

- **Continuing in Acts Chapter 21- Acts is history of the first generation of the church- as communities of Christ followers spread across the Mediterranean world.**
- **TODAY's story can be easily passed over, as it seems to be more of a recounting of events we've already seen multiple times. But there are some hidden gems in this story that speak powerfully to the radical message of the Gospel- that In Christ, we may enter a NEW WAY of being in relationship with God – a way NOT based on religious systems & structures, or our ability to keep all the religious rules, moral or otherwise.**
- **Rather, we see the great hope of God's Grace FULLY changing who we are, and one day at a time bringing change and transformation into how we then live.**
- **At its core, today's text is a story of how Christ breaks down walls- the walls separating us from Him, and the barriers we erect separating us from each other.**
- **ALL in the context of yet ANOTHER riot.**
- **THIS IS WHERE WE ARE GOING.. but first, PE, TO, Sunday March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, thanks....**

† Last week: A sincere, yet failed, attempt to bring unity

- **Paul arrived in Jerusalem to find a city primed for explosion. It is a time of political and social instability, with the Jewish population harboring increasing resentment and hostility toward the Roman occupiers, and gentiles in general.**
- **IN THIS CONTEXT, Paul's friends urge him to undertake a religious purification ritual, to dispel the rumor circulating in the city that Paul had sold out his Jewish heritage and had become an enemy of the mosaic law, their traditions, and the Hebrew People themselves.**
- **SO, Paul does this. Out of a desire to bring unity into the city, and out of his love for his Jewish brothers and sisters, he participates in a temple ritual he otherwise would not have done. HERE WE SAW what we called...**

*One of the great non-conformist ethics of a Christ-formed life. The willingness- at times- to conform to something we otherwise would not, for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel.*

- **HUGE principle of a Christian life. But here's the thing. This attempt at diffusing the tension surround Paul's presence FAILS. Spectacularly. This is where we pick up the story, where once again, Paul faces...**

† False allegations

**Acts 21:27-29** *When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him,<sup>28</sup> shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place."<sup>29</sup> (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)*

- **OK. Paul is at temple, likely to offer a sacrifice related to the completion of his multi-day ritual.**
- **THE TEMPLE is a series of courtyards, with each progressive space becoming more holy and more restrictive.**
  - **Outside the temple wall was a large space of the rest of the temple mount- this was the court of the gentiles, and would have been filled with people, commerce- very much the city center.**

- *Inside the temple walls proper, you first had the court of the women- Jewish women- no gentile could enter into this space.*
- *From here, you would enter the 'court of the Israelites', only accessible to Jewish men. This too, would be a place of great activity.*
- *Next is the inner sanctuary, only accessible to the priests, and inside this was the Holy Of Holies, which was the presence of God- the ark of the covenant- which only the high priest could enter once a year.*
- *Paul was likely recognized inside the 'courtyard of the Israelites'. The Jews of Asia most likely were from Ephesus, where Paul had taught for over two years- AND the location of our last big riot.*
- *You can imagine the scene. Paul is minding his own business when these men see him... HEY- THAT'S THE ONE! They stir up crowd, accusing Paul of opposing the law, the Jewish people, and the Temple itself.*
- *But then they add something new- Paul is accused of desecrating the Temple holy space- where they were- by bringing in a gentile. To do this would have been unthinkable- a sacred violation of the highest order.*
- *NOW- Paul had not done this. Trophimus WAS a gentile, from Ephesus, and part of Paul's travel party as they had made their way back to Israel. Trophimus had been with Paul in the city, but not in the temple.*
- *In any case, this was enough pretext for the accusation, and the crowd explodes against him.*

**Acts 21:30-32** *The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut.*

- *Have to make this observation... they are about to try and kill Paul... why did they drag him out of the temple?*
- *If they had stayed in the inner courtyard, they wouldn't have been interrupted by the Roman guard, and would have succeeded in killing Paul.*
- *But that wouldn't have been right. They were in a sacred, holy space, and such action would not have been appropriate there... so, before they committed mob-violence and murder, they wanted to get a little further away from the presence of God.*
- *Problem is, uh... even outside the temple...*

† Uh... God can still see you

- *This is one of the problems of the idea of 'sacred space'- or that there are places where God is more present than others.*
- *On one hand, we think we are less accountable for our behavior away from the 'house of God', or on the other, we lack the presence of God when we need him.*
- *THE death and resurrection of Jesus forever did away the need to be in a sacred space- or go through the chain of authority of priests or sacred people- in order to be in relationship with God.*
- *NOW, in the New Covenant, ANYONE, ANYWHERE, may enter into the presence of God by FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, and the temple of God is OUR HEART AND MIND. He is with us, and there is no longer anything standing between us and God.*
- *This beautiful chapel is often the location of sacred activity, but it is not inherently a sacred space. We honor God through its use, but God is not contained, nor constrained, by any physical location.*

- **SO, they drag Paul out of the temple, into the courtyard of the gentiles, where the activity is fully accessible to the Roman guard...**

<sup>31</sup> While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. <sup>32</sup> He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

- **Not for the last time, Paul's life is preserved by the Roman authorities. But he isn't going to be released- rather, in the eyes of the guards, Paul is presumed guilty for inciting the riot.**

#### ✠ Presumed guilty

**Acts 21:33-40** The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup> Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. <sup>35</sup> When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. <sup>36</sup> The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!" <sup>37</sup> As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?" "Do you speak Greek?" he replied. <sup>38</sup> "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

- **There is historical evidence the event the guard mentions here did happen- but this is not Paul. The guard was confused because he didn't expect Paul to speak Greek.**
- **What follows is interesting. Paul consistently humbly respects and operates within the bounds of Roman authority. But he is perfectly willing – at times- to bring up his credentials, education, and status as a Roman citizen- in order to preserve his ability to be a witness to the Gospel.**

<sup>39</sup> Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

<sup>40</sup> After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: **Acts 22:1-5** "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

<sup>2</sup> When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

- **Aramaic was an ancient language related to Hebrew, and was the common 'street' language spoken by most Jews living in Jerusalem at this time.**
- **By speaking in Aramaic, Paul was not only increasing his chances of being understood by the crowd... he was saying "I'm one of you"**
- **And so, CHAP 22, Paul tells his story- his testimony- focusing on what happened years before on the road to Damascus. REMEMBER- Paul greatly desires for there to be unity in the city, AND for his own people to hear him- but as he speaks, he purposefully builds a case this crowd does NOT want to hear.**
- **His first point is- I AM ONE OF YOU...**

#### ✠ Paul's testimony

- **I am one of you- I've been where you are now**

Then Paul said: <sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

<sup>4</sup> I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

- **POINT: Just as you want to shut down this message about Jesus, so did I. I GET WHY YOU ARE UPSET.**
- **But as he continues, Paul describes how Jesus went from being his mortal enemy, to being LORD.**

- **Jesus = Lord**

**Acts 22:6-11** “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. <sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ <sup>8</sup> “‘Who are you, **Lord?**’ I asked. “ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. <sup>9</sup> My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> “‘What shall I do, **Lord?**’ I asked. “ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ <sup>11</sup> My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

- **Paul makes sure the crowd knows this wasn’t just some vision he had in his head- this was a physical event, seen and heard by the people with him.**
- **As he continues, Paul now makes the point that the God at work here is also THE GOD OF THEIR ANCESTORS- the God whose temple the crowd was claiming to protect.**

- **The God of our ancestors**

**Acts 22:12-16** “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. <sup>13</sup> He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. <sup>14</sup> “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One (**one who is Just**) and to hear words from his mouth. <sup>15</sup> You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

- **In the Greek, it is faith in the name of Jesus that would set Paul free from sin- and baptism was the outward confession of this. The NASB better translates this as “Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.” We’ve talked about this in-depth before, but the physical act of baptism has no power in and of itself- it is faith in Christ that brings forgiveness and new life- which Baptism illustrates.**
- **But the crowd wasn’t concerned about the meaning of baptism. They had just heard Paul say that deliverance from sin came through FAITH IN CHRIST- NOT through the sacrificial system of the temple.**
- **It’s pretty amazing the crowd didn’t erupt at that... but there was one last straw, which Paul promptly breaks...**

- **The last straw**

**Acts 22:17-21** “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’ <sup>19</sup> “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

- **PAUSE- think about everything Paul has just implicitly and explicitly said.**
  - **The Jesus you killed, and his message that I myself fought against- it is the truth. Jesus, in fact, is Lord.**

- *Your God, whose temple you are trying to protect, is the same God at work through Jesus, and the same God who sent me to bring this message*
- *This same God told me that you- his people- would reject his message, just as you rejected Jesus and killed Stephen.*
- *And NOW Paul breaks the last straw... because you have rejected what God has done, God has chosen to send this message to someone else...*

<sup>21</sup> *“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”*

- *This doesn’t go over well. But before we see the crowds reaction, we need to see what...*

- **What Paul *didn’t* say**

- *The crowd had accused Paul of desecrating the temple by bringing a gentile into the inner court- Something he had NOT DONE.*
- *But in making his defense, Paul doesn’t even mention this. If he had, this MAY have gotten him off the hook, but Paul’s greatest interest is not his own safety. His desire was to be faithful to God. To the work God had called him to do- to tell story God had called him to tell.*
- *As the crowd erupts, we see...*

- † **Jerusalem’s final rejection...of the Gospel!**

- *The Gospel- the NEW WAY to be forgiven, to be made right with God, and receive freedom of the NEW LIFE made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.*
- *This message was hard enough for them to receive, but when Paul said God’s plan was now extended to the gentiles- that the temple was no longer necessary- this was intolerable.*

**Acts 22:22** *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”*

- *When we continue the story next week, we’ll see that not for the protection of the Roman guards, Paul almost certainly would have been killed.*
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- *Okay... want to go back to this main accusation against Paul, and something it reveals... 21:28...*

*“he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.”*

- *The holy place was the inner courtyard, just two gates removed from the Holy of Holies, the presence of God.*
- *This is just part of the larger temple and sacrificial system that was given to the Hebrew people, as a gift from God- because it was- initially all the way back in OT book of Exodus.*
- *When we look back at this, for most of us- including me- it all seems very strange and foreign. But the temple and sacrificial system represented God making a way for people to receive forgiveness, freedom from the crushing burden of sin and the brokenness sin visits upon society- and to move from being UNCLEAN to being CLEAN- before God, and before each other.*

- *But over the centuries God's provision of the temple became distorted, and rather than being a means of restoration to God, it became a multi-leveled wall separating people from God, with the priestly class acting as the gatekeepers.*
- *Likewise, the concept of clean and unclean- while at least ritually still referring to the relationship between people and God - became a dividing line between people and other people. The clean and the unclean. The spiritually deserving and the spiritually undeserving. The people who were worthy to draw near to God's presence in the temple, and those who were not.*
- *And here's the tragedy. We're ALL the unclean. Let's be clear- this isn't saying we lack value. Every human life is precious. In his book 'The weight of Glory', CS Lewis put it this way...*

*There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations— these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit...*

- *In our humanity, we are precious eternal creations of God- every last one of us... but in the human condition, we all are unclean. We are broken, and any honest assessment of history and the human condition will bear this out. We are separated from God, leading to separation from each other. As Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Ephesus, "We were separate from Christ... without hope and without God in the world."*
- *And there's the key! THE TEMPLE AND SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM COULD NEVER overcome this. God didn't intend for it to.*
- *Likewise, today, - as much as we may try- no amount of religious activity or learning, no religious system or religious people, nor any of our moral efforts and arguments have the power to free us from our brokenness and bondage to the human condition, which the Bible calls SIN.*
- *In contrast stands the radical message of the Gospel.*
- *As Paul goes on to say in Ephesians chapter 2-*
- *NOW - in Christ Jesus - you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
- *THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE- Be we Jew or Gentile. Male and female. Slave and free. Democrat and republican. Gay and straight. Rich and poor. White, black, Hispanic, Asian. Muslim and Christian, secular and religious, or any other barrier we could invent- it doesn't matter....*
- *ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, AND ALL are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*
- *Friends- IN CHRIST there is no longer any clean and unclean! The dividing walls of hostility have been destroyed, and the holy of holies is the heart that surrenders and receives the message and goodness of God's Grace in Jesus Christ.*
- *This is something the temple- nor the many temple equivalents we create in our own world- could ever do.*

† What the temple could never do

- *I'll end with this passage from the book of Hebrews.*
- *If even a small part of you believes you will never measure up- that somehow you are damaged goods, not deserving of wholeness, love, acceptance- and it's so hard to see a way you'll ever achieve this on your own.... I have some good news.*
- *YOU CAN'T achieve this. But you may receive it, and God wants to give it.*

**Hebrews 10:1, 11-14** *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.*

<sup>11</sup> *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (Your efforts to be good enough will never be enough)*

<sup>12</sup> *But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,* <sup>13</sup> *and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.*

<sup>14</sup> *For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

- *This is the message Paul proclaimed, and the Gospel still proclaims today.*
- *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. What does this salvation mean? Verse 14... YOU ARE MADE PERFECT FOREVER.*
- *You are forever forgiven. The dividing wall of your sin and brokenness before God is DONE. GONE. FOREVER.*
- *Not only that, the NT proclaims- almost on every page- that you are now a new creation, and the NEW YOU is nothing less than the presence of Christ in you.*
- *Your past is redeemed, your future is assured, you are set free from the shame of guilt and the bondage of pride...*
- *and RIGHT NOW, each day is the process of you entering in your EXPERIENCE- in your mind, your will, your emotions- how you think, feel, and act...*
- *The ACTIVE REST of becoming who you ALREADY ARE.*