

Katie and I had arrived in Oklahoma and were getting about the task of settling in. We were living in a cramped two room apartment and desperately looking for a house to buy, we were looking to purchase our first house ever.

As we looked at houses around town, there always seemed to be some major problem with the houses we were looking at. You know, you arrive at the curb of the next house on the list, the house looks great from the outside, your hopeful, maybe a little excited, "This might be the one. This might be the house that will work for us. This might be good enough to end this search right here." But, alas, you walk up the stairs, or you turn the corner, or open the kitchen door - and there staring at you, no more than three feet away, are a herd of the neighbors goats.

That really happened by the way. Nice place, great layout, high ceilings, a herd of goats right outside the kitchen...and all the the things that come with goats, wafted into the kitchen.

Well, the house we eventually purchased was a house that was such a disaster that the first time we looked at the house, we didn't even make it past the first two rooms of the house. The house was build in the 1920's and was an art deco style house. It had custom molding in every room, inset cupboards, classic light fixtures and so on. But, the previous owner had pulled out most of the classic architecture, and replaced it with the country look. All the work was very poorly done...It just didn't work in this house.

So that house had sat on the market for about two years, because it was an ugly mess. However, when the owners dropped the price over \$20,000 - the house suddenly didn't look so ugly anymore.

Over the years we renovated the house and the great thing was that I learned house to repair things from plumbing to electrical. So we would do a little here and a little there and eventually got to the kitchen. In the kitchen the previous owner had placed a couple of large sheets of fake paneling in two very odd places in the kitchen. Naive as we were, we could not, for the life of us figure out why someone would place a section of fake paneling sideways, only one third the way up a wall, crooked. It seemed so random, so disjointed, it just didn't make sense.

One day I had enough of looking at those crazy sheets of paneling and announced, "Katie, today I am going to take that fake paneling down!" I felt so, I don't know,

invigorated that I was finally going to get these crazy things off the wall. I was finally going to rid our house of the crooked fake paneling the didn't make any sense.

I got my wrecking crowbar and eased it behind the fake paneling and with one quick heave, the first panel popped off the wall.....and there behind the crooked 4x8 sheet of fake paneling was an ever so slightly smaller 4x8 HOLE IN THE WALL! The previous owner had put up the fake paneling to cover this massive hole.

And so, now I did not have to look at a 4x8 piece of crooked fake paneling on the wall when I sat down to eat, instead, I now was able to gaze upon a 4x8 hole in the wall. The crooked fake paneling was only there to hide the huge hole behind it, but at least the hole in the wall wasn't crooked.

Today in our Scripture Paul calls the high priest of the Sanhedrin a whitewashed wall. Paul calls him this for two reasons: One, In the Jewish court system, it was against the law to strike a Jew before he was proven guilty. A Jew could not be struck until proven guilty. Two: Paul was being put on trial for the very thing Judaism stood for Grace and forgiveness before God, the resurrection of the dead.

You see, the men who accuse Paul of wrong doing were like a whitewashed wall, for on the surface they appeared to be righteous men; To the casual observer, they were pious men of God, but, pull away the fake paneling, and their philosophy, their theology, their faith, was like a gaping hole in the wall.

They either didn't believe in the resurrection, or though they claimed to believe in the resurrection, when it actually happened, they failed to believe it.

How did Paul arrive at this point, being on trial for his life?

As you remember from last week, Paul had come back to Jerusalem after being on the road for an extended period of time. While Paul was gone a rumor had circulated the city. The rumor claimed that Paul was teaching Jews to ignore the law of Moses. In essence the gossip claimed that Paul was teaching others to ignore the bible.

Upon Paul's arrival, the wise leaders of the Jerusalem church advised Paul to preform a pious act, to show outwardly that he was observing the law. Paul was asked to pay for four men to complete a purity vow. This would show the Christian Jewish community that

Paul had no intention of violating the law. By paying for these men to complete their vow, Paul was acting as a righteous man. Paul agreed and went to the Temple to pay the vow. However, at the Temple Paul is recognized and attacked by a mob. Not only have Christian Jews heard the rumor, but all Jews, Christian or not have heard the rumor, and Paul is set upon.

The Romans see the commotion around Paul and intervene. The last thing the Romans want is violence in the city, so they step in and stop the mob. Because it is a religious dispute, the Roman authority brings Paul to the Jewish religious court to hear the charges against Paul, and see what in the world is going on that would cause so many people to attack a man.

You may remember that four other people were brought before the Sanhedrin. Jesus Christ was brought before this judicial body as well as Stephen. It didn't go well for Jesus and Stephen, they were both put to death. Peter and John were the other two who appeared before the Sanhedrin. Peter and John are let go after being threatened, they were told - be quiet or else. Now it is Paul's turn.

The Sanhedrin is a religious court made up of religious leaders from the two political/theological parties in Judaism, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sanhedrin was led by the high priest. The high priest at this time was Ananias. Ananias had a reputation for stealing tithes that were to go to less powerful priests. Ananias was removed from power by king Agrippa II shortly after this incident. He was then killed about eight years later by Jewish Zealot revolutionaries.

The high priest orders that Paul be struck (verse 2). And Paul responds in verse 3 by saying: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Paul says this because, as I said earlier, a Jew in a Jewish court of law was not to be struck until proven guilty. So Paul points this fact out, showing that he is being mistreated from the start. Paul is then reprimanded for insulting the high priest, to which Paul apologizes.

Now, there is some discussion by scholars as to whether Paul is telling the truth here, for it normally would be fairly obvious who the high priest was, especially to Paul, who certainly would personally know many of the people in the room. So, we could come up with a long list of reasons why Paul didn't see who the high priest was from the fact that

Paul had been gone for ages, to this being a more informal hearing, to even Paul's poor eyesight. Whatever the reason Paul does not recognize the high Priest, our text doesn't say why and I think we should believe Paul? Why would he lie? There is no possible reason for it. Here is a man who has dealt with numerous mobs, severe beatings and filthy jail cells, Paul has faced beatings and death, why would he lie on such a little matter. It makes no sense to claim Paul is lying, plus there is no real evidence to back up the theory that Paul is lying, so we must take him at his word.

So here we arrive at the heart of the matter, for like many things in the book of Acts, what appears to be happening, isn't really what is happening, but something else is going on altogether.

It appears that Paul is being charged with teaching in error, but what is really going on is the clash of two mighty theological schools, one that believes in the resurrection of the dead, and one that does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Paul is a smart guy, and Paul can see that what is really happening isn't about him, rather it is about the resurrection, specifically, the resurrection of Jesus.

So we have two schools of thought here, the Sadducees and the Pharisees and though both in Judaism the two are literally worlds apart.

The school of the Sadducees is a much stronger school as a group, the Pharisees held less influence as a party. The Sadducees believe the whole of the bible was encompassed in the Pentateuch, that is, they believed in only the first five books of the bible. So the Sadducees believe in neither the resurrection nor the activity of spirits, which is odd, because angels are mentioned all over Genesis. The Pharisees believed in the whole of the Hebrew bible, what we call the Old Testament, and they also believed in both the resurrection and the activity of spirits and our Lord Jesus Christ does.

The Sadducees claimed that they were purists and the Pharisees retorted that because they failed to believe in the resurrection, the Sadducees would have no part in the world to come.

So Paul, lays it right out there. Paul points out the elephant in the room and calls upon those who believe in the resurrection to come to his aid - and they do. Now many Pharisees became Christians at some point, perhaps a few who are in the room are close to believing in Jesus Christ. So from a Pharisaic viewpoint Paul is being condemned for

simply believing what every Pharisee believed in - the resurrection of the dead. Paul has not believed anything contrary to what a Pharisee would believe. His only "crime" is belief in the resurrection and therefore, the afterlife. If one believes in the resurrection, then by logical conclusion they believe in the afterlife as well.

Now when we talk about belief in the resurrection, what do we really mean? What exactly does believing in the resurrection mean? Some people say they believe in the resurrection, but in reality they believe in something far different.

The resurrection of the dead in both Jewish and Christian thought is very specific. The resurrection of the dead is the raising of a physical body from the dead - anything else is not resurrection. The body was dead. Now the body is alive.

When Jesus dies and is placed in the tomb, it is the person of Jesus who dies, but it is the body of Jesus that is placed in the tomb. Jesus dies on the cross, and leaves his body and heads off to the world beyond.

You and I. When we die and are laid to rest, it is who we are that dies and leaves this body.

Now the Gospels are very specific when they talk about Jesus rising from the dead. Jesus 'soma' is resurrected, that is Jesus physical body is resurrected. Though people have in mind a variety of things when they think of the resurrection, In Jewish and Christian thought, resurrection is only resurrection, if there is a body involved.

Resurrection is not waking from a deep sleep or waking up from a coma. Waking up from a deep sleep is, well, its waking up, and waking from a coma - that's the same thing, its waking up. Resurrection isn't waking up, it is a dead body coming back to life.

Jesus wasn't asleep, or knocked unconscious. Jesus wasn't awakened. Jesus was dead, three days dead, dead as could be; Then Jesus was resurrected and alive - in his own body. Bodily resurrection.

Jesus was not just "mostly dead" and then revived. He was resurrected, fully dead, and then, three days later, fully alive.

Resurrection is also not an afterlife experience. Jesus was not resuscitated a few minutes after his death by his followers. Jesus was placed in a locked tomb and three days later he resurrected, body and all.

Resurrection is also not Jesus being a phantom. In other words, it looked like Jesus, it sounded like Jesus but it was only a phantom of Jesus, like a spirit coming back to haunt those who did him wrong. No, the resurrection of Jesus was not a spiritual resurrection, it was a bodily resurrection.

Finally, resurrection is also not reincarnation. The belief of reincarnation (which is not a Jewish or a Christian belief) is where a person comes back to life as a completely different being - In reincarnation an existing spirit enters into an embryo and takes on the body. In Christianity and Judaism, God, a whole new person is created in the womb. Jesus doesn't come back to life as someone else, Jesus' body is resurrected, Jesus was dead - the exact same Jesus is now alive.

He was dead, completely dead, now he's alive, completely alive. Same Jesus, same body, same person, once dead, now alive.

Why was this resurrection such a hot issue between the Sadducees and the Pharisees? The Sadducees hold the upper hand in the balance of power at this time in history. All this talk about the resurrection is quite alarming to the Sadducees, they see their power collapsing as more people give their lives over to Jesus Christ. The more people that believe in the resurrection, the less influence the Sadducees will have.

The Pharisees, though they are no true friend of Paul, can all see in their own minds a situation where each of them could be standing in the place where Paul is now standing, because they believe in the hope of the resurrection too. So they all rally around Paul, for they might be looking at their future, being prosecuted by the powerful Sadducees.

And so they divide.

But, there is much more at stake here than two groups of men vying for political power, because it is all about the hope we have in the future. Hope is at stake here, and this is not a false hope, but a very real hope.

See our hope as Christians is based upon the resurrection. For without the resurrection we have nothing, we have no salvation, we have no afterlife, nothing. Remember the resurrection of Jesus is proof that there is an afterlife. Where did Jesus go, if there is no life after death? If there was no life after death, then no one can be brought back from the dead.

See if there is nothing after we die, if we cease to exist after we die, then we are annihilated upon death, put out of existence, erased, obliterated. If that is true, then how did Jesus come back from the dead? If Jesus was obliterated, if Jesus was annihilated upon death then Jesus could not return. Jesus would, in a phrase, cease to exist upon death - I mean he wasn't asleep, in a coma, or just, mostly dead, Jesus was a goner for three days. That's time enough for some serious decay to set in.

But, Jesus didn't cease to exist did he? Jesus came back, Jesus rose from the dead. Since Jesus rose from the dead there is the resurrection, since there is the resurrection, there is an afterlife, and that means, brothers and sisters, we are eternal beings, and when we die, we will most certainly not cease to exist.

The Sadducees cannot have anything to do with this for they do not believe in the afterlife and therefore do not believe in the resurrection, so they must try to stop Paul. The Pharisees on the other hand know that there is an afterlife because there is such a thing as resurrection.

Paul called these men whitewashed walls because they were like my kitchen in Oklahoma, there was a big hole in who they really were. The Sadducees were like whitewashed walls, clean on the outside but inside empty, because they believed in an empty philosophy, and in the end, if there is no afterlife, what's the point?

The Pharisees were like white washed walls too, they had the right philosophy, but their faith was empty, because though they believed in the resurrection, they couldn't find it in themselves to believe in the resurrection, when it happened right in front of them.

Listen, there is an afterlife, the resurrection proves it so. If there is the resurrection, then there must be an afterlife for we do not cease to exist after we die.