

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

Paul Arrested In Jerusalem

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Acts 21:27-22:30

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 21:27; that’s on page 931 in your pew Bibles. We’re going to jump back into our journey through the Book of Acts and we’ll be looking today at the story of the Apostle Paul being arrested in Jerusalem. It is a LONG TEXT but it represents a critical turning point in the book. It is a story about division, persecution and Providence – topics that I imagine we will need to reacquaint ourselves with over the coming years and decades.

Hopefully you have your Bibles open in front of you as we begin to read God’s holy and inspired Word together. I will start to read at verse 27 of chapter 21 and I will carry on all the way through to verse 30 of chapter 22. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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, 28 crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is 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.” 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

30 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. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 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. 33 Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. 34 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. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!" 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? 38 Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

39 Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." 40 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:

1 "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but 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. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, 5 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.

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 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.' 11 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.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 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. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for

him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

17 “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ 19 And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 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.’ 21 And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.” 23 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 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.

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?” 26 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.” 27 So the tribune came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.” 28 The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I am a citizen by birth.” 29 So those who were about to examine him 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.

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. (Acts 21:27-22:30 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Whooooo! Take a deep breath – that was a very long passage to read, and that in itself is somewhat unusual. Luke is generally very selective as an author – and he doesn’t tend to include any extraneous or repeated details. For example, Paul says in 2 Corinthians that he was beaten

with rods THREE TIMES – but Luke only tells us about one time, because once you’ve heard about it happening in Philippi in Acts 16 you don’t need to hear about it happening anywhere else – so we know that Paul went through MORE adventures and further trials than Luke has included here, because editorial decisions have been made.

Fair enough.

But they haven’t been here. Here we are getting “the Director’s Cut”. We’re cutting a very full, very detailed narrative that functions as a sort of hinge in the story Luke is telling. This is the story that basically ENDS Paul’s missionary travels and BEGINS his journey through the civil court system that will terminate with him awaiting an audience before Caesar in the City of Rome. So Luke gives us the uncut version and in it I think we can identify three very important themes.

Three Important Themes:

First of all, this story shows us WHY the Jewish people so resented the early Christian movement.

1. It shows us why the Jewish people resented the early Christian movement

That was a major apologetic issue in the first several generations of church history. The Apostle Paul will deal with this question at length in his Epistle to the Romans – because Roman people were asking: what is it about Christianity that caused it to be rejected by the very people from which it sprang? That question had to be addressed and here we see Luke beginning to provide an answer. Look again at Acts 22:21-22. Paul is mid-testimony here; he says:

he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”
22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said,
“Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”
(Acts 22:21-22 ESV)

So we don't even know what kind of sermon Paul intended to preach here, because he couldn't even make it out of his introduction. As soon as said that he had been given a commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles the crowd immediately lost its collective mind!

Away with this fellow!!! He should not be allowed to live!!!

What in the world is going on there? You'd think they'd be happy to get rid of him. "By all means, go to the nations! Here's a first class ticket. Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

But no – as soon as Paul introduced this global perspective, they lost their minds – why is that?

Well, if you are a Bible reader you know that the Jewish people never did embrace their calling to be a light to the nations. In the Old Testament the plan was for Israel to be **AMONG** the nations, **FOR** the nations. God said that to the people as he constituted them into a nation at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:

“you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6 ESV)

Notice there that he called them to be a Kingdom **OF** priests, not just a kingdom **WITH** priests. The whole **NATION** was supposed to be a priesthood unto God! Well, what does a priest do? A priest speaks to God on behalf of people and to people on behalf of God! That was the **MISSION!** They were supposed to **SHINE** – that's the holy nation part – and they were supposed to **SPEAK** – that's the Kingdom of Priests part – but they weren't doing **ANY OF THAT.**

They didn't want to work for God – they wanted God to work for them! They wanted God to be their **SECRET WEAPON AGAINST THE NATIONS!** We see that time and time again, don't we, in the Old Testament. We think of the time, for example, when the people had **FALLEN FAR AWAY** from God in the time of Eli. The worship was corrupt, the sanctuary had become a place where pilgrims were robbed and women were sexually assaulted – it was an absolute mess! The people were completely apostate! But then, the Philistines started threatening them, so what did they do? They marched out to face them carrying the **ARK OF GOD!** They thought they had trapped the God of the universe in a box! They thought they could **WIELD GOD** as a weapon – and of course, they found out the hard way that that's not how it goes.

God abandoned the Israelites to the Philistines and there was a terrible slaughter. 30,000 Israelites died. It was the worst tragedy in the Old Testament prior to their exile to Babylon in the 6th century BC.

Israel has NEVER had the right to ASSUME upon the favour and protection of God merely on the basis of some kind of nominal relationship.

Think of how many stories there are in the OT making that point. If God was a secret weapon that Israel could control – if he was a giant ogre on a chain that they could trot out whenever they wanted to, then why did they lose to the Philistines? Why did they lose to Assyria? Why did they lose to Babylon? Why did they lose to Rome?

Because that's not who God is.

God is not a magic power you keep locked away in a secret box. God is not a dog on the end of your covenant chain. The entire storyline of the OT seems to be saying that Israel has misunderstood the nature of this relationship. They have not understood who God is and they have not embraced who God had created and called them to be.

They had no interest in being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and so here is Paul saying: “what you have dropped, we, the people of Jesus are picking up. By the grace of God we are now a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation. And through the power of the Spirit of God we are going to make disciples for God from the peoples of every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.”

And of course, the Jewish people were not interested in hearing that, at least, not the Jews in Jerusalem on that day. They liked being “The Chosen People” – and they didn't want to hear that the covenant community was being reconstituted such that Jews and Gentiles would now sit side by side.

They understood the implications of the Gospel Paul was preaching. They understood that they could still be IN but that in the new system they would lose their special status. They would be

EQUAL partners only; no special status. Remember, this riot was starting by Jews from Asia – the capital city of which was Ephesus – where Paul preached this Gospel for 2 years. They’d heard this before. They’d heard Paul say:

“For through him **we both** have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:18-20 ESV)

They had heard Paul inviting Gentiles IN so as to enjoy equal covenant status WITH THEM!!

According to Paul, God was building a WHOLE NEW HOUSE on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Christ Jesus as Cornerstone. Jew and Gentile STONES were going to be added to this house, sitting side by side. Like EQUALS!

Now, of course, we Gentiles hear that as VERY GOOD NEWS INDEED – but there were a great many Jews in Paul’s day who were not nearly so excited. They did not want the doors of the covenant community to be thrown wide open to the nations, so they cut off Paul’s sermon and they might have cut off Paul’s head if not for the intervention of the Roman Tribune – which takes us to the second important theme in this story. Luke has preserved this story in all of its voluminous detail, in part, because it so aptly illustrates the correct use of the civil law in the course of Christian mission.

2. It illustrates the correct use of the civil law in the course of Christian mission

We caught a glimpse of this back in Acts 16 when the Apostle Paul was wrongly imprisoned and illegally punished without a proper trial. As a Roman citizen that should never have happened and so he refuses to go quietly into the night. He demands a review of the entire proceeding because he wants it known that the conduct of the magistrates in that situation was illegal – and they acknowledge that and they apologize publicly and that creates some operating space for the Christian church in the city. So that was very wise of the Apostle Paul – and we see him doing much the same thing here.

And that is important for us to see.

Christians need to understand that it is not wrong to make wise and appropriate use of the law.

It is not wrong to say to the person who is arresting you: “Is it LAWFUL for you to be doing what you are doing?”

It is not wrong to say to the court that has levied a significant fine: “Is this fine proportionate to the punishment or is there an element of malice or animus in your judgment?”

It is not wrong for you to ask the courts to review the legality of the protocols that were enforced during a recent medical emergency.

It is not wrong for you to petition the government to review their recent legislation placing limits on what pastors and parents can say to children who come to them for counsel and care.

And it is not wrong for you to ask the courts to review your recent firing for refusing to wear the pink T-shirt or to help build the company float for the upcoming parade.

Luke wants us to know that while we must show all proper honour and respect – we can ask QUESTIONS and we can take SHELTER behind the SHIELD of the LAW.

There is nothing wrong with keeping the wedge of the LAW underneath the door that the devil is trying to slam in our face.

Brothers and sisters, we need to know what we can and cannot do – we need to know what is fair and foul as we begin to come under assault in this culture. We didn’t have to think about any of this stuff in generations past in this country, but we need to think about it now, and so we’re thankful that Luke has preserved this story that shows the Apostle Paul threading this needle to precisely.

And then finally; and I think very obviously as we consider the end of the story, it would seem that Luke has preserved this narrative because it reminds us that, in the Providence of God, persecution often serves to extend the reach and impact of the Gospel.

3. It reminds us that persecution often extends the reach of the Gospel

Look at verse 30, the very last verse in the story; it says:

But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. (Acts 22:30 ESV)

Think about that for just a moment.

Paul came to Jerusalem with a completely different agenda. He came, as you may recall, to deliver the Jerusalem Offering. Paul had been collecting relief funds from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to support the benevolence ministry that was being run out of the church in Jerusalem – and he was hopeful that this generous gift would create a deeper sense of unity between Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ.

That's a very noble ambition.

He wasn't planning on stirring up a riot. He wasn't thinking about preaching the Gospel to the Jewish Senate – and he would have had no idea that he was about to enter the last chapter of his life – in which he would write a significant portion of the New Testament and provide a defense of Christianity before governors, kings and eventually the Emperor of Rome.

All of that because of an angry mob in Jerusalem!

What the enemy means for evil, our GOD turns to the good – can you say amen to that?

I hope you can, because unless I'm misreading the signs, we are about to put that principle to the test in this country over the coming years and decades, so we NEED to believe this. We need to

believe that, just like we're seeing in this story, sometimes, things can get HARDER and BETTER simultaneously.

Things definitely got HARDER for the Apostle Paul starting right here in this story. From this point on he lived his life under the shadow of the executioner's sword. From this point on, he was not a free man. His time was not his own. He spent MONTHS sitting in a tiny little cell waiting for his next audience with this governor or that. We visited Caesarea in 2011, the site where Paul was kept in prison for 2 years awaiting the conclusion of his trial.

TWO YEARS!

Can you imagine how hard that was for a guy like the Apostle Paul?

You didn't like living in your basement for two years – but at least you got to go for a walk in the woods, and there were some breaks in there when you go out to dinner or whatever as long as you were socially distanced.

But Paul didn't have any of that.

For two years here and then for another year or two in Rome all he could do was pray for the churches, speak to his guards and visitors and write letters. But in the Providence of God those hard years CHANGED THE WORLD!

Think of all the times when you're reading your Bible that you encounter offhand references to the fact that Paul was in prison when he wrote that letter. Just yesterday in our RMM Bible Reading Plan we were reading Colossians 4. Did you notice what Paul says there? In Colossians 4:3 he says:

“pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison” (Colossians 4:3 ESV)

We tend to skip right by those references but imagine if every Pauline Epistle that was written from prison were taken out of your New Testament. You would have a much thinner Bible, wouldn't you?

That's what I mean by HARDER and BETTER. It was definitely HARDER for Paul, but BOY was it BETTER for us.

Do you have a category for that?

Harder for you personally, but better for us collectively?

Christian teachers out there – do you have a category for that? Are you ready and willing to use your unjust firing and subsequent lawsuit as an opportunity to preach the Gospel before the lords and leaders of this land?

Christian doctors, do you have a category for that? Are you ready and willing to use your impending court proceedings to speak winsomely and courageously in defense of the dignity and worth of every human life?

Because that's coming. It is coming for all of us – teachers, doctors and pastors first and then parents, grandparents and employees after that. We all need to prepare ourselves for the experience of persecution – with the expectation that it will be used by God to extend the reach and deepen the impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this country.

Jesus told us to think in these categories. He told us:

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:11-13 ESV)

That's a pretty bracing forecast, isn't it?

Some of you are going to be arrested, but the Holy Spirit is going to help you take advantage of that opportunity when it comes.

You are going to be hated and even betrayed by your family members. Brother will deliver brother over to death, the father his child, children are going to rise up against their parents. I'm not sure I could have even imagined that 20 years ago. But I have no problem imagining it now.

It's going to get HARDER, friends– but it's also going to get BETTER. The opportunities are going to get BIGGER and the hearts of our friends and loved ones are going to get SOFTER as they see how we suffer and as their culture continues to decline and disintegrate all around them.

So there is absolutely no reason for us to despair – and no reason either for us to be anxious. When the opportunity comes, words will be given to you in that hour. When you are hated and betrayed by those you love, the Lord will be present with you through his Spirit. When it seems like the devil is getting the upper hand, just you wait and see how the Lord will work all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose – thanks be to God!

Let me pray for us.