

Courageous Conviction (Part 1): All Things to All People - Acts 21:1-27-22:21
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Our story this week is a pivot moment in the book of Acts. Until this point in the story those witnessing of Jesus have been on offense. Like the great 1999 St. Louis Rams, they marched down the field with ease, taking the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth. The second third of the book focused on the mission ministry of the Apostle Paul and his three missionary journeys taking him all over modern day Turkey and Greece, preaching and planting churches with great success. Now, at the end of his third trip Paul has returned to the city of his childhood to bring an offering and encourage the church there. His plan is to keep playing offense, with a plan to sail to Rome and then take the Gospel to Spain. He knew it was the will of the Lord to bring the offering to Jerusalem himself, although the Spirit told Paul that this trip would be treacherous, a fact confirmed in the Holy Spirit from others, including a crazy prophet. Yet, Paul came to Jerusalem following the will of God. We expect the outcome to involve a brief moment of persecution, followed by Paul's miraculous escape and his continued travels. What happens in Paul's life and the story of Acts is something drastically different.

From this point on Paul will be playing defense, and actually making a defense for himself and the Gospel. He is not quickly released, and the culture around him becomes hostile. Jewish religious people despise his message of grace because it puts an end to their self-salvation experiment and allows Gentiles into the Kingdom of God. The Romans, who represent a more secular point of view, also grow more hostile as the Gospel would require repentance of sin and trusting a Jewish Galilean peasant as their True King rather than Caesar. So, rather than the story being about Paul's short persecution and subsequent release, what we will find is that Paul will be in chains for close to four years, and the story is going to give us five defense speeches given by Paul to people who despise his message.

Paul visits the Temple, following the charge given to him by James to pay three guys offering as they end a religious vow to show that he is still a faithful Jew. But as he does this some Jewish people from Asia see Paul in the Temple and shout out to gather a mob who starts beating Paul, actually seeking to lynch him. Before they can kill Paul, Roman soldiers looking down from the Antonia Fortress tower see the commotion and tell the highest ranking Roman official in the town, a Roman Tribune (military leader of at least 1,000 soldiers) named Claudius Lysias (see Acts 23:26). He sends a squad of soldiers town to the Temple area to break up the crowd before a riot ensues. They see Paul getting beaten, so in order to both protect him but also figuring he is getting beaten for a reason, they arrest Paul and bring him to this fortress for questioning. He is placed in two chains, probably on arms and legs, but the beating has been so brutal that Paul has to be carried by the soldiers. When he arrives the Tribune begins to question him, and Paul speaks to him in Greek which catches Claudius by surprise. He assumes Paul is a bad dude, and accuses him of being an Egyptian terrorist who gathered a band of thousands of assassins who tried to overthrow Roman occupation of Jerusalem. Historian Josephus tells us about this Egyptian guy and that his insurrection was overthrown by the Roman governor Felix. Paul quickly corrects his misunderstanding of who he is, and gains a level of trust from the Tribune. He asks to address the crowd around the Temple, and does so speaking Hebrew now. He musters all the strength he can find in his beaten body and stands before them.

His first words ask his brother and fathers in the Jewish faith to "hear the defense that I now make before you." The word "defense" in this text is the Greek word *apologia*.

While we do get our word “apology” from the word, it does not mean that Paul is saying, “I’m sorry.” The word literally means to give an answer with a reasoned defense before people who are hostile, or hold disagreement. It can refer to a defense made for a criminal in a court, or to a reasoned response defending the faith in a hostile crowd. We get our word “apologetics” from this word, referring to a discipline of Christian study focused on knowing the truth of the Gospel so we can defend the faith, play defense when the culture around us is hostile. These chapters will be important, and the example of Paul helpful at a time when we as Christ-followers are finding ourselves in a culture that is growing more opposed to the church and Gospel. So we need to see that Paul is gracious and loving to his opponents, and the core message he makes in defense is to show the glory of Jesus as the only hope in life and death for these people.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Proverbs 8	Proverbs 9	Proverbs 10	Proverbs 11	Proverbs 12	Proverbs 13	Proverbs 14

Reading from this past week: Acts 21:27-22:21

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 22:22-23:10

Family Worship

Song - *His Mercy is More*

<https://youtu.be/l1GiZL60c80>

Gospel Project

Unit: The People Return

Story: The People Rebuilt the Temple

Big Picture Question: Can God be trusted?

Answer: Yes, God cannot lie or ever be wrong, so we can trust whatever He has said.

Scripture: Ezra 2-6

New City Catechism

Question #3: How many persons are there in God?

Answer: There are three persons in one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Verse: 2 Corinthians 13:14

Scripture

Acts 21:1-27-22:21

- Do you believe it is getting easier or more difficult for people to share and live out their faith in our culture? Why?
- How does Paul demonstrate his respect and even love for both the Roman ruler and Jewish people in this story?
- When Paul has a chance to defend himself against the charges being made, what is his basic message? Why is this helpful for us?
- How does Paul use his story to point people to their only hope in the Gospel?

Prayer

*Pray for the issue of racism and favoritism in our nation and in the church.

*Pray that we would be people of courageous conviction when we face opposition and hostility in the culture.