
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R2L: Maintaining a Positive Testimony in the Midst of Negativity

(Acts 21:27-36 -- Part 1 - The Attack)

27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. 31 While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. 34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; 36 for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

Some of you may be familiar with the expression, “No good deed goes unpunished.” What we mean by this is that beneficial actions often go unappreciated or are met with outright hostility. Or, if they are appreciated, they often lead to additional demands or requests. If you have ever done anything good for another, then you have probably experienced this very thing, shocked at the response of others for something you did with the best of intentions.

How do you respond to such responses? I suspect that at times you are taken aback; offended, hurt and sometimes you might even vow to never do something like that again. But these are not biblical responses. As we read in 1 Peter 3:17, **“For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”** Inherent in that verse is this very idea; that there will be times in a person’s life when he or she will suffer for doing the right thing. God knows and God will take care of it.

As we come to Acts 21:27-36, we find Paul about to suffer for having done the right thing; actually a number of right things. And even though he will be misrepresented; mistreated and ultimately arrested (yes, arrested for doing good); Paul nevertheless maintains a Christ-like demeanor. He maintains a positive testimony in the midst of negativity. In Acts 21:26 all the way through Acts 22:20 we see how Paul handles being arrested, giving his apology or defense and finally we see his attitude through it all. We find a Christian who continues to do good, even to those who do him harm. This is one of the lessons we glean from this whole account.

Let me remind you that Paul had returned to Jerusalem, and after he rejoiced with the Jerusalem church concerning the work of God among the Gentiles, the elders told him that the Jews in Jerusalem were saying that he had taught all people hate the Jews, to abandon the teaching of Moses and the traditions of Israel. What Paul had actually taught was that the Ceremonial Law – things like what foods to eat and what clothes to wear – have no bearing on salvation; that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from the works of the Law.

And so, the elders recommended that Paul put aside his Christian liberty and purify himself according to the Law before he entered the temple, to pay for the shaving of four men who had

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taken a Nazarite vow, and to pay for the sacrifices that they needed to offer. The point to be made was to show that Law was not irrelevant and to be abandoned, but that it just was not that which brought salvation.

Paul agreed with the plan knowing that if the Jews would be upset about his not keeping this Ceremonial Law, they would in no wise be inclined to listen to him about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, in order to have the opportunity to win some to Christ by preaching the gospel to them, he kept the Ceremonial Law. He began and completed a weeklong period of purification. That should settle the issue. That good deed should be received and rewarded by listening ears, right? But, as the saying goes, “No good deed goes unpunished.” Let us see what happens, two scenes that lead to Paul’s arrest.

I. **Scene One: the Accusations (Acts 21:27-30)**

Paul was purifying himself according to the Ceremonial Law so the Jews would not have a bias against him, and so they would hear him explain why Jesus is the long-awaited Savior. But while he was going through the purification process – when it was almost finished – some of the Jews from Asia – that is what we call Turkey – very possibly Jews from Ephesus, where the riots had been – these Jews followed Paul all the way to Jerusalem, and when they found him, they started crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid!” (21:28).

The Jews from Asia got a crowd together and started to rile them up: ***“This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” (21:28).***

Here we find at least four accusations made against Paul. Four accusations that were gross misrepresentations of the truth”. The **first** accusation was that Paul was against “our people” – that is against Israel. They accused Paul of being anti-Semitic. Can you believe it? The date of this event is around 59 AD. Just three years before, in 56 AD, while in Corinth, Paul wrote a letter to the saints at Rome. Listen to what Paul wrote to the largely Gentile congregation...

Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

And even before this, in Romans 9:1-5, Paul poured out his heart regarding his brethren according to the flesh, fellow Jews, saying...

1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Was Paul against the people of Israel? No. That was a fabricated accusation meant to incite Jews against Paul. The **second** accusation there in verse 28 was that Paul was against the

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Law of God? Again, looking at Paul’s attitude toward the Law, let us note again what he wrote to the saints at Rome. In Romans 7:7 he wrote...

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

Paul was grateful to the Law of God which revealed to him his own sin and thus his need of a Savior. Until people know they have violated God’s law and deserve punishment from Him, they will not be inclined to seek His forgiveness that comes by faith in what Jesus did on the cross.

The **third** charge there in verse 28 was that Paul was against the Temple and by implication, all the ceremonies and festivals held at the temple. Was this charge true? We have already noted in Acts how Paul longed to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost so that he could rejoice in a celebration that pointed toward Christ and His church. Remember back in Acts 20:16 where Luke recorded...

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

And then there was the charge of charges; the accusation of accusations; that Paul had brought “Greeks” (notice the plural, meaning more than one) non-Jews into the temple, defiling the holy place. Did Paul bring Gentiles into the area of the Temple that was only for the Jews? Earlier, Paul had been seen in Jerusalem with Trophimus, a Gentile Christian friend. According to verse 29 they either assumed that Paul brought him into the court of the Jews or they manufactured the charge. Now Gentiles were permitted in the outer court designated for the Gentiles, but they were not permitted to enter the Court of the Jews. There was a four foot wall that was designed to keep all non-Jews out and all that wall were signs that read as follows; “*No Gentile shall enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple, and whoever is caught shall be responsible to himself for his subsequent death.*” The Romans even granted the Jewish authorities the right to *execute* anyone, including a Roman citizen, who crossed that barrier. According to verses 30-31, upon hearing these charges of gross disrespect for Judaism and the Temple, the whole city was enraged and rushed toward Paul. They seized him, dragged him out of the Temple and then began beating him, fully intending to kill him. Not a good day for Paul who had sought to win the hearts of the Jews by participating in Jewish ceremony of a Nazarite vow. The Jews sought to only see Paul as preferring Gentiles over his own heritage and countrymen.

Now, if you would allow me to make an observation that I believe is worthy noting; even as the early church confessed that Jews and Gentiles were one body in Christ, at this point, the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem still tended to worship in the Temple, thus leaving the Gentile Christians out; the church was divided between Jews and Gentiles.

This is not how Christ intended it to be. One spectacular event that occurred at the death of Christ on the cross was that “*the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...*” (Matthew 27:51). The Holy of holies, the once guarded and protected dwelling place of God which no one was allowed to see except for the High Priest, and him just once a year, was now

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exposed and opened to all who would come. This was the confession of the Church. In Colossians 3:11 we read, “...**there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.**” And in Paul’s earliest written letter, the letter to the Galatians, we read, “**There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:28). Beloved, we need to remember that everyone who has believed upon the person and work of Jesus Christ are made one with Him. As a side note, God would take care of this artificial division of Jew and Gentile, of removing from the Jewish Christians this pull toward the Temple when in 70 A.D. He sent Titus and the Roman army to destroy it. Ever since that time, temple worship and sacrifices have been done away.

And yet Christians even today still struggle with show preference or partiality to some in a congregation while neglecting others. James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus, leader in the early church, and author of the earliest written New Testament letter that bears his name wrote this in James 2:1-4...

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

Let me tell you that one of the primary strategies of our enemy, the devil, is to splinter the church, even a local congregation, up into groups. Let us never forget that God has called us first and foremost to be one body, the people of God. We are called by God to gather to worship God together. As we gather for worship, we are not called to separate or give preference to people because of wealth, age, youth, poverty, race, language, or upbringing. The devil is the author of confusion, the concocter of chaos who is constantly working to separate us and getting us to work against one another.

But, back to the Temple scene: Jews from Asia, most likely from Ephesus, made these false accusations against Paul, accusations that if true, would have caused to the people to react exactly as we see in our text, with rushed violence. They had no idea if the charges were true; they did not seek wisdom or discernment, but dragged Paul out of the Temple and immediately the Temple police closed the gates; a symbolic gesture demonstrating how they were separating Paul from God. This leads us to the second scene...

II. Scene Two: the Assault (21:30-36)

In verse 30 we see the mob mentality take over and in verse 31 we see the intensity of their intent as “**they were seeking to kill him...**” Because of the frenzied rhetoric of a handful of out-of-towners, these people were ready to kill Paul. According to the end of verse 32, they were already physically beating Paul. Remember, the crowd really didn’t even know for sure what Paul had done, but they were sure that God must be angry at him and thus felt it their civic duty to carry out God’s vengeance upon him. They were sure God was on their side.

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And so, the Jews dragged Paul out of the Temple intending to kill him for his supposed heresy and blasphemy. Then, by the good providence of God, word of this incident got to the commander of the Roman cohort, a man identified by Paul in Acts 23:26 as Claudius Lysias. He was the captain of one thousand men and he ordered his soldiers to take charge of this riot, this cacophony of chaos.

According to verse 33, as soon as the crowd saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Now notice something here. How did these soldiers secure Paul? They, **“took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains...”** Is this not exactly what the prophet Agabus foretold would happen just back in Acts 21:10? This commander, being more emotionally detached and reasonable, began asking about Paul and what he had done. In verse 34, the chaos continues with everyone shouting at once; and notice they were not all saying the same thing, **“some were shouting one thing and some another...”** all making different accusations. It was utter confusion and the work of the enemy, the devil to discourage Paul and destroy the Church.

There is a remarkable parallel with what happened here to Paul and another Jew who was punished for seeking to good for His people. Of course I am speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had been scourged by Pilate, and Pilate brought Him before the crowd, declaring that he found no reason to hold Jesus, that Jesus was not guilty of anything. But remember that some Jewish leaders stirred up the crowd, getting them to scream and make all sorts of accusations until finally Pilate gave them a choice between crucifying the terrorist, Barabbas or the King of the Jews, Jesus. The crowd begged for Barabbas’ release and for Jesus to be put to death.

Our enemy the devil thrives in negativity and confusion. One of the **“schemes of the devil”** (Ephesians 6:10) is to get us into situations that distract us from what we should be doing; to lead us to jump to conclusions about others, and to get us to do things that we should not be doing.

According to verse 34, the commander could not get to the facts because the riot was now an **“uproar”** – out of control. The only thing the commander could do was to take Paul away quickly, bringing him to the barracks where he could be safely protected from the riotous crowd until the truth of the matter was determined. But even as they made their way up the steps to the barracks, the crowd was still in its furious frenzy, like rabid dogs seeking to tear Paul apart. Even as Paul was removed from the crowd, they still chanted, “Away with him!” Again, this was not a good day for Paul. Having sought to do what was good and right so that he might share the truth of the gospel, Paul was met with anger and violence. This was the negativity that Paul was thrust into.

How would you respond to such hatred, violence and misrepresentation? We will see over the next couple of messages how Paul responds, but for today, let me remind you that our enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. According to Jesus, the devil is “the father of lies” (John 8:44) and he uses lies and mistruths as a means to bring disorder, chaos and confusion into our lives. Now, I am not saying that every difficulty we run into is a work of the devil. I don’t want to hear our students say, “I don’t get this math, it’s too difficult, and it must be the work of the devil.” That is not what we are talking about here. The negativity and chaos the devil seeks to introduce is a confusion of knowing the difference between what is true and what is false; what is good and what is evil; what is God’s will and what God’s will is not. His scheme is to make us doubt the reality and dependability of God and His promises. The devil’s

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scheme is to introduce just a *little* lie, something with just enough truth to be considered; but just enough falsehood to introduce doubt.

You all know the very first recorded words of the devil? In Genesis 3:1 we read: **“Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”** Using doubt, the devil sought to confuse the issue of God’s command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that which God had forbidden, changing the quote from God to say that God had not forbidden them to eat from every tree in the Garden. Here he planted the subtle suggestion to Eve that somehow God was hiding something, holding something back, being unfair, that there was something that God had not given her and Adam that they somehow deserved.

In Revelation 12:10, the devil is called **“the accuser of the brethren.”** These Jews from Asia were making false accusations against Paul. The implication is that the devil himself was behind the accusations: Rather than saying that the people of Israel have been rejected, Paul’s message was that because of his love for the people of Israel, he wanted them to see and understand that Jesus was their promised Messiah and the Savior for whom they had been so long awaiting. Rather than saying that people ought to reject God’s Law, Paul’s message was that ceremonial Law could do nothing to save them, but rather was meant to point them to their need of Jesus, the Messiah. Rather than saying that the Jews ought to forsake the Temple, Paul’s message had been that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system by becoming the perfect Lamb of God who would once for all take away the sin of all who believe in Jesus and that all who are saved are welcome in the presence of God regardless of their background.

Beloved, we need to remember that the devil will do everything he can to distract us, discourage us and throw us into confusion so that we might either water-down the gospel message or be afraid to speak the gospel message at all. One of the great schemes of the devil is to tweak the truth just enough to take the teeth out of it. We live in a culture that seeks to misrepresent Christians so that we are more distracted by the accusations rather than announcing the truth of the gospel. As we are misrepresented as uneducated, anti-scientific, homo-phobic and thus dangerous creatures, our response tends to be hurt, becoming emotionally defensive or to some degree ashamed and content with just trying to lay under the radar. But what ought we to do?

III. The Application

While we have not gotten to this in our text yet, we will learn that even in the midst of this negativity, Paul would purposely present the gospel as clearly and accurately as possible. Rather than shying away from being bold and clear, Paul would make known the person and work of Christ; the gospel.

Now, for the sake of encouragement and exhortation, let me ask you, “What is the gospel?” Let me remind you of the simple truth, that the Son of God came to earth in the person of Jesus. That this Jesus lived a perfect life according to the revealed will of God and that He died a perfect death, according to the revealed will of God, to be the only sufficient payment for our debt of sin; that this Jesus rose from the dead, has ascended back to the right hand of God, all according to the revealed will of God, the Scriptures. And all who believe on Jesus as the Son of God who has come to give eternal life to all who trust in what He has done will be saved. That, beloved, is the Gospel. We must keep it simple and clear.

Beloved, let us not assume that everyone knows this or believes it; declare it always. Now, we need to make opportunities to declare it. One of the best way to get people to listen to

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the message about Jesus is to be friendly and to be friends with them. We need to make friends with unbelievers, be they family, neighbors or co-workers. We need to love others and when people know you care; it will open many more doors of opportunity.

Beloved, as we gather to worship in times like this, we need to make sure, for the sake of our children, for the sake of any unbelievers who are with us today, and even for our own spiritual well-being that there is never any question by anyone who is with us that we worship Jesus Christ as our God and only Savior. Then as we leave this place, our lives out to be clear reflections of this truth, that we love, worship, know, and live for Jesus.

I read the story about a Thanksgiving evening service where the pastor asked people to come forward and publically declare what they were thankful for. The people came and offered their praises from some time. Then a man came up and began talking about the dangers of the New Age movement. The pastor stood up, stopped the man and then asked him to sit down or to leave. Why? Not because there are not real dangers in the New Age movement that need to be known; but rather because this man was bringing confusion into the worship. He was taking the congregation away from the worship and giving of thanks to God. There is a time and place for such information, but not as a congregation is purposely and specifically worshipping God. By doing such a thing, this man, whether knowingly or not, was doing the work of the devil.

The world, the devil and even our own flesh will respond with and because of negativity. Our goal is to keep focused and continue to proclaim Jesus and His Gospel. And even if we are misunderstood and suffer for the sake of Jesus, we are to keep on the positive message of Jesus and the gospel. It may be true in this world that no good deed goes unpunished, but according to the promise of God, those who endure to the end have the hope of salvation. As Jesus said in Mark 13:11-13...

11 When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 You will be hated by all because of My name, [a sea of negativity, is it not?] but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

Soli Deo Gloria

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