

# (Acts) Paul Goes to Jerusalem

by Brian Brodersen

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*Brian Brodersen's sermon emphasizes Paul's unwavering commitment to his mission in Jerusalem despite warnings of impending persecution.*

**Duration:** 1:01:37

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 14:27, Acts 15:4, Acts 21:4, Acts 22:16-20

**Topics:** "God's Sovereignty", "Humility"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing that it is God who works in and through people, rather than focusing on the achievements of individuals. The speaker criticizes the tendency in some ministries and Christian TV shows to glorify and elevate certain individuals as 'great men of God.' The speaker shares a personal experience of watching a Christian TV show where the preacher seemed more focused on himself and his actions rather than on God. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God to apply the lessons from the book of Acts to the listeners' lives and for them to actively participate in God's ongoing work.

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## Transcript

Now, as we come to the 21st chapter of the book of Acts here, it's at this point that Paul really begins to sort of pick up the pace and rather than giving us a whole lot of detail about the journey or about some of the, you know, things that occurred in the various stopovers, Paul is wanting to get to a particular point, and that is the point where Paul is apprehended in Jerusalem and then the various things that happened to him afterwards, the number of trials, literal trials before, you know, kings and governors and things like that take place. And so here in 21, Luke takes us on a geographical adventure initially, but rushing toward Paul's experiences in Jerusalem. And so as we pick up in chapter 21, Paul is now departing from Miletus.

And remember last week as we studied the 20th chapter, Paul had come to Miletus, which was just a bit south of Ephesus, and he gathered the elders of the church of Ephesus there in Miletus, and he sort of gave them final instructions, sensing that he would not see them again on earth. And so now it came to pass that when we had departed from them, Luke is, of course, writing and he was with Paul and set sail running a straight course. We came to cost the following day to Rhodes and from there to Patara.

So if you have a Bible map, you can kind of follow. They left Miletus, which is just as I mentioned, just south of Ephesus, and they sailed to cost, which would be an island not too far off of the land there in that southern tip of Asia Minor and from cost. They went to Rhodes and, of course, Rhodes is another island.

And then from there they went to Patera and finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia. We went aboard and set sail. And when we had cited Cyprus, we passed it on the left sail to Syria and landed at Tyre.

And so they took the route that would take them around the southern southwestern tip of Cyprus and then on into Syria and down to Tyre, which would just be above the border of Israel for there. The ship was to unload her cargo and finding disciples. We stayed there seven days.

They told Paul through the spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. And when we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way and they all accompanied us with wives and children till we were out of the city and we knelt down on the shore and prayed. And when we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship and they returned home.

So as they went from place to place, they would lodge with the disciples in those communities. And it really does show you how far the gospel had spread. There really wasn't a place that they could go where there wasn't a group of Christians that had, you know, formed a fellowship.

And that's something that I personally think we ought to strive to see accomplished today, a fellowship in every city, every community where the Lord is is being honored. Of course, most cities do have churches in them, at least most cities here in our country. But unfortunately, not every church is really honoring the Lord or faithful to his word.

And the ideal situation is to see a church in every community where the Lord is working and the spirit is moving and the word is being honored and people are living by faith. That's the exciting thing. Now, in other places, of course, in the world, we don't have that kind of a situation.

A church in every city, in some cities here in America, we have people building churches right on top of one another. And you have church wars, you know, because these guys moved into our territory and they're too close to us and all of that. But there are plenty of cities in the world that don't have any churches at all.

I've personally been to a few with no churches, no evangelical churches at all. And it would be great if we could see all of that changed. And so they met with the disciples here.

And once again, the same message is being reiterated over and over again to the Apostle Paul as he's going. They told him through the spirit not to go up to Jerusalem will comment on that a bit more in a moment. And when he had finished or when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemaeus and greeted the brethren and stayed with them one day.

Now, Ptolemaeus is known today as the city of Akko, which is in the northern area above Haifa in Israel. And so they stayed with them one day and on the next day, we who were Paul's companion companions departed and came to Caesarea and entered the house of Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the seven and stayed with him. So here, after such a long time, we have a mention of Philip once again and notice he's referred to as Philip, the evangelist, I think probably to distinguish him from Philip, the apostle.

There was an apostle named Philip, and then there was a deacon named Philip. Notice here he's referred to as one of the seven. Remember back in the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts when they were having a dispute in the church in Jerusalem because the Hellenistic Jews thought that they were being discriminated against.

The apostles advised them to choose out men from among them who they could put over this particular ministry. And Philip was one that was chosen. And Philip, of course, was the same man who went to Samaria and a great revival broke out under his ministry when he was in Samaria.

And then he was spoken to by the Lord that he was to go down to Gaza, to a deserted place. And it was there that he met that Ethiopian eunuch on his way back from Jerusalem and led him to the Lord and then was miraculously transported. And of course, Philip was a close companion of Stephen.

Remember, Stephen was one of that number as well. One of the seven. And Stephen, remember, was the first martyr in the church.

And who was it that was there consenting to the death of Stephen and casting his vote against him? It was none other than Saul of Tarsus. And now here, so many years later, probably 25 years later or so, Paul comes into the area of Caesarea and he and his companions, they stay in the home of Philip, the evangelist. I wonder what the conversation was like between Paul and Philip at this point.

They perhaps had contact prior to this, maybe back in the early days after Paul's conversion. But we don't know that they did. And so perhaps some of the insights that Luke had to the things that really happened with Stephen, perhaps some of those came from his conversation with Philip.

Now, Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Now we have met Agabus also in the story that Luke's been telling us.

We met him back in the 11th chapter when he came from Jerusalem to Antioch and there he prophesied that there was going to be a great famine throughout the region. And the famine did occur in the days of Claudius Caesar. And so here again, Agabus comes.

And when he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit. So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Now, Agabus here was, you know, sort of following suit with what you would find with some of the Old Testament prophets.

Of course, many times they would prophesy just in a verbal sense. But there were times as we read through Isaiah's prophecies or Jeremiah's or Ezekiel's, there were times when they were called to sort of act things out. Isaiah was called to go barefoot and bare bottomed among the people as a lesson, an object lesson.

God wanted them to see Isaiah walking around with his behind exposed because God was going to humble Israel in that way. And Ezekiel was called by the Lord to do an interesting sort of, you know, acting out a prophetic thing where he was to lay on one side for a long period of time and then lay on another side for a long period of time. And he had a little sort of a puzzle picture thing that he had developed of the city of Jerusalem.

And it was all an object lesson about how Jerusalem was going to come under siege. And then one of my favorite stories is when Hananiah, the false prophet, was prophesying there in the court along with Jeremiah. And he had put this this yoke around his neck, and then he came in and he dramatically broke the yoke off of his neck.

And he said, Thus says the Lord, he's going to break the yoke of the king of Babylon in just a short period of time. And he was encouraging the people not to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, but to rebel against them. And but he was prophesying falsely.

And so the Lord spoke to Jeremiah and said, he's broken the yoke of wood, but he's put an iron yoke around his neck. So Jeremiah then went in with an iron yoke and, you know, acted this thing out to communicate to them that God was going to leave them under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. So here Agabus is following suit with some of the Old Testament prophets in the way they would communicate, taking Paul's belt and binding his hands and feet.

And again, notice, thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind this man who owns the belt, delivering him into the hands of the Gentiles. Now, when we heard these things, Luke says, both we and those from that place pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Now, here's the question that has been asked regarding this whole thing.

The question has been asked, was Paul going against the word of the Lord in insisting that he was to go up to Jerusalem? And I personally don't think that was the case at all, because Paul previously stated that he was being compelled by the spirit to go. But you have an interesting thing here you have on the one hand, Paul is saying I'm being compelled by the spirit. And then clearly the Holy Spirit is speaking through those believers, as Paul is making his journey toward Jerusalem and warning him about what is going to be happening to him when he gets there.

And I don't think it was that the Lord didn't want him to go. I think it was that the Lord was simply informing Paul that. He would be persecuted when he got there, and I think Luke emphasizes this because Paul was really Luke's hero and Luke wanted us to see the kind of a man that Paul really was, how he was a determined individual.

And nothing was going to sway him from his course if it meant that he was going to be arrested in Jerusalem. It didn't matter to him because he felt compelled by the spirit of God to go and he was willing to go at all costs. And Luke wanted us to understand that about this man, Paul, he was a man of commitment.

And so Paul says, he says, what do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. So, Paul, you know, in a sense, he says, I'll have no more of this. Don't be weeping, breaking my heart because you're not going to dissuade me from my purpose.

He said, I'm I'm ready to be bound. As a matter of fact, if I need to die in Jerusalem for the Lord Jesus, I'm ready to do that as well. Now, that's a determined person right there.

And that's why the church spread the way it did in the early centuries, because you had men with this kind of conviction, this kind of determination. And as a matter of fact, wherever you look in church history and find that someone has really pioneered the gospel into a difficult region, you find that each and every one of them pretty much had the same mentality. They went knowing that they might have all kinds of difficulty.

They went even anticipating that they might die. But they were so committed to the cause. They were so passionate to get the gospel to people that they were willing to take that risk.

I think of Jim Elliott, you know, this young man who had such a passion for the Alka Indians and in his journal, as he would write about his passion for them and his desire to get the gospel to them. He wrote in his journal to the Lord. He said, Lord Jesus, I seek not a long life, but a full life like yours.

And here this young man, he was he was willing to lay down his life. They they knew that they were risking their lives to try to get the gospel to these people. And indeed, they were risking their lives and they did lose their lives on their very first attempt to make personal contact with the Alcas.

They were slaughtered by them. But their death, although it seemed a great tragedy at the time, back in 1956, their death really planted the seed for the salvation of the Alka Indians. And as time would go on, family members of those that died would go back and minister to the people.

And eventually the entire tribe would come to salvation. And that tribe of people today are all Christians because these guys gave their lives. And so that's what it takes in some places.

It takes someone willing to go and give it all. And as they do, God uses that. And Paul was that kind of person.

He was willing to do that. And so when he could not be persuaded, we ceased trying to persuade him, saying the will of the Lord be done. After those days, we packed up and went to Jerusalem.

Also, some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain manassin of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we were to lodge. So evidently, this man had a home in Jerusalem and they were going to stay in his home. 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 now on this occasion, although Paul does or Luke doesn't tell us in in this particular account right here. This is where Paul brought the offering to the church in Jerusalem from the Gentile churches.

As you read through, especially Corinthians, you find Paul talking about this collection. That he was taking up for the poor churches or for the poor people in the church in Jerusalem and in Romans, he mentions the fact that we have become beneficiaries of their spiritual wealth. And so we ought to minister to them on a material level, Paul said.

And so he went around to those Gentile churches and he collected a gift and he brought that gift with him. And so now, as he goes in before James and the elders, he presents it, although it's just alluded to a bit later without any detail given. But notice that they went before James.

Now, there's no mention of Peter and John, any they're not mentioned at all throughout the remainder of the book of Acts. And evidently, by this time, they had pretty much departed from Jerusalem and were no longer based there and no longer really leading the church. James had been evidently from the story.

James had been leading it for quite some time. Now, this isn't James, the brother of John, because remember, he was executed by Herod. This is James, the brother of Jesus.

He is the half brother of Jesus. And although he wasn't a believer during the life, the the lifetime of Jesus, he actually became a believer after the resurrection. Of our Lord Jesus, and he became a key figure in the early church.

Now, I don't know if you remember reading about this or seeing anything recently on the news or even on the Discovery Channel. They they did a little story on this ossuary that turned up. That an ossuary is a little stone sort of a coffin that bones, the bones of a deceased person were placed in back in biblical times.

And this ossuary turned up that had inscribed on it that it was the burial box of James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus. And immediately when this thing was brought out into public, there was all kinds of excitement. As you can imagine, people were thinking this is the greatest archaeological find of all time.

Other people were saying it's a fraud. There's no way that this is legit. Somebody fabricated this thing to try to prove the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth or whatever.

So because of all the controversy around it, they brought it before the experts and they began to do a series of tests on it to find out whether or not it was authentic. And in the process, using all kinds of modern scientific methods to determine whether this engraving was the same age as the box itself or whether it was something that was, you know, done by somebody else more recently or whatever through the whole process, you know, as they went through this thing, they concluded that it was indeed authentic, that it dated back to the time of the first century A.D. and it was actually the ossuary of James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus. But then the next question was, well, was it actually the Jesus of Nazareth and the Joseph, the husband of Mary, who were the relatives of this James? And and they thought, well, you know, many people were named James or Jacob would actually be his name.

Many people were named Joseph and many people were named Yeshua. And therefore, this was, you know, OK, we'll grant it that it was, you know, James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus. But it wasn't the people in the Bible, they said, the skeptics said.

And so what they did is they went to a professor at the Hebrew University and they asked him to do some research and to determine what he thought was the possibility and the probability of this being the actual people that are mentioned in the New Testament. And after he applied the laws of probability science and he went through this whole thing of looking at how many people would have lived in Jerusalem at the time, how many men would have lived there, how many of them might have been named James with, you know, a father named Joseph and a brother named Jesus, you know, going through this whole process. And his final conclusion, the man is not a believer.

He is a Jew, and I don't know that he's even necessarily a religious Jew, but his conclusion was that this could be none other than James, the son of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the brother of Jesus, who is called the Christ. And I was watching a documentary on it, actually, when I was flying home on British Airways last few weeks ago. And, you know, right at the end, there is this guy's looking right into the camera and he just says, you know, without a doubt, this is authentic and this is indeed the burial box of James.

I just got shivers went up my spine, you know, as he said that. And so an interesting bit of archaeological evidence, you know, there are still some foolish people today that try to deny the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Still, some people that try to say he never lived, you know, it's really a dumb position to take.

There's so much evidence that he did live. I got an email from a friend of mine in Australia yesterday, and he sent me a little clip from one of the Sydney Herald or something. And they're having a big seminar in Sydney regarding delusions and religious belief and how you can understand delusional people a little better if you understand religious belief and so forth.

And one of the primary things right on the top of the list was, you know, dealing with the issue of the delusion of a virgin birth of a son of God. And, you know, the attack against the faith is on and it's strong and and yet God, of course, not needing to use any of these things to prove himself or prove this word. It's interesting that he's allowing some of these things to come to surface.

You know, not too long ago, there was a discovery in Jerusalem that had to do with Caiaphas, the high priest. All of these people that are mentioned in the New Testament that for many years, people denied the historicity of them. They denied the authenticity of the New Testament.

They said all these people, you know, this was all made up. And yet over and over again, these discoveries are being made that affirm that what the New Testament declares is absolutely the way it was. And so that's the James who Paul now goes before and he's there along with the other elders in the church in Jerusalem.

And so when we had greeted them, Paul told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. So Paul, just he must have spent quite a bit of time just telling all the stories of the great things that God had been doing in all the various cities that he had visited in the churches that had been established. But notice one little point here that he told in detail the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

He didn't tell in detail the things that he had done. Paul was well aware of the fact that it was God who was at work, and that's not always the case with people and it's not always the case with people today. You know, sometimes you hear about a ministry or you see something on TV and, you know, it's all about this man.

It's all about this great man of God and what this man of God has done and his name is in light, you know, and there he is. You know, he's the big celebrity. Some time ago, I was quite a while ago, actually, I was watching so-called Christian TV.

I can't really bring myself to call it that because it doesn't seem like it's that to me. But they were you know, there was some program on and they were featuring this speaker from another country. And and, you know, as they were sort of, you know, preparing the audience for this guy to come out and stand at the pulpit and begin is.

His message that night, I mean, you would have thought, you know, this was like some sort of a celebrity gathering or this was some sort of a sporting event where they were going to give the the Heisman Trophy or something to somebody, you know, and they're talking about this guy. But, you know, they're talking, he's a man of God. He slays people in the spirit.

He raises the dead. He does all this stuff, you know, and I mean, it's going on and on endlessly. And the next thing you know, the music gets louder and the guy comes running out like this.

You know, he looks like Rocky, you know, and he's coming out, you know, starts to preach. And I'm thinking, what on earth are one of the people thinking, you know, it was obvious who was the the center of attention. It wasn't the Lord.

It was this guy. And we see so much of that today where the spotlights on the man and what all that he's done for God. But here, the great apostle, his greatness was partially due to his humility, talking about what God did to the Gentiles.

God used Paul, but Paul was well aware of the fact that all that had happened was. The work of God, and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they 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 they ought to not circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. What. Should we do about that, that's the question that James and the elders are posing to Paul now, notice it says that they've been informed about you, a better way to have worded it, not that, you know, Luke was wrong and wording it this way.

But but what was actually the case was that they had been misinformed. You see, Paul had definitely not emphasized the Gentiles coming under the Jewish customs and and he did himself also begin to deemphasize some of the cultural aspects of the faith, because it was it was sort of, you know, coming in and polluting a bit the the real essential issues. You see, the Jews had a hard time because, you know, their religion and their society were one.

They had a hard time separating what was biblical or theological, theological from what was just more cultural. And Paul was beginning to see more and more clearly as time went on that a lot of the things were just purely cultural. And so he wasn't bound to those things and he wasn't emphasizing those things, not that Paul was actually going around telling Jews that they shouldn't circumcise their children or that they shouldn't keep any of these things.

He didn't do that at all. Those were some of the lies that were being told about him, but those things were being spread. And that was sort of the general impression that a lot of the believers in Jerusalem had regarding Paul.

They thought that he was anti-Jewish. They thought that he had turned against his own people to some extent. And so James and the elders there, they're presenting this dilemma to Paul.

They're saying this is the way a lot of people think about you here. What should we do? And then they come up with this. The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.

Therefore, they said, do what we tell you. We have four men who have taken about, 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 they said, look, why don't you do this? Take these guys and pay their expenses. They've taken a vow. Now, it was probably the Nazarite vow that they had taken, and there was a substantial cost to it because there were the various offerings that needed to be made.

And there were a number of things that would incur an expense. And oftentimes what a person of means would do in those days is they would sponsor a person who was taking the vow and they sort of, you know, felt that they were getting somewhat of the benefit of that as they would sponsor it. And so that's what they advise the apostle Paul to do.

Verse 26 says, Then Paul took the men and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. So Paul went along with this. Now, some people have accused Paul of compromising here.

Some people have said, man, Paul really blew it. I can't believe that Paul, you know, lost his nerve here and and buckled under the pressure. Some people actually accused Paul of sinning here because he was going back and participating in the offerings in the temple.

And, you know, because after all, those were null and void because of the death of Jesus. But that's not really the case. There were certain offerings that even the believers would still participate in offerings of thanksgiving and consecration and things like that that didn't really address the sin issue or give the impression that they weren't feeling the sacrifice of Christ was sufficient.

So what Paul was doing here was he was condescending to their weaknesses. He was not compromising anything of any theological weight. He was really just going along with their cultural beliefs and just, you know, letting go of a bit of his own liberty to sort of accommodate them culturally.

Remember when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said to the Jews, he said, I've become all things to all men that I might win more people to the Lord. And then he said to the Jews, I became a Jew. And what Paul was expressing there is that he was not going to let non-essential things get in his way.

He wasn't going to let some cultural issue stand in his way. So if it would lend itself to leading people to Christ, for him to condescend to some of these cultural practices of the Jews that had no theological ramification, then Paul was willing to do that. He said, I've made myself the servant of everyone that I might, by all means, save some.

And so he had that kind of an attitude. Paul was completely free. He was so free that he could even put himself sort of, you know, figuratively speaking, temporarily in bondage again for the benefit of somebody else.

A lot of times when we talk about liberty, we talk about Christian liberty. Most of the time, the emphasis is that, man, I've got liberty. I can do anything I want.

Paul's perspective of liberty was almost the opposite of that. Paul's perspective of liberty was that I've got liberty, so I'm going to allow myself to go under maybe a situation that that isn't that comfortable for me, but I'm going to go under it for the benefit of these people. Paul was truly willing to let go of his own personal convictions when it didn't have anything to do with theological matters and things that he felt comfortable with, he didn't push those things, he was ready to just say, you know what, that's fine, let's just, you know, let's remove that that stumbling block if that's the problem, you know, if Paul is saying here, in essence, if they've got all these misunderstandings regarding me, they think that I'm against our our forefathers and our heritage here, I'll just I'll go ahead and do this and I'll clear up that misconception.

We have to make sure that we have a clear division between what's really biblical and what's essential and what's more cultural and therefore non-essential. And one of the great curses, really, upon the church historically has been its inability to be flexible and to sort of, you know, not get caught in a cultural rut and and to not put people in bondage over things that aren't really important or, you know, truly biblical in

nature. And over and over again, that's happened in church history where the church becomes rigid.

And as Pastor Chuck, you know, many times will tell the story about what happened back in the late 60s, early 70s with all the hippies coming here and at that time, as God's moving in this culture and he's saving these thousands and thousands of young people. They don't have any churches they can go to because the churches at the time, for the most part, said you can't possibly be a Christian and look like that. And therefore, go get a haircut, take a bath, change your clothes, shine your shoes and then come back and we'll, you know, we'll talk to you then.

Yeah, that's just a classic example from our own experience of the kind of thing that we're talking about here, where you put the church develops its own culture and then everybody who doesn't conform to the church's culture is immediately, you know, seen as somebody who ought to be on the outside. It's like the missionaries who went from Europe into, you know, places like India or Africa or other destinations, the ones who would go and and really seek to force a European culture upon these other peoples really, to a large degree, did a great disservice to those people. It was the ones who would go and not be concerned with spreading European culture or British culture or whatever it might have been at the time, but they were concerned with spreading the gospel.

And so they weren't going into these countries to, you know, get them to adopt European culture or European civilization. They were going to just simply bring them the gospel. But they themselves oftentimes would suffer great persecution from their fellow Christians.

Hudson Taylor was a great example of that when he originally went to China from Yorkshire, England, he joined up with a missionary society and as he arrived there, he found that, you know, everybody was still very British. Everybody was still, you know, living very much like they were living in England. They had just taken and transported their culture to another part of the world.

And as they were evangelizing, they were converting the Chinese not only to Christianity, but to the British or European culture. And Hudson Taylor, after a brief period of time, he realized this isn't the way to do this. This isn't the way to reach these people.

We've got to we've got to be like them, not try to get them to be like us. So he began to dress as a Chinaman. And he began to live as a Chinaman, he began to eat what they ate and live in the kinds of houses that they live in, and ultimately he had the greatest impact upon the people.

See, a lot of times, as the missionaries would come into the cultures, they would stay detached from the people they would live in. You know, they would just create an environment just like they'd left at home and they had even like a compound. And the the peoples that they supposedly went to minister to couldn't even have any contact with them many times.

They were they were that separated until they become part of that cultural thing. So, Paul, far from making a big mistake here, I think Paul is teaching us a valuable lesson. And the lesson is, don't let culture get in the way.

Don't let something trivial and something non-essential stand in the way of us being able to communicate Christ to people. And if people have like the Jews did, they had this man that, you know, the cultural thing was so huge to them, Paul just said, OK, fine, that's OK. As long as you're not seeing that as as a as an obligatory thing or something that, you know, is giving you a greater standing before God than anyone

else.

Then, you know, you just keep doing your cultural thing and I'll even, you know, do it with you at this point if it'll make things better and if it'll help the cause of Christ. And so when seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia seen 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 teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law and this place.

And furthermore, he also brought Greeks into the temple and he is defiled this holy place. Now, at the time, and we've mentioned it before, but we'll touch on it again, the Jews had just completely lost touch with what their mission in the world was, and they had developed an exclusive mentality and they pretty much thought that God hated everybody and he loved them. And they actually had the temple in Jerusalem, had various divisions.

There was the outer, the outer part of the temple was known as the Court of the Gentiles, it just so happens that the money changers and all those people that Jesus was really irritated with and, you know, threw their tables over and chased them out of there just so happened that they set up their racket in the Court of the Gentiles. So that's that's how much the Jews respected the Court of the Gentiles. But separating the Court of the Gentiles from the place where the Jews would gather was a wall with an inscription on it that warned that anyone not of, you know, truly Jewish passing this boundary does so at the risk of their own life.

And so now, with that in mind, they're they're thinking that Paul has brought this Gentile into the temple, this Greek, and they're saying, you know, Paul is a blasphemer, everything that we told you about him is obviously true, you know, and these were the people that came from the area of Asia, Ephesus, that whole place where Paul had been ministering for those years. And, you know, they're saying this is the man that we were telling you about, he's teaching against this place and this is proof he brought this Greek into the temple and he's defiled this holy place, it says, for they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian with him in the city whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple. So because they saw Paul with Trophimus in the city, they concluded that he must have brought him into the temple and that was how they were building this case.

And so all the city was disturbed and the people ran together, seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple and immediately the doors were shut. Now, as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Now, remember, this was a feast time, and so during this time there would be a thousand soldiers there based at the Antonia Fortress, which just butted up against the temple precinct and they were there for the specific reason or purpose of quelling any sort of uprising that would happen.

So they get word that there's an uprising there on the Temple Mount. And so. They took the soldiers and centurions and they ran down to them, and when the Jews saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul, so evidently they were just going to beat him to death.

Then the commander came near and took him and and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken to the barracks.

And when he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob for the multitude of the people followed after him, crying out, saying away with him. Then, as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, may I speak to you? He replied, Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who sometime ago stirred up a rebellion and led 4000 assassins out into the wilderness? Now, about 54 AD, there was, according to Josephus, an Egyptian who had gathered around him a band of assassins. They would hide these daggers in their garments and they would go into the midst of a crowd and they would just start it, start randomly killing people.

And this Egyptian had a vision that he would come upon the city of Jerusalem with his band of assassins and the walls of Jerusalem would immediately fall and they would overthrow the Romans. So, of course, when the Romans heard about this, they took up action against this individual and they they pretty much slaughtered those that had teamed up with him. But he actually had escaped.

And so this commander Lycius here, he he can't get any kind of accurate information about who his prisoner is. He thinks he's the Egyptian assassin. And so Paul says, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.

Cilicia was a very prominent city in the empire. And I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people.

Now, here's the amazing thing about Paul. He's just about beaten to death and the soldiers actually have to put him up on their shoulders and carry him up the steps because the mob still grabbing at him, trying to get ahold of him again to rip him to shreds. And instead of, as you would think that most people would do, you know, hey, get me out of this place and protect me from these people.

Paul says, wait a second, let me speak to these people. Give me one more shot at it. And so he says, well, can you speak Greek or.

Yeah, I'm a Hebrew, I'm a Jew, and so he gives him permission and so he stands on the stairs and any motions with his hand and notice a great silence fell upon them and he spoke to them in the Hebrew language. So, you know, it's almost. It to me, it almost appears that that some work of the spirit happened right here to take a mob that was in the state of mind that that these people were evidently in wanting to rip him to shreds and shouting away with him, away with him, and then suddenly for there to be dead silence.

It seems like the Lord moved upon this crowd to give Paul the opportunity that he had always wanted to have. This was the moment that the apostle had been waiting for. He had longed for years and years and years.

If he could just get back to Jerusalem, if he could just talk to the Jews. And now, look, he's got an audience of thousands. This is the moment that he'd hoped would come.

And so. He says, Brethren and fathers here, my defense before you now, and when they heard that when they heard that he spoke in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent than he said, I am indeed a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel. Now, Gamaliel was one of the greatest rabbis of all time and a very prominent man who had passed away probably about five years before this event.

So taught according to the strictness of our father's law and was zealous toward God as you all are today. Paul says, look, I can relate. I'm a Jew.

I was brought up by Gamaliel. I know exactly how you feel. Listen, I persecuted this way to death.

Binding and delivering into prison both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness and all the council of the elders from whom I also received letters to the brethren and went to Damascus to bring in chains, even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. Now, it happened as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon. Suddenly, a great light from heaven shone around me and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? So I answered, who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.

And those who are with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me. So I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, arise and go into Damascus and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do. And since I could not see for the glory of that light being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

Then a certain Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me and he stood and said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that same hour, I looked up at him. Then he said, the God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know his will and see the just one and hear the voice of his mouth, for you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

And he says, and now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And now it happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple that I was in a trance and saw him saying to me, make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning me. So I said, Lord, they know, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on you.

And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then he said to me, depart. For I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.

And they listened until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live. Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw their dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks and said that he should be examined under scourging so that he might know why they shouted so against him. So, Paul, the opportunity that he waited for his entire life has finally come.

To share the gospel with his Jewish brethren, and he's got this captive audience, they're silent, they're listening attentively and he's going on and on. And then he mentions this one word Gentiles, he had him up until that point. You ever talk to somebody about the Lord and you're doing really great.

And then you say something that you shouldn't have said, and the whole thing is gone out the window. Well, that's the experience Paul had here. You see, it wasn't that the problem here with them was that Paul was actually saying that Gentiles could be saved just like Jews could.

What Paul was saying is that God loved Gentiles just like he loved Jews, and they just had become so blinded in their, you know, they just become so focused on their own national identity and everything else. They could no longer see God as the God who loved everybody. They just really thought that God loved them only.

And if he did love anybody else, he certainly couldn't love them with the same kind of love that he loved Israel with or there was no possible way in their thinking that Gentiles could come into the same kind of relationship that the Jews had with God. But that's what Paul was declaring. And as he says here, you know, he's he's got their attention and he's telling them about Jesus.

But then he tells them that Jesus told him to get away from here. Get out of Jerusalem because I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. And that just sent them right over the edge.

And so. Now, the commander is baffled because, of course, Paul speaking to them in their native tongue, so the commander has no idea what he's saying, but all he knows is that he had their attention. It was a captive audience.

It was a cooperative audience. And then all of a sudden the the same frenzy was whipped up again by just, you know, something that he said. So he ordered him to be brought into the barracks and said that he should be examined under scourging so that he might know why they shouted so against him.

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander saying, take care what you do for this man is a Roman. You see, it was absolutely against the law to bind a Roman citizen. And the commander was frightened with a good reason, because he could not only lose his position, but it would be even within the realm of possibility that he could lose his life for mistreating a Roman citizen.

So the commander came and he said to him, tell me, are you a Roman? He said, yes. The commander answered with a large sum. I obtained this citizenship.

And Paul said, I was born a citizen. And then immediately those who are about to examine him withdrew from him. And the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman and because he had bound him the next day because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews.

He released him from his bonds and commanded the chief priest and all the council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them. So just as the Holy Spirit had warned. So now things have developed.

And I'm sure I'm absolutely positive that as Paul was there in his prison cell at this point, he probably was the most downcast man. In the world at that time, because he would have thought that he failed God, he would have thought that. I blew it.

God finally gave me the opportunity and I messed it up. Why? Why did I say Gentile? I had them. They were listening.

They were eating out of my hand. And then I said, and I'm sure Paul went into just an utter state of condemnation during that time. I can just imagine it.

And we've all probably had, of course, not experiences of that magnitude, but we probably all had experiences where we've done something or said something or blown an opportunity. And and you just those are the kinds of things that just haunt you. I've had I can think of so many times over the years that I've had key opportunities to share with people and I've blown it and I've lived with guilt over it and I've just felt condemned.

And I know Paul felt that way. But, you know, as we continue on in the story, which we'll do next time, you'll find that the Lord was not nearly as hard on Paul as he was on himself. And the Lord appears to Paul in his dejected state, and he says, Paul.

Be encouraged for just as you've testified for me in Jerusalem, you're going to do it in Rome as well. You know, Paul probably thought that he he did not testify at all, he blew it. But Jesus said, no, you testified for me in Jerusalem and you'll do it in Rome as well.

And my point is this, as we close, even if we say the wrong thing. Even if we blow the opportunity of the century, God can take care of it. I thank God that he's not limited to my performance to get his job done.

I really do. If that were the case, I quit a long time ago. Can't tell you how many times I've preached and thought I should have stayed home.

And for me, inevitably, it's when I get, you know, sometimes I get invited to do these things and there's 10,000 people there. And, you know, that's when you really want to do your best. It seems like inevitably that's when I will do my worst.

And I always think, oh, Lord, why did I say that or why didn't I say that? And then the irony in it all, somebody I'll meet somebody, you know, nine months later and they'll say, man, you know, that I was there at that event and you spoke and that changed my life. And I'm thinking, you're joking. How could that have happened? It's because God is greater than our mistakes.

And maybe it wasn't the wisest thing to say at this point, but I think Paul was being led by the spirit. I think the Lord was just allowing this whole thing to show Paul the true state of the heart of the people and to remind him that he was called to minister to the Gentiles. So we'll pick up in the story next week and continue to follow the adventures of Paul, the apostle.

Lord, we thank you for your word. And Lord, for the many lessons that are contained in this great book of Acts. And Lord, may you just apply now to us, each of us individually, those things that you would have for us tonight.

The things, Lord, that you want us to take home and continue to think about things that you want us to incorporate into our lives, things that you want us to know and remember. Lord, by your spirit, work those things into us, we pray. And Lord, we thank you that your work is still going on today.

And Lord, it all started here in Acts, but it's still carrying on to this very hour. And Lord, we thank you that we can be part of it. We thank you that it's all heading toward you returning, Jesus, and setting up your glorious kingdom.

And so, Lord, help us to be busy. Loving you, seeking you and serving you until you come in your name, we pray. Amen.

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