart.

Conscience: G4893. *suneidesis*, from G4894; co-perception, i.e. moral consciousness:--conscience. [G4894. *suneido*, from G4862 and G1492; to see completely; used (like its prim.) only in two past tenses, respectively mean. to understand or become aware, and to be conscious or (clandestinely) informed of:--consider, know, be privy, be ware of.]

Ray Stedman is a well known Bible scholar and teacher. I met Ray in Chicago, when I was playing in the Western Open. He was invited to teach the PGA Tour Bible Study, and he gave an excellent teaching on shalom, or peace. When I was researching conscience, I came across one of Ray's teachings on conscience. Here is an explanation that he gives.

"There is a very common myth that says conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right and wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear. Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts before and after the fact – it can either prod or punish."

Our conscience is like an instrument gauge on an airline. If the instrument has been properly calibrated, it will help the pilot make right decisions. If the instrument is not giving true readings, the pilot can make some critical errors.

In 2009, there were two airline crashes due to instrument errors. In March 2009, there was a Turkish Air that crashed at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. The altimeter gave a false reading of the actual altitude of the airline. At 1,950 feet the altimeter said the plane was at ground level and the autopilot reduced the engine speed, resulting in a crash that killed about ten people and injured another eighty. Here is part of the finding by the investigation team.

"The Turkish airliner that crashed at Schiphol last week had a faulty altimeter. That's the conclusion of the preliminary findings of the investigation team that has been working to establish the cause of the accident. The altimeter wrongly indicated that the Boeing was already almost on the ground. Because the airplane was flying on automatic pilot, the thrust was reduced according to the faulty reading. The pilots realised the problem, but had insufficient time to correct it."

In June 2009, an Air France going from Brazil to France crashed in the Atlantic Ocean. At 38,000 feet, the air speed gauge said they were flying too fast, and the auto-pilot slowed the engine down. It continued reading that it was flying too fast, and the engine slowed down until it stalled. The pilots were slow in recognizing the problem and taking corrective actions. Even though there was nothing wrong with the engines or the planes ability to fly, it crashed, killing all 228 people on board.

Our consciences are like the instruments on these planes. If the instrument is working correctly, it helps us make proper decisions. If the instrument is not working or is not calibrated, we may take incorrect actions that can cause our lives to crash. Our conscience, by itself, is not a good moral compass. If it is trained properly, if the instrument is working properly, it is a good instrument. If our consciences are not properly calibrated to God's word and His standards, then our consciences will not be an accurate instrument to base our actions on.

Paul tells the Council that he has lived his life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. Paul does not say that he had not sinned. In 1 Timothy 1:15 he said he was the foremost of sinners. He says that he has not violated his conscience. As we look at Paul's life, we see the following actions. First, Paul participated in the murder of Stephen. He held the robes of the people who stoned Stephen. He was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. Furthermore, a great persecution took place immediately after that, and Paul was right in the midst of that persecution against the church.

(Acts 7:58-8:1) "And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. {8:1} And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Not only was Paul involved in the murder of Stephen, we find in Acts 9:1-2 that Paul was zealously attacking the church. He was breathing threats and murder against the disciples. He was pursuing saints, even in other cities, so that he could have them put to death or imprisoned. Yet, in spite of doing these atrocious things, Paul says that he has lived with a good conscience all his life up till this day. In his mind, he was staying true to what he believed was right to do. His sense of right and wrong, based on his training, was wrong. In his mind, he was doing what was right. He was staying true to what he believed to be right. Therefore, he had not violated his conscience. Unfortunately, his altimeter was giving him wrong readings.

(Acts 9:1-2) "Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, {2} and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

In the movie Pinocchio, there is a character named Cricket who sings a song to Pinocchio. He says that all you have to do is listen to your conscience. There is a problem with that statement. The problem with that song is our consciences give us readings according to their calibration. If the conscience is not calibrated according to God's word, it will give erroneous readings. If we applied Cricket's theology to Paul, we could say it was okay to murder one another because of religious preference? Paul's conscience was not upset over it.

As we look at Paul and his statement that he has lived with his life with a perfectly good conscience, his belief and value system was the Law. He zealously defended the Law and how the Pharisees interpreted the matters of the Law. In killing Stephen, he did not violate his conscience. In persecuting Christians, he did not violate his conscience. **A correct understanding of the word of God must be our ultimate guide, not our consciences. Sound doctrine is essential in our lives.** Our beliefs and value systems must be based on the word of God. Then, our consciences help us do what is right. Our consciences insist that we do what we believe is right and avoid what we believe is wrong. If we do not listen to our conscience that is telling us what is right and wrong, we can develop a bad conscience. Paul tells us that **if we reject a good conscience, we can suffer shipwreck in regard to our faith.** It is important to listen to and follow our consciences.

(1 Tim 1:19) "keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

After hearing Paul make this statement, Ananias orders him to be struck in the mouth, Paul responds by saying, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" Then, the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" Notice Paul's response. "I was not aware, brethren, that he was a high priest; for it is written, 'you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" **Paul had calibrated his conscience with the word of God.** If he had known that Ananias was the high priest, he would not have spoken

evil of him. Paul was a man who lived with a clean conscience. (As a sidenote, this was a prophetic word from Paul. Ananias was a wicked and crafty self-centered leader. He was hated by most people. He was murdered a few years later.)

(Acts 23:3-5) “Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" {4} But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" {5} And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'”

There is so much more about consciences. There are good and bad consciences. There are weak and strong consciences. There are two types of defiled consciences. There are seared consciences. There are consequences to all of these consciences. I encourage you to do some studies of your own on consciences. Four years ago, I did one of the best messages that I have ever preached on consciences. It was part of a series on love. The message was called, love from a good conscience. You can get with James if you want to order a copy of the message. (December 2, 2012)

It is very important for you and I to calibrate our consciences correctly. The world tries to program our consciences. But God commands us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. We must fill and saturate our minds with the word of God. We must become ingrained with the word of God. Memorize and meditate on the word of God. Let it richly dwell within you. Let the word of God calibrate your consciences. If you will calibrate your mind with the word of God, your consciences will give you proper readings. But, that is not enough. You have to be committed to follow your conscience. James wrote, “to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” If you know what is right, do what is right. Listen to your conscience. Let’s learn from Paul. Let’s be a church that lives our lives with a perfectly good conscience. Let’s be a church that calibrates its conscience with the Word of God.

(James 4:17) “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

Paul was a Pharisee. He knew all about the Sanhedrin. Luke says he perceived that the Council was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. So, he cried out that he was on trial for the resurrection of the dead. That was the hot button that set off a fight between the two groups.

(Acts 23:6-9) “But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" {7} As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. {8} For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. {9} And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”

The dissension grew so hostile that the commander thought that they would tear Paul to pieces. He ordered the troops to go down and take Paul from them by force, and bring him back to the barracks.

(Acts 23:10) “And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.”

While Paul was at the barracks, the Lord came to Paul and stood at his side. He encouraged Paul. He said, “take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.” What a great encouragement. Paul had heard that he was to go to Macedonia, Achaia, Jerusalem, and then Rome. He has been to the first three, and the Lord is re-confirming to Paul that he is to go to Rome. It is not just an encouragement; I believe it is the start of the next chapter. Paul’s work in Jerusalem has been accomplished, and he is now headed for Rome.

(Acts 23:11) “But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, ‘Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.’”

2. The Plot

The next event in this piece of the puzzle is the plot. More than forty men formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. The Jewish leadership had been unable to get things done, so now some of the zealous Jews were going to take care of things themselves. It reminds me a little bit about our own government right now. There is so much division and fighting between the two parties that not much is being accomplished in Washington. One of the things that Americans are looking for is an outsider, someone who has not been part of the ineffective government bureaucracy.

(Acts 23:12-13) “When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. {13} There were more than forty who formed this plot.”

The church can learn a lesson from this also. We have to stop fighting over things. God has given the church a mandate to preach the gospel. He has commanded us to go and make disciples, teaching them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Some churches are doing an effective job of this. But, much of the church is no different than the Sanhedrin Council. We are divided over our beliefs, and distracted from the work we have been assigned. The Council was so divided and the dissension was so chaotic that the Commander had removed Paul from the Council. Church, let’s be unified, and strive together to accomplish the work God has given us. **Without unity, we will not be able to accomplish the work God has given us to do.** We know that these forty men were not part of the Council, because they went to the chief priests and the elders, and told them and the Council to bring Paul down as if they were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation. While Paul was being brought down, they were going to ambush him.

(Acts 23:14-15) “They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. {15} “Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.”

In Psalm 138, God gives a promise. David wrote, “The Lord will accomplish what concerns me.” **God is sovereign.** In Jeremiah 1:12, the Lord told Jeremiah that He watches over His word to perform it. What had the Lord just done for Paul. He personally appeared to Paul and encouraged him. He told Paul that just as he had faithfully witnessed in Jerusalem, he was now going to go to Rome and testify there. That was God’s word, and He was going to watch over His word to perform it. He was going to accomplish what concerned Paul. God is sovereign, and He was watching over His word. **He watches over His word to perform it.** He did it for Paul; He will do it for you.

(Psalm 138:8a) “The LORD will accomplish what concerns me...”

(Jer 1:12) “Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it."

God arranged for Paul’s sister’s son to hear of the ambush. Paul had grown up in Jerusalem. Even though he was from Tarsus, he had studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem. His father was one of the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Paul had roots in Jerusalem. His sister’s son heard of the ambush and entered the barracks and told Paul. Because Paul was an uncondemned citizen, he had visitation rights and privileges that other prisoners did not have. Paul called one of the centurions and asked him to lead the young man to the Commander. The centurion did just that. He took him to the Commander, and told him that the young man had something to say to him.

(Acts 23:16-18) “But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. {17} Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." {18} So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.”

The Commander took Paul’s nephew aside and inquired of him privately. The young man told the Commander of the plot that had been formed. He also told the Commander what to do. He said, “so do not listen to them.” This was a very wise and bold young man. He reminds me of Joseph. He did not just reveal to Pharaoh what the dreams were about, but he told Pharaoh what to do about the dreams. A word of knowledge followed by a word of wisdom is a powerful combination.

(Acts 23:19-21) “The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?" {20} And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. {21} "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.”

The Commander let Paul’s nephew go after instructing him not to tell anyone that he had notified him of these things. The plot had been exposed, and the Commander was now going to do what needed to be done. This Commander probably did not know Jesus yet, but he was doing Jesus’ work. Proverbs tells us that the heart of the king is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He directs it wherever He wants. God used Paul’s nephew to direct the heart of the Commander. God was watching over His word to perform it, and he was using people like the Commander, without him even knowing it.

(Acts 23:22) “So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.”

(Pr 21:1) “The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

Church, be encouraged. When God promises something to you, He will watch over His word in your life to accomplish it. Stand on His promises to you. Stand on His word for your life. Trust the Lord to fulfill His word and His will in your life.

3. The Transfer

God’s word to Paul was that he must go to Rome and testify there. God was watching over His word to perform it. The Commander ordered two hundred soldiers to be ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea. The third hour of the night is 9 p.m. The Commander also ordered seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen. They were also going to provide Paul mounts to put Paul on and bring him safety to Felix the governor. It is about 75 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea, so this was going to take about three days for these soldiers to travel by foot. Paul was riding, but there were four hundred soldiers who were going by foot. God provided Paul a very safe transfer to Caesarea. This will be Paul’s first stop on his way to Rome. He will be there for a while, but he is now headed for Rome.

(Acts 23:23-24) “And he called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen." {24} They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”

The Commander also wrote a letter to the governor. The first part of his letter is factual. Paul was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them. He came up to them and rescued him, but the part about learning that he was a Roman was a lie. He was making himself look good before the governor. The Commander had Paul tied down and was about to interrogate him by scourging when the centurion found out he was a Roman citizen. The Commander could have been imprisoned or put to death for putting Paul in chains, so he is trying to cover himself in this letter.

(Acts 23:25-27) “And he wrote a letter having this form: {26} "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. {27} "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.”

The Commander tells the Governor that he tried to ascertain the charge against Paul, and that he had brought him down to their council. He found that Paul had been accused over questions about their Law, but that he had not done anything deserving death or imprisonment. Next, he tells about the plot that had been formed against Paul, and why he had sent Paul to him. He also tells how he instructed his accusers to bring charges against him before the Governor. All of these statements were true. The Commander had other motives for sending Paul to the Governor. He got rid of the source of dissension in Jerusalem, shifted the responsibility from him to the Governor, and made himself look good.

(Acts 23:28-30) “And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; {29} and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment. {30} "When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.”

After writing the letter to the Governor, he sent the soldiers and Paul out that night to Antipatris. Antipatris is a small town on the way to Caesarea that is forty-one miles from Jerusalem. (The current name is Ras El Ain.) It would not be the normal route to take to go to Caesarea. To go forty-one miles that night, the soldiers on foot had to be going at a pretty fast pace. They were probably not running, but their pace was not a casual walk. The four hundred soldiers returned the next day to the barracks, and the seventy horsemen went on with Paul. Once they had got out of Jerusalem, the Commander was not as concerned about the forty men who had formed the plot.

(Acts 23:31-32) “So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. {32} But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.”

When they had arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter and Paul to the Governor. After reading the letter, the Governor asked Paul what province he was from. This was critical because the region was divided up into two jurisdictions. The Governor needed to determine which jurisdiction Paul was under. Since Cilicia and Judea were under his domain, he tells Paul that he will give him a hearing after his accusers arrive. He also ordered Paul to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium. Herod had been the Governor and had built him a magnificent palace in Caesarea. In Acts 12, he refused to give God glory and an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms. (See Acts 12:20-23.) Paul is now going to be kept in the governor’s palace until his trial.

(Acts 23:33-35) “When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. {34} When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, {35} he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.”

Conclusion

In this piece of the puzzle, we are reminded of four things. First, we are reminded about living our lives with a clean conscience. We are reminded how important it is for us to have our consciences calibrated with an accurate understanding of Scripture. Then, we are reminded of how important it is to follow our conscience.

Second, we are reminded that God watches over his word to perform it. He is going to accomplish what concerns us. God’s will was going to be done. Paul was submitted to God, and his life was in the hands of God. God directed the heart of the Commander to run and rescue Paul. God directed the Commander to send him to Caesarea. God’s sovereign hand is seen throughout this passage.

Third, we are reminded of God’s protection of us. He protected Paul from being killed outside the temple. He protected Paul from the plot formed against him. God had put a hedge of protection around him. That did not mean that Paul did not suffer. He did suffer. But, his life was protected and

spared. It is important for us to be under proper authority and covering. God places authorities, governmental and spiritual over our lives to protect us. He also supernaturally intervenes at times to protect us. We are reminded to pray for the Lord to deliver us from evil, and to protect us from evil. As your pastor, I pray protection over your leadership team, your life group leaders, and over all of you.

Fourth, we are reminded of God's care and comfort in our suffering. God showed care for Paul. He was given a mount to ride to Caesarea. He was given the best accommodations in Caesarea, the Governor's palace. We saw a couple of weeks ago that the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, but so is the comfort ours in abundance. We see the abundance of comfort to Paul in the midst of this trial. It reminds me of the song, "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies, they are new every day. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord. Great is Thy faithfulness.

Let's pray.

Introduction (Acts 19:21, 22:30)

1. The Meeting (Acts 23:1-11, (Acts 7:58-8:1, Acts 9:1-2)

- Paul lived his whole life with a perfectly _____ conscience before God. (Acts 23:1)
- *"There is a very common myth that says conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right and wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear. Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts before and after the fact – it can either prod or punish."* (Ray Stedman)
- A good conscience is when your actions and convictions _____ with one another.
- A _____ understanding of the word of God must be our ultimate guide, not our consciences.
- Sound _____ is essential in our lives.
- If we reject a good conscience, we can suffer _____ in regard to our faith. (1 Tim 1:19)
- Paul had _____ his conscience with the word of God. (Acts 23:3-5, James 4:17)

2. The Plot (Acts 23:12-22, Pr 21:1)

- Without _____, we will not be able to accomplish the work God has given us to do.
- God is _____. He _____ over His word to perform it. (Ps 138:8a, Jer 1:12)

3. The Transfer (Acts 23:23-35)

Introduction (Acts 19:21, 22:30)

1. The Meeting (Acts 23:1-11, (Acts 7:58-8:1, Acts 9:1-2)

- Paul lived his whole life with a perfectly _____ conscience before God. (Acts 23:1)
- *"There is a very common myth that says conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right and wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear. Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts before and after the fact – it can either prod or punish."* (Ray Stedman)
- A good conscience is when your actions and convictions _____ with one another.
- A _____ understanding of the word of God must be our ultimate guide, not our consciences.
- Sound _____ is essential in our lives.
- If we reject a good conscience, we can suffer _____ in regard to our faith. (1 Tim 1:19)
- Paul had _____ his conscience with the word of God. (Acts 23:3-5, James 4:17)

2. The Plot (Acts 23:12-22, Pr 21:1)

- Without _____, we will not be able to accomplish the work God has given us to do.
- God is _____. He _____ over His word to perform it. (Ps 138:8a, Jer 1:12)

3. The Transfer (Acts 23:23-35)