

Acts 21:27-22:29

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[0 : 00] Please join me in your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you. I hope it's well read and treasured in your hearts. To the book of Acts chapter 21.

Our text this morning will begin in verse 27 of Acts chapter 21 and go through verse 29 of Acts chapter 22.

That's right, not three verses. We're going to go almost a whole chapter this morning. And this morning's sermon will be a bit different because this morning's text is such a long one. It's setting a stage for really the rest of Luke's second narrative for Paul's arrest and his coming trials, his journey to Rome.

Also, because I'm just not feeling super hot today, here's the plan. As we read the text, I'm going to stop. I'm going to pause and I'm going to make comments. I hope for your benefit.

I hope this will be helpful to you in understanding what's happening to the life of Paul as Christ ministers through him in Jerusalem. And then at the end of that, as I'm making notes through, at the end of that, we will do a brief outline, which will be the following.

[1 : 19] Number one, we'll note the ferocity of the crowd. Number two, the fearlessness of Paul. And number three, the faithfulness of Paul.

So the ferocity of the crowd, the fearlessness of Paul. And number three, the faithfulness of Paul. Before I begin reading, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us.

That it was written for his glory and for our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

I'll begin in verse 27 of chapter 21. When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help!

This is the man who was teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

[2 : 23] For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was stirred up and the people ran together.

They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. Recall that Paul, in order to maintain unity amongst the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, was participating in a custom along with four men.

We spent an expansive amount of time on this last week. Luke's reference to the seven days has to do with that custom, the purification that would have occurred at the end of that custom at the temple.

So we see that Paul is participating in the custom, and Jews from Asia, that is Jews who had rejected the gospel in Ephesus and sought Paul's life there.

Some of these Jews are now in Jerusalem, and they create a commotion by making a presumptive accusation that Paul has taken a Gentile, a non-Jewish person by heritage, in the holy place of the temple.

[3 : 38] The temple had various courts, the Holy of Holies at the center, that only the high priest went into one day a week, called the Day of Atonement. The holy place, which was reserved for Jewish worship, and then the court of the Gentiles, which Gentiles were allowed to be in.

So they presumed, having seen Paul with Trophimus, I think that's how you say his name, that they had taken him in there. And I would suppose they're just looking for accusation to rail against him.

The text says that we've read so far, at once the gates were shut. The temple guard closed the gates to the temple so that the temple would not be defiled by Paul's death.

They have dragged him out in order to kill him. Continue reading in verse 31. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Now the tribune is the commanding officer of the cohort that's there of Roman soldiers that are there in Jerusalem.

[4 : 58] A cohort loosely means a band of soldiers. In this case in Jerusalem, there were a thousand soldiers, 760 foot soldiers and 240 cavalry soldiers.

There's a mention of both soldiers and centurions. So if your curiosity is piqued, the centurion was a professional officer of the Roman army. So also a soldier, but an officer in the Roman army. The tribune was charged with keeping the peace in Jerusalem. Remember, this is an occupying army. And he was meant with all of these Roman soldiers, the cohort of a thousand soldiers, to keep down any insurrections.

So when there was an uprising, just like when Jesus was crucified, they worked to appease the population at any cost. If it meant crucifying our Lord and Savior, this is what they would do. If it meant arresting Paul, this is what they would do. They wanted to keep peace in the place that they were ruling over. So the tribune is not particularly sympathetic toward Paul.

[6 : 09] He's just meaning to keep the crowd in order, which in this case works out to Paul's benefit. Verse 33. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

He would be bound between two soldiers. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another.

And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd.

For the mob of the people followed, crying out, away with him. So Paul is arrested by the commanding officer who assumes that he is guilty of something.

Otherwise, why would the crowd be so furious with him? He has to be guilty of something. However, as he makes inquiry to Paul's crime, the crowd is in such an uproar, and so clearly not on the same page.

[7 : 16] One saying one thing, one saying another. This is mob violence that Paul finds himself in the middle of. But the tribune decides to take Paul to the barracks, which would have been just across the street from the temple where he could question him by torture for a confession.

The crowd at this point is in such a frenzy that Paul has to be carried above the crowd. This is my presumption, but that he's actually carried, lifted up above the crowd for his safety so that he can, in fact, be questioned.

Verse 37. As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, may I say something to you? And he said, do you know Greek?

Are you not the Egyptian then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness? Because Paul speaks in Greek to the tribune, the tribune wrongly assumes that Paul was an Egyptian man that some years earlier led a group, here Luke records, of 4,000 men to the Mount of Olives where he proclaimed that the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command and the Romans would be routed.

So there was a man from Egypt, we just know him as the Egyptian here, makes this bold proclamation that he would command the walls to fall and Rome would be driven out.

[8 : 45] Before that happened, Governor Felix led Roman troops against him, killing much of the insurrection, but the man known as the Egyptian escaped. Paul simply gives the tribune a simple response.

Verse 39, Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.

And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.

And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. I imagine they became even more quiet because of the mass confusion about who he was.

Upon hearing him speak in Aramaic, I think many of the crowd recognized him as a Jew, which calmed some of their false assumption about him. So with the crowd now quiet, and Paul standing on the steps, he tells of his dramatic conversion.

[10:02] He tells them how he went from Christianity's most violent persecutor to Christianity's greatest missionary. Verse 3.

And he said, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus and Cilicia, brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

I persecuted this way, speaking of Christianity, to the deaf, binding and delivering to prison both men and women as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness.

From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.

And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.

[11:17] Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.

And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight.

And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, The God of our fathers appointed to know his will, to see the righteous one and to hear a voice from his mouth.

For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Now it is worth pointing out at this point and noting that as Paul is telling of his conversion, he is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[12:32] He is weaving his story into the greater narrative of the world and God's redemptive purpose in it as he recounts the words of Ananias, Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

Now I will spare you the Greek work it takes to arrive at the following conclusion, but Ananias' call to rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on your name is more literally translated, and I appreciate ESV, which is the translation I'm using, making it sound poetic, but it's more literally translated, rise, get yourself baptized, and your sins washed away, having called on his name.

That is, Ananias preached the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. He is not suggesting that baptism washes away sin, but that faith in Jesus Christ, calling on the name of Jesus Christ, washes away sin, which leads to the obedience of baptism.

Hear it again. Rise, get yourself baptized, and your sins washed away, having called on his name. So the calling on the name precedes baptism.

Verse 17, When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance, and saw him saying to me, saw Christ saying to Paul, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.

[14:24] And I said, Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.

And he said to me, Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. So Paul recounts Jesus is commissioning him in a trance to carry the gospel to Gentiles, to non-Jewish peoples.

It has always been God's purpose to make himself known throughout the world. In Psalm 86, 9, David writes, All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Many Jews had missed this reality. Many of them were hanging on to their ethnic and national identity as a people who had been invaded and were being ruled by Rome.

They had missed that God intended His glory to go out amongst all peoples. Praise God. I think most, if not all of us, are benefits of that good purpose in the world.

[15:44] So, having missed that reality, the Jews, verse 22, Luke records for us, Up to this word they listened to Him. Then they raised their voices and said, so this is in response to Paul saying, Jesus commissioned me to go to the Gentiles.

they raised their voices and said, halfway through verse 22, away with such a fellow from the earth. He should not be allowed to live.

And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks saying that he should be examined by flogging to find out why they were shouting against him like this.

Jewish prejudice against Gentiles threw them once again into a rage which they expressed by calling again for Paul's death and making expressions of disdain in throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air.

And so, the tribune proceeds with his original plan to torture Paul to find out what he is guilty of. Verse 25, But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?

[17:12] When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen. You see, Roman citizens were exempted from torturous methods of inquiry.

So Paul, with a simple question asked, I think, in the way I read it, makes it known to a centurion that he is a Roman citizen. Is it lawful?

Knowing full well it wasn't. For you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned? Paul's treatment could have cost the tribune his career or possibly even his life.

So the centurion hastens to him and reports Paul's citizenship to the tribune who comes and questions Paul in order to confirm it. Verse 27, So the tribune came and said to him, Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?

And he said, Yes. The tribune answered, I bought this citizenship for a large sum, which likely means that he had bribed his way into becoming a citizen.

[18:26] The law did not allow for such a thing, but likely he paid his way in through illegal bribery. Paul said, But I am a citizen by birth, a legitimate citizen.

Verse 29, So those who are about to examine him, torture him, and ask him questions, withdrew from him, immediately. And the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him, unlawfully bound him.

And this sets us up for the trials that are to come in coming weeks. So, as a reminder, and in brief, at least that's my intention, let's note together the ferocity of the crowd, the fearlessness of Paul, and the faithfulness of Paul.

Number one, the ferocity of the crowd. Now, the way in which this crowd acts should be no surprise to you if you have been a student of the book of Acts along with us.

We have seen in our study together a great number of crowds upset by the teaching of Paul. And we know that many years earlier, it was persecution of Christians in Jerusalem that flung wide the gates for a broad spreading of the gospel.

[19:58] Everywhere we've seen so far in the book of Acts, where the gospel is preached, there is opposition to the gospel. Dovetailing this morning with Paul's telling of his conversion in today's text, we can recall Luke's record following the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, which was overseen by Paul.

We read in Acts 8, verses 1 through 4, And Saul approved of Stephen's execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house.

He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. And verse 4 says, Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Darkened hearts, apart from God's saving grace, want nothing to do with the truth. But rather, as Paul states in Romans 1, verse 18, these people, by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth.

[21 : 21] We find in our day this to be true. There's a great labor made to suppress the truth of God. Here, this crowd called for Paul's death.

This morning, around the world, many Christians meet in secret. Many Christians will be hated, ridiculed, imprisoned, beaten, and killed.

This should not surprise us. If we are faithful witnesses, we will not be exempt from this kind of disdain.

What should surprise us is if we don't experience opposition to the preaching of the gospel. The apostle Peter wrote to Christians experiencing persecution in 1 Peter 4, 12, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

And Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, 12. You're familiar with this if you've been with us in our study of Acts. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

[22 : 39] I know that it will take a different shape in the place that we live, but we will meet with opposition. We will meet disdain. We will be met with ferocity.

Beloved, if we are faithful stewards of the good news that we have partaken of, then the crowds will be ferocious. If the prospect of ferocious crowds is frightful to you, then let the example of Paul serve you in these next moments as we look at number two, the fearlessness of Paul.

Paul was not at all surprised by the ferocity of the crowd. As stated before, he had experienced such opposition almost everywhere that he went. It was becoming an old trick for him.

And he said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, verses 22 and 23, and now behold, I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

He was very aware that something in our term bad would happen to him in Jerusalem. And he seemed so very untroubled by this, believing, I suppose, as he wrote in Romans 8, 18, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[24 : 17] So he goes on in Acts 20, verse 24, to say, but I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul believed that his life only had value in that it ascribed value to Jesus Christ. He said as much in Philippians 1, 21, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And in Acts 21, the last part of verse 13, he said, I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

So Paul is fearless in the face of opposition. He believes that if God is for him, no one can be against him.

He believes that he is filling up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ. And he believes that this is an opportunity to preach the good news of Jesus.

[25 : 33] Beloved, do you seize every opportunity to make Christ known? Do you press forward or do you shrink back?

Are you a faithful ambassador of the gospel? faithfulness Let's be further spurned on by the example of Paul as we consider number three, the faithfulness of Paul.

The faithfulness of Paul. I imagine as Paul is being carried to the barrack that he whispered a prayer that went something like this.

Thank you, Lord, for gathering another crowd to hear the good news of your saving grace. Thank you for allowing me, who once was set against you and your ways, to now be part of your saving work.

Thank you for granting it to me that I should suffer for Christ's sake. Thank you for using the wickedness of Rome to carry me bound up a flight of steps where I might address the crowd.

[26 : 40] Thank you for your goodness to me. Now, oh God, work mightily by the hands of your servant for the sake of your name. Amen.

And then Paul, with kindness and respect, makes a request of the tribune. And I love this, especially in our day.

The most popular thing seems to be to rage against authority. Says simply, may I say something to you?

And then he goes on, I am a Jew from Tarsus and Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. And then to the Jewish crowd, he says, I am a Jew born in Tarsus and Cilicia, brought up in the city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers.

He stands in solidarity with them, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. Can you believe that he commends them for being so fired up against him?

[27 : 52] He says, I also am zealous as you are zealous. Paul respects both the office of the tribune and the zeal of the Jews and his desire to see them turn from their ways to rightly worship Christ.

He's not saying that their action is warranted, but he's rewarding the motivation behind it, proper worship of God and he wants to see them worship God as they should by Christ.

Then he tells them a story. In telling his story to this Jewish audience, Paul wants them to see God's sovereign working in his conversion.

Paul wanted his accusers to know as he would write to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1 15 and 16. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience and his example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

[29 : 09] I would have liked to have known what else Paul intended to say. The God in his sovereignty and most likely I would suggest as a judgment against the people.

They cut him off and he's carried into the barracks and his speech stops there. But feel the faithfulness of Paul in the midst of that kind of situation.

If all of you suddenly turned on me and were yelling at me, I would likely walk out that door. Or jump out that window. Paul waves his hand and he hushes an audience and he speaks to them in their language in the way that he had hoped would bring about conversion, bring about faith.

We get no record of maybe somebody in that crowd reached out to the Jerusalem elders, sought out more about this way that they were so set against.

we don't know, but we can observe in Paul his fearlessness and his faithfulness. Beloved, if you are in Christ, you have a similar story to tell.

[30 : 23] The juxtaposition of your old self to your new self may not be as stark as Paul's conversion story, but each and every person who was once dead and has now been made alive by God's mercy to us in Christ has an equally miraculous story to tell.

In the face of ferocity against the gospel of Jesus Christ, are you fearless, trusting in God's sovereign purpose for your good and his glory?

Are you faithful in the telling of your story? Let's pray together. Amen.