

**Acts 21: 15-36; “Paul’s Successes & Troubles”, Sermon # 80 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on August 28th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.**

I want to speak to you at this hour about the trouble that Paul had at Jerusalem, for it was this that would lead to the successful fulfillment of the commission that Christ had given to Ananias to give to him, after he had been converted on the road to Damascus. You will remember that Paul, at the time of his conversion, was blinded by the light of Christ and could not see for three days. It was only when Ananias came to him and laid his hands on him that he received his sight. And then he was baptized. And then, no doubt, Ananias told him that he was a chosen instrument of the Lord’s, to bear His name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. And he told him that God would show him how much he would have to suffer for His name’s sake.

Paul’s entrance upon this ministry of suffering in relation to the truth which had been revealed to him, begins here. It was not as though he had not suffered or been persecuted before, but we need to understand that Paul was being led by the Holy Spirit into the greater and more entire fulfillment of his ministry through the troubles which he encountered in Jerusalem. And we will follow him through these situations of opposition and difficulty to the end of the book of Acts. I want you to understand that the Lord the Holy Spirit was with Paul. I want you to see that God and Christ had ordained these things of suffering, difficulty, and opposition, so that Paul would have greater opportunity and greater success in preaching Christ.

This leads me to say, in relation to those who preach the word, that oftentimes, along with the successes of their gospel preaching, will come some troubles and difficulties. But these things have been ordained by God to be the means of the greater and more complete fulfillment of God’s plan for them. This is a principle of truth which each of us needs to take notice of, not only in order that you might support and encourage the ministry of your own pastor, but that you might fulfill your own personal ministry which the Lord has given to you, according to the gift that He has given you, and the purpose that He has for your particular life as a Christian.

So 1st of all – I want to show you that it was because Paul faithfully preached Christ and the gospel of grace that He saw great success. 2nd – It was because Paul was faithful to submit to the counsel of James and other godly men, that he was attacked by ungodly religious men. And 3rd – It was because Paul’s ministry was valuable to Christ, that God protected him by bringing him into the custody of the commander of the Roman garrison. In relating these things I want to show you how the sovereignty of God was at work by the power of the Holy Spirit to help Paul in fulfilling his ministry. He will do the same for you and I as well.

1st – It was because Paul faithfully preached Christ and the gospel of grace that He saw great success in his ministry.

Verses 17-19 say – “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.” “On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.” “When he had greeted them, he told in detail things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Now when I used the word “success” in giving you this first point, I want you to see what success was, according to Paul in relation to his personal ministry. According to what Paul related to James and the elders of the church there in Jerusalem, it was his being able to tell in detail the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Let us always remember, my brethren, that success for a Christian is your being able to know that God is doing something great and powerful in the hearts and lives of the people whom you are ministering the gospel, and the word of God, to. They should not be impressed with you, so

much as they should be impressed by the Christ whom you preach, and the grace that He gives to unworthy sinners like ourselves. Let's think together now, about what we talk about. Do you talk about what Christ is doing in your life? Do you speak to people around you about the greatness of the love of Christ, and the power of Christ in His having saved you from your sins? Do you speak of His power to change your heart so that you sin less and less and you do righteousness more and more?

Do you speak about how it has been His power that has saved you from yourself and your sins? Do you speak about the bad habits of sin that He has helped you to repent of, and to forsake? Perhaps it was bad thoughts about God. Perhaps you became convinced by the Spirit to leave the false sacramental religion that you used to hold to. He helped you to leave that, and to come to a good Bible believing church. He has helped you to live by faith and not by sight. He has helped you to see that the best of your works and efforts cannot win God's favor. He has helped you to see that repentance is a duty that you must engage in.

Perhaps He has helped you to stop swearing. You used to be a person whose mouth was seasoned with trash. Now you think before you speak and you consider the words that come out of your mouth. Perhaps He showed you the value of keeping the Sabbath Day, the Lord's Day, holy. You used to think that there was something more important for you to be doing on Sunday, rather than going to church. Now you are thankful to be here and to worship the Lord with others of like precious faith. Perhaps He has given you the grace not to be angry and controlling toward people around you. You once wanted to force people to your own perspective and view of things. Now you have become a thoughtful, gentle person, who considers how to win others to the truth.

Perhaps He opened your eyes to the truth that there is such a thing as sexual sin, adultery and fornication, and homosexuality. By God's illumining your mind you came to understand that He could not accept you or bless you spiritually in an eternal sense until you repented of those sins. You began striving for purity of heart. Perhaps the Lord showed you that covetousness and greed are a form of idolatry and now you do not go any longer to the casino to gamble away your money. That was something that God Himself showed you, through His working by His Spirit, so that you would stop doing it.

Perhaps you used to lie quite a bit and fudge on the truth. You used to exaggerate the good things that you did, or not tell the entire truth about a situation. Now you speak words of sober truth. You relate things as they were and are. It is something which Christ did in you. Do you speak in detail about the good things that He has enabled you to do for Him now, even as a Christian? Do you tell others that it was He who found you and revealed Himself to you in your heart in relation to the gospel, and the truth of the Bible?

Do you bear witness to the greatness of His grace? That now, you do not love the things that you used to love, those sinful things of the world and your flesh. Now, you love to do what is right and good and true. You are learning the New and Living Way of walking with Christ. You tell people around you that you love these things which are right because you want to be more like Christ. I am asking you whether you as a Christian speak much about your Lord, your Master, and Your Friend? For if God has done a work in you, you want to speak of it. If God is enabling you to use your spiritual gift, still you want to speak to other Christians about the things that He has accomplished through your ministry by His grace.

You say, well I would like to speak of Christ and what He has done for me and through me, more. How does this happen? Colossians 4, verses 2-6 give us the answer to that. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,

that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.” “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” So then, according to these verses, how do you learn to speak of Christ more, and tell of the things that He has done and accomplished in your life?

You become earnest in prayer, and you begin to pray that God would open a door with others around you, to speak of what Christ has done, and He will do it. Let your speech be seasoned with the salt of Christ’s grace. Think of your relationship which you are developing with Christ, having fellowship with Him in prayer and fellowship with Him in your thoughts, and you will want to speak of Him more. Think and speak of His love and His power at work in your life. Speak of His perfections and how you would be more like Him. Let His name be upon your lips. Think of what He might want to accomplish through you.

In Romans 15: 17-19 Paul says this: “Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.” “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Yes, it is true that Paul had great revelatory gifts and you do not. But the Person of the Holy Spirit is just as much a part of your life as it was in his. Christ accomplished much through him in word and deed, but He can accomplish much in your life as well. When you begin to live your Christian life speaking of Him and His grace and what He has accomplished in and through you, then God can and He will, work behind the scenes in their heart.

2nd – It was because Paul was faithful to submit to the counsel of James and other godly men, that he came to be attacked by ungodly religious men.

Verses 20-25 say that when James and the men with him heard these things that Paul related to them about what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry, they glorified the Lord. They praised the Lord for His mighty work through Paul’s ministry. Then then said to him – “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.” “What then?” “The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.”

“Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow.” “Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.” “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

So, I want you to consider with me now, the leading of Paul by the Holy Spirit to regard this counsel of James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem, and to do what they suggested. As we read of what took place here, we see that the motives of these godly men in Jerusalem were good. I think that we can conclude that James and the others with him, were trying to promote what they thought would be a holy effort by Paul to prove his good intentions towards all Jews in regard to the truth. They were counseling this for the sake of the peace and safety of all the Christians in Jerusalem. James and the others with him really understood the implications of the

council held a few years before in Jerusalem, concerning circumcision not being something that needed to be done by the Jews any more.

Paul knew that he could not compromise the truth. He had taken a vow back in Acts 18, verse 18. That, too, was a Nazarite vow. He was publicly declaring that he would continue to be fully devoted to preaching Christ as the only Savior of the world, and Christ as the fulfillment of the whole law, both moral and ceremonial. Paul was the apostle who Christ had sent to the Gentiles, but he began his ministry by preaching to the Jews; going into their synagogues and preaching to them, and reasoning with them from the Scriptures, that Christ was their Promised Messiah, that He had fulfilled the law by His righteous life, and that He had died for sinners and to break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile and make them one new people.

In chapter 18 of Acts, we find that he preached in the synagogue at Corinth until the Jews began resisting the truth concerning Christ, and they were blaspheming. And so he shook off his garments at them and he said that their blood was on their own heads. From that time on he would go to the Gentiles. This did not mean that he would no longer have any ministry among the Jews at all. But it meant that since Christ had fulfilled the whole law, moral and ceremonial, it was no longer necessary for the Jews to observe the ceremonial law. But you can see here by his actions in relation to James' request, that he did not want to give the impression to the Jews, those who had believed in Christ, or those who had not, that he thought that they should apostatize from the law at all.

Rather, he agreed to do what James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem wanted him to do, to show forth his respect and love for the law, even though the law could not save anyone. He would become all things to all men, that he might win some. 1st Corinthians 9: 19 – “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.” He knew that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed anything, but faith in Christ would mean salvation, and that faith would work through love to keep the commandments of God. (Galatians 5, verse 6)

He knew that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed anything, but a new creation by the power of the Holy Spirit based upon faith in Christ's death and resurrection was absolutely necessary and it meant everything. (Galatians 6: 15) He himself had had Timothy circumcised it says in Acts 16: 3 because of the Jews in the region that he lived, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. And so Paul accepted the counsel of James. He would take a Nazarite vow with these four other men who had already taken a vow. He would pay their expenses so that they would shave their heads, and all the Jews in Jerusalem would know that those things which were said about Paul were really not something to worry about. And James and the men with him hoped that all would turn out fine, and that Paul would not cause a riot in Jerusalem as he had in other places in Asia by His preaching Christ.

Let me apply this to you in this way. Even though you are free from all men, and you know the truth, that Christ has fulfilled the whole Law, moral and ceremonial, you may need to hold your convictions of what you know to be true, as regards your liberty in Christ, in the meekness of wisdom, and not argue over it, in order that you might win others to the true view of the law. This is what Paul knew that he had to do with James. He did not compromise what he knew to be true, one iota. He knew that Christ had fulfilled the law. But he knew that he wanted to win the Jews to this right view by his doing whatever he need to do to establish that all important truth. Therefore he performed this ceremony.

3rd – It was because Paul’s ministry was valuable to Christ, that God protected him by bringing him into the custody of the commander of the Roman garrison.

I will not read this whole section of verses 26-36 again, but I want to make some observations on them for your benefit and instruction. The very thing that James and Paul were trying to do by Paul’s coming into the temple, having taken this vow to show the purity of his intentions and His love of God’s law, both moral and ceremonial, was not only not believed by the Jews there, but Paul was attacked. You, as a Christian, may have the best of intentions in regard to showing forth the truth of what Christ has done in the fulfilling of the law, and they will not only not receive it, but they will attack you for holding to it.

The men who attacked Paul were Jews from Asia, who were there for the feast of Pentecost. When they saw Paul in the temple, they stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on Paul. And they cried out as though they had a might cause of righteousness to uphold – Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this place. These things were not true at all. But they remembered that Paul had tried to preach to them about Christ’s fulfilling of the law, and they were violently against that truth.

They dragged him out of the temple and were intending to kill him. But the Lord Jesus Himself was watching over this whole situation, and Paul’s ministry was very valuable in His sight. And so He providentially ordered that the news of what was happening should reach the ears of the commander of the Roman garrison there, and that man immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to there to investigate. When the mob saw this man and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander had Paul bound with two chains, and asked who he was and what he had done.

Some cried one thing and some another. And so since he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken to the barracks. And here we find that when he reached the stairs, that he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. The multitude of the people following after him were crying out – Away with him! I want you to see that Christ was so ordering things in this situation that it would lead to his being able to speak and give his testimony before all of these people, to the glory of God. By way of application, I want you to see that in each of our lives, as Christians, Christ Himself leads us into all the various situations of our lives to accomplish His will and purpose in relation to the ministry that He would have us fulfill on His behalf.

Therefore, we should do what Paul did. We should see all of these situations of difficulty, opposition, and suffering, as our opportunity to bear witness to Christ, His fulfillment of the law. We should show forth the truth of the sufficiency of His grace personally to us in such times, by not being afraid, but having a calm and joyful heart. Christ Himself will be with you, dear Christian, to so work in your heart, according to your faith and hope in Him, that you will be able to fulfill all that He has called you to do in such situations and even to have the strength to triumph in your witness; that whether you live or die, you will do so to Him.