

Acts #34
Paul's Arrest In Jerusalem
Acts 21:1-30

After the uproar in Ephesus, Paul moved to Macedonia, where he had purposed to go before the uprising in Ephesus had begun. From there he went to Greece, then to Troas, and on to Miletus, Tyre, and on to Caesarea.

The apostle faced misunderstanding from many of the believing Jews at Jerusalem as well as opposition and hatred from the unbelieving Jews. A bold and open witness for Christ will often provoke controversy. Some people will usually accuse the one who is serious about living for the Lord of being fanatic and of having a “holier-than-thou” attitude. **The unregenerate, especially, may do everything in their power to silence, or at least make ineffective a true witness for Christ.** Even though, a Christian's first concern must remain to do God's will for their lives.

Look with me as we study Acts 21 beginning in verses 10-16, “And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's belt, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason (na-son) of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.”

The main person in this incident is a prophet by the name of Agabus. Verse 8 tells us that once at Caesarea Paul stayed at the home of “Philip the evangelist.” It was there that Agabus the prophet, who had come from Jerusalem, further warned him, dramatically. Agabus knew the intense feelings of the Jews at Jerusalem.

Therefore, Agabus, through the Spirit, foretold what would happen to the apostle when he arrived in Jerusalem. Agabus demonstrated his prophecy in a visual way, “And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's belt, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

The Orientals wore loosely flowing robes as outer garments for warmth and appearance. Underneath this outer garment was a close-fitting, shirt-like garment. This outer garment was kept tightly around the body when they ran or worked by a belt or sash (called “girdle” in the King James Version). Agabus took Paul’s “belt” and bound his own hands and feet with it to symbolize that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind Paul.

Yet, Paul prompted by the Holy Spirit, knew that he could not need the warning. To understand such determination, we must remember that Paul was seeking to preserve the unity of the Christian world and to still the various Jewish factions within the mother church at Jerusalem.

It was then that Paul’s companions try to persuade him to change his plans. Luke, the writer of Acts, included himself in the attempt to keep Paul away from Jerusalem, as seen in verse 12, “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.” The prophecy of Agabus, and the way that it was presented, impressed Luke and the other believers who heard and saw it.

Luke, Philip, those of Philip’s household, and the brethren all tried to convince Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem. The Bible says they “besought him not to go.” The wording in the Greek here reveals exhortation and/or passionate persuasion, even to the point of weeping. In other words, they were very serious about their concerns, but so was Paul about his, as seen in verse 13, “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” **Paul could not allow the feeling of others to distract him from doing what he was convinced was the will of God for his life.** Obedience to God just might cause a measure of division.

Look at the response of Paul’s companions: (1) They stopped trying to convince him not to go, as seen in the words, “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased...” (2) They were committed to doing the will of God, whether or not it agreed with their own wills, as seen in the words, “The will of the Lord be done.” (3) They packed their baggage and went with Paul, as seen in the words in verse 15, “And after those days we took up our luggage and went up to Jerusalem.” **Ladies and gentlemen, once the will of God has been settled, the choice must be made to be obedient.** You would be amazed at how many people who are out of God’s will because they were not willing to leave home, or to leave their job, or to leave their family, or whatever, to follow God.

Look at verses 17-20, “And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had greeted them, he declared particularly

what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law.”

When the caravan arrived in Jerusalem, the third missionary journey of Paul was completed. The believers in Jerusalem received the group gladly.

It must have been a happy reunion for all that day. After all, Paul had been gone for a long time, and had visited many distant places. There were many experiences to recall for the brethren, who had been so vitally interested in the whole missionary venture. The missionaries were now home safe.

After a night of rejoicing and rest, the next day after his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul met with James and the elders of the church. Those present at the meeting listened attentively to Paul’s account of his work among the Gentiles. When he was through, they gave God the glory for what had happened.

The praise did not last very long, for soon the jealous Jews could hide their feelings no longer, as seen in verses 20-21, “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous of the law; and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought no to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.”

There are some things that never change when it comes to human nature – selfishness. These religious folks were so caught up in their “customs” (the Greek word used here is “ethos” (eth-os) which means “manner, habit, or tradition”). These people did not care about what God was doing among the Gentiles; they were only concerned about their traditions, the way they had always been taught in the past! **They did not see Paul as a great missionary for the cause of Christ; they saw him as someone who had gone against their religious customs.** And the result was that, instead of changing their way of thinking, they would just destroy Paul. My God, that has not changed through the years!

Therefore, seeking to avoid a riot and a division in the church at Jerusalem, James and the elders presented a plan to Paul, as seen in verses 23-24, “Do, therefore, this that we say to thee: we have four men who have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and pay their expenses, that they may shave their heads, and all may know that those things, of which they were informed concerning thee, are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.”

It was a bad bargain, but Paul fell into it. He had already written Romans and Galatians, proving that no man could be saved by the Law or sanctified by keeping the Law, and showing that the Christian is free from the Law of Moses. Now he is denying all of this inspired truth by a “religious bargain” that was aimed at compromising with the Jews.

In spite of all that he had done, Paul was arrested in the temple on a set of false charges. Folks, listen to me tonight, you can never be successful in the cause of Christ by compromising God’s will and Word with a bunch of folks who are more religious than they are saved. **Why? Because the more you give, the more they will take, until you become the “scape-goat” for their scheme.** Listen, get in God’s will and go forward for His glory. And those that want to go with you will, and those that want to stand around and fight, leave them where they are!

Look at verses 27- 30, “And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an, Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple, and at once the doors were shut.”

Some of the foreign Jews, who knew Paul, had seen him in the area of the temple with Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile; and looking for something to accuse him of, they immediately said that Paul had brought his Gentile friend with him into the temple, which was strictly forbidden by Jewish law. The assumption was a lie, but then Satan is a liar and the father of lies. The very thing James was trying to prevent happened just the same. A riot started.

While we do not want to be guilty of judging the great Apostle, we must admit that it appears he made two very serious mistakes: (1) he compromised his beliefs with the Jews, and (2) to be accepted, he sought to water down his doctrine of salvation by grace. We understand, of course, that Paul’s heart was so full of love and concern for his brethren in the flesh that he would have paid any price to have given them the Gospel; but from the very beginning God had warned him that the Jews would not be moved.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are not doing your lost friends and family any favors when you compromise your convictions seeking to get them involved in the church. It is my conviction that the world is looking for something that is real and life changing. And the more you compromise your

convictions, seeking to reach them, the more confusion you are causing in the kingdom of God, until pretty soon they conclude that you too are a fake when it comes to Christianity.

The confusion in churches today between Law and Grace is appalling.

Candles, incense, robes, ornate cathedrals, altars, sacrifices, and priests – all these things belong to the Old Covenant and have been abolished by the death of Christ. This false doctrine of law and grace has produced a salvation that is attained through faith plus something, when the Word of God makes it very clear that salvation come by faith plus nothing!

May we never mingle Law and Grace; may we never compromise the truth of the Gospel and its liberty.

If you are not saved, why not come tonight?