

## Acts 21:27-40

### "Paul Gets Pummeled"

Paul the apostle wrote to the Romans saying, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."<sup>1</sup> Don't be one who makes waves, just go w/the flow so long as it's not a sin situation. We know that when it comes to the decision between obeying the word of God or the ways of man, we have to obey God rather than man. That's not even in question. But so long as I'm not being asked to sin or somehow *condone* sin, I'm not to make waves. I'm not to cause trouble. Some people like being troublemakers. But Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*"<sup>2</sup> So you can be a *troublemaker* if you want, I prefer to be a *peacemaker*.

& Paul was that way, for as much trouble that seemed to follow him, his heart was to maintain peace. He'd meet you where you were at. If you wanted to maintain Jewish customs, honor the traditions that was fine, he could hang w/you & honor those customs (feast days, fellowship offerings, Sabbaths, whatever). If you had no fondness nor familiarity w/such customs & were out working on the Sabbath enjoying leftover porkchops for lunch or whatever; that was find too!

Why? Because those customs, those religious observances had nothing to do w/salvation, nor did they have anything to do w/sanctification. That is, they didn't save you, nor did they make you more spiritual or any closer to God than the one who didn't observe them. All of that was settled at the cross of J.C. *He* is our righteousness; you can't add to His work, or somehow improve upon His work, it's finished. All we can do is receive it & rest in it by faith. Our confidence doesn't lie in our *performance*, but in the *Person* of J.C.

When we last left off, Paul was in a bit of a precarious position. He'd made his way to Jerusalem, excited to be there for the Day of Pentecost, to present the offering of the Gentile churches to the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. He had the opportunity to report to James & all the elders all of the wonderful works, the amazing miracles of God that had taken place throughout the last few yrs of his ministry out on the mission field. Churches were planted, disciples were made... & They all just rejoiced & really praised the Lord for the wonderful report that Paul had brought.

Then it seemed to turn a little awkward. They in essence said, "Hey, that's awesome Paul... listen uh, you see the thousands of Jews who are here for the feast, the love the Lord, they're zealous for the law, & they've heard that you teach the Jews to forsake Moses.

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 12:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 5:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You know; that they shouldn't circumcise their sons or walk according to the customs. So, let's put that rubbish to rest. Do what we tell you to do & this will all go away like a bad dream. *We have 4 men who've taken a vow. Take them, be purified w/them & sponsor their expenses so that everyone will know that what they've heard of you is nonsense because you're fully supporting our customs right in front of them! & Again Paul, (Vs 25) we aren't talking about what Gentiles need to do, we know none of this applies to them, but let's show everyone that you're still a good Jewish boy & that you haven't disdained nor abandoned our ways."*

So Paul (wanting to live peaceably, doing whatever he could to obtain an inroad to share Jesus w/people) took them, sponsored them & basically made reservation to make a peace or consecration offering some 7 days later.

### Vs 27-30

Oh man! Can we just say the fuse is lit & fireworks are coming!?! This whole scene here (truly) is fascinating. I mean, you get the feel for what's happening here don't you? *There's Paul, trying to keep the peace, he's going through a purification ritual (probably a Nazirite vow) & just about the time his vow is coming to a close some non-believing Jews from back in Ephesus recognize him. (Now when I say "non-believing" I don't mean they don't believe in God, they very much believe in God, they adhere to the rituals of the law, but they miss the reality of J.C. to whom the rituals point. They don't believe in Jesus, they're trusting in performance-based righteousness...* People do this today, they believe in God & think they're going to heaven because they were baptized, or because they attend church every Sunday, or dress a certain way or give a certain amount. But as I said in our time of introduction, our righteousness isn't found through a performance, but through a Person, the Person of J.C.)

*But back to our happening here; it's like, what are the odds? 10's if not 100's of thousands of people & you run into the one group of guys from over 600 miles away who tried to destroy your life in Ephesus & now here they are in Jerusalem at the temple on the same day you are!?! I mean, imagine there you are out in Denver Colorado (or Colorado Springs) & you get jumped by a group of guys, but you live to tell the tale. Then 6 months or so later you're back in Joplin around Christmas time, people are all over the place running everywhere, you go to the mall & who sees you in the food court? The same guys that jumped you in Colorado... & they set their eyes on you again. I mean, hey, you're just out Christmas shopping, trying to do some good for some people & you just can't catch a break!*

Now, the reason I say they're from Ephesus is because they also recognized Trophimus. That's where he was from. But what's happening here? The very thing Paul is trying to avoid by honoring James' advice & going through this ritual is occurring just the same. We might even say that if he *hadn't* gone through the ritual, he wouldn't have been in the temple, at that time, for them to accuse...

Again; it wasn't wrong for Paul to do this but when we walk by faith, there's no need to hatch a clever plan in order to influence or appease other people. Paul would've been just as right to say, "You know James, I respect your opinion on this, but the truth is I'm not teaching those things, *you know* I'm not teaching those things & I really don't need to prove anything because I'm clean before God..." But in seeking to live peaceably he complied, now here we are.

Listen, the plan that James laid out made sense, it seemed reasonable, even logical. But here's my question. Did they seek the Lord over it? Did they pray & ask for wisdom regarding it? I don't read where they did... It seems like it was something that just made sense, so they went w/it.

What's the take home? *Presume upon nothing, pray over everything.* Do you remember the pickle that Joshua got himself into from a similar scenario? There they were (the children of Israel) taking the Promised Land. They'd taken Jericho, they'd taken Ai, & the people of Gibeon were freaking out (& *appropriately so*). So they hatched a plan. They put together a delegation, saddled up, put on ragged clothes, torn/tattered sandals, loaded up some moldy/crusty bread & blown out wineskins & rode to Joshua (Josh Ch 9).

Joshua is all, "Who are you & where have you come from?" They're all, "We're your servants from far away! When we started this journey our shoes were new & the bread was fresh, but look, it's all old & moldy, torn & tattered... But we want to make sure we're on your good side & that you won't destroy us like you are the inhabitants of *this* land." So Joshua & the elders looked them over, the story seemed to make sense based upon the way they looked & the supplies they had, so they made a covenant of peace w/them & promised not to let them live. It was the rationale, logical thing to do based upon the circumstantial evidence that they had.

The problem was that they didn't seek the Lord about it & 3 days later the children of Israel showed up on the people of Gibeon's doorsteps. They'd been bamboozled! Now; had Joshua & the other elders sought the Lord, God would've led them differently, instead he just did what seemed logical & it came back to bite them.

This is why the Bible says, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”**<sup>3</sup> In how many of our ways are we to acknowledge Him? To seek after & consider Him? In the really tricky areas? In the major turning points of life? In *all our ways*... It’s something we’re all guilty of to some greater or lesser extent. Something makes sense; A+B adds up to C & so we go w/it. **But God would have us bring the details of our lives to Him. Here, they didn’t... & the very thing they thought they could avoid by doing this, actually put Paul right in the firing line that brought it to pass. Because it gave the enemies of Paul a platform to accuse him right there on the temple grounds & start a riot. Had he not been there going through these procedures... who knows? But what we do know is that here he is, the fuse is lit & the fireworks are on the way.**

They bring 3 accusations (w/a cherry on top) against Paul. They grab hold of him & begin to shout, “This is the man whom you’ve heard about who teaches all men everywhere against the people!” Essentially that he’s an “anti-Jewish” Jew... But here’s the thing. In some respect they were being accurate, but in another they were completely wrong. In other words, they had some right *information*, but with it they made the wrong *implication* & the wrong *application*.

**You see, the Jews taught that the only way you could be saved was by becoming a Jew, they were the way to God & if you weren’t willing to convert to Judaism, you couldn’t be saved. Paul taught salvation by grace through faith in J.C. & That being a true Jew has nothing to w/ethnicity & everything to do w/walking by faith. Just as Ab walked by faith & it was counted to him as righteousness (Rom 4).**

They said that Paul taught against the law. Again, right information (sort of), wrong implication. Paul taught that the law had a very definite purpose, it wasn’t to make us righteous, but to show us that we’re sinful.

**They said that he taught against the temple (even though they found him *in* the temple). The temple was kind of synonymous w/sacrifice. What he taught was that the sacrifice for sin wasn’t found in bulls & goats, but through the sacrificial death of J.C. upon the cross for the sin of the world!**

So here it is. Paul taught you didn’t need to become a Jew (being circumcised & adhering to Judaism) to be saved. You just need to believe in Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Pr 3:5–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Righteousness isn't found through the law, it's found through faith in J.C., The sacrifice for sin was once for all at the cross of Christ. Now; if you *wanted* to become circumcised, or observe Jewish customs, or worship at the temple... that's fine. *So long as you don't equate your salvation/sanctification or righteousness before God w/those things in any way.*

As he said to the Galatians, *"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."*<sup>4</sup> He thoroughly & utterly rejected works-based righteousness.

But to top it all off (they say), "Furthermore" (as if those things weren't abominable enough), "his utter disdain for all that we are & all that we stand for is exemplified in that he brought a Gentile into the temple!"

There were various staging areas on the temple grounds. (Pic, Replica 1) A court of the Gentiles, of the women, the men, the priests, the holy place & then the holy of holies. Separating the court of the Gentiles (which was the outermost court) from the other courts was a wall beyond which no Gentile was allowed to go beyond. *In the 1800's there was actually an inscription found on an archaeological dig that read, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."* & It was such a sacred infringement to them that the Romans (though they'd stripped Israel from the right of capital punishment) allowed Israel to execute violators *even* if they were a Roman citizen.

But this is the wall Paul was referencing in the book of Eph when he wrote, *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,"*<sup>5</sup> The idea being that in Him (Jesus) there's neither Jew nor Gentile, we're all one in Christ; there is no distinction.

But that's not where these guys are at! They're accusing Paul of the single most sacrilegious thing he could've done (in their eyes). A crime punishable by death! (Of course, it wasn't true, they just presumed since they saw Trophimus in Jerusalem & Paul in the temple, that Paul must've brought him in w/him).

Can we just say that anytime we presume upon someone, it's just not wise? Sometimes when we don't like someone, we just presume the worst of everything they do.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ga 2:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 2:13-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

That's what they're doing here, & they were wrong. The bible is clear that we're to search out the facts, not succumb to hearsay. That's *not* what happened here, this enlarged crowd was enraged. As far as they're concerned Paul just signed his own death warrant. So w/a lynch mob mentality, they lay hold of him, drag him outside those walls (because they don't want to defile it by bloodshed) & the Levites slam the door. Paul is a dead man walking right now.

### Vs 31-36

Can you see the scene in the movie that's running in your mind? The soldiers are literally crowd surfing Paul to keep him from being torn apart by the feeding frenzy of the mob! When we read that the commander took soldiers w/centurions, what that means is that (w/a Centurion being over 100 soldiers) there were a minimum 200 soldiers on deck for this, probably more.

Now if you're wondering how the commander caught wind of what was happening & able to be on the scene so fast it's because Herod had actually built the Antonia fortress which housed the soldiers & attached it to the N.W. side of the temple Mt. (Replica 2, Replica 1). Why? Because he knew that if there was ever unrest in the city, chances were high that it would have its roots on the temple mount. Which was exactly the case here. **An uproar started (don't you love how nonchalantly Luke reports, "Now as they were seeking to kill him...") they were pummeling him, kicking him, beating him, genuinely trying to kill him. It was an "act 1<sup>st</sup>, ask questions later" kind of happening here! One of the soldiers sees the tumult taking place down in the court of the Gentiles, informs the commander & away they go!**

Why? Not because they sympathized w/Paul, but for the sake of public order. Rome wasn't down w/riots. & If (as a commander) a situation got out of control on your watch, it wasn't going to fare well for you. So they took action immediately. Came down w/ferocity (shock & awe), 100's of soldiers come storming onto the temple Mt & the people stop beating Paul.

**The commander takes control, has him bound in chains (just as Agabus prophesied) & tries to get some answers. The problem was that no one really knew what was going on... Some people said one thing, others cried another thing, it was pandemonium in the ring! There was so much confusion & people yelling different things that he ordered the soldiers to take Paul back up to the barracks just to disperse the people and regain order.**



But by the time they reached the stairs, the madness of the crowd had reached such a fever pitch that they had to pick him up over their heads to keep him from being ripped apart! Some were crying one thing, others a different thing, but they *all agreed* on the same thing, “*Away w/him!*” That didn’t mean, “Get him out of our sight”. It meant, “Put this man to death!” It was the same words they were crying out when Jesus was on trial...

Jesus was always trying to teach them that it wasn’t the external ritual that God was concerned about; but internal righteousness before Him. He said, “Listen, if you want to honor God than just do 2 simple things & you’ll fulfill all the law.” (Matt 22:37-40) Love the Lord your God w/all your heart, w/all your soul & w/all your mind. & Love your neighbor as yourself...” Do those 2 things (love God, love others) & you’ll fulfill the entirety of the law.

Now here’s Paul, who’s only tried to bring clarity to the place of the law & that they were fixated on the rituals rather than the reality of Jesus to whom they pointed & he’s literally about a step from death...

### Vs 37-39

It’s at this point we wonder who was crazier, Paul or the people!? There was such chaos in the crowd that Paul couldn’t get a word in edgewise. But now that he’s up at the top of the steps & away from the immediate grasp of the people, he clears his throat & says to the commander, “Excuse me, could I trouble you for a moment?”

The commander is blown away, he’s speaking Greek, he’s an educated man. He assumed he was an Egyptian terrorist who’d duped about 4,000 men into following him who a few yrs earlier (according to the history) had deceived his men into believing he could cause the walls around the temple mount to fall from the Mt of Olives across the valley, but instead Roman soldiers came upon them, killed a bunch of them & imprisoned a bunch of them but the Egyptian had escaped.

He assumed by the ferocity of the crowd that he was that guy that they’d gotten ahold of. But Paul shocks him because rather than yell for help, or shout, “I’m innocent, this is all a misunderstanding!” He’s totally composed, beaten & bloodied, but fully cognizant, incredibly polite & educated to boot!

Paul says, “No, I’m not an Egyptian, I’m a Jew from Tarsus.” This instantly put him in a completely different light w/the commander. He wasn’t a suspected terrorist, he’s a citizen of Tarsus (a significant city in the Roman world.) So Paul says, “Listen, I’m begging you, just let me talk to the people.”

Isn't that incredible? He's standing there w/his life on the line; there's a lynch mob downstairs that wants nothing more than to see him dead & all he can think is, "You've got to let me share the gospel w/these people..." Paul has waited his whole Christian life to speak to the Jews in Jerusalem. There are thousands of them all fixated on him now & all he can think is, "This is the moment I've been waiting for, please!!!"

### Vs 40

Well what a fine way to end a chapter! What did he say!? We're on the edge of our seats! We'll wait, we'll watch & we'll see... next time.

But there are so many "God moments" happening here. #1 That Paul had the wherewithal to ask for a platform to address these people. I'd just be grateful I got out there alive! (#praisereport)!

But the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing is that the commander actually acquiesces to his request! He had *no reason* to do this. "Look, because of you we're in this mess to begin with. You think I'm going to let you speak to them, they want to kill you!" That was a God thing.

Then finally, for all the madness of the people, by a motioning of his hand a deafening silence fell over the multitude... I can't explain that outside of God doing a work. I've seen riots & mob mentalities & you don't gain control of the masses by standing up on a platform & just motioning w/your hand. Especially if you're the one they want to kill!

But this is a dramatic scene to say the least. It's like you could cut the tension w/a knife. Now; 1 Pet 3:15 tells us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies w/in you. I'm telling you; Paul was ready. He's waited his whole life for this moment; he knows where they're at, he's been there. He probably feels uniquely qualified to speak to them. & He *knows* that if he could only speak to them, they'll hear & understand. He probably thinks he's on the edge of a great spiritual awakening. (But how many of you realize that God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called?)

Be that as it may; he motions w/his hand, silence ensues, he opens his mouth & begins to speak in the Hebrew language, saying...

### Prayer Points:

Lord we admire the resolve of Paul the apostle. Strengthen us in the same way. So often ours is the testimony, "The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak", but we want to honor You both in the tough times & in the everyday details of our lives. May we be those who pray over & seek Your wisdom in all that we do. Lead us in the way we should go, & we'll give You praise.



Paul had a message that He was willing to die for & that was this. Christ died for your sins, was buried & rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that you (through faith in Him) might stand justified in the sight of God. Turn from your sin, trust in Him & He will give you life.