

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul's Sermon in Jerusalem

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At the end of Chapter 21, Paul's audience for this sermon had just tried to kill him, believing that he had profaned the temple by sneaking a Gentile in past the Court of the Gentiles.

Addressing the Mob; Paul's Upbringing ([22:1-5](#))

Brethren and fathers, hear: Paul began this defense before the Jews the same way that Stephen had: "Men and brethren and fathers, listen" (7:2). He is careful to lay the common ground between them by reminding them that he, too is a Jew, and an educated Jew who while from Tarsus, was brought up in part in Jerusalem. As we read earlier in Acts, Gamaliel was one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day (5:34).

Zealous toward God as you all are today: Paul reminds the crowd of his credentials as a persecutor of this Way, and the fervor with which he waged his campaign of persecution into Syria.

By this time Paul had been a Christian for more than twenty years, but he could still relate to those Jews who were not.

The Road to Damascus ([22:6-16](#))

Suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me: Paul was a driven, determined persecutor of Christians until that light from Heaven shone on him. It is as if Paul is saying: "I was just like all y'all, until I had a personal encounter with Jesus, and He changed me dramatically." (Paul was, I assume, from the southern side of Tarsus!)

I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting: Paul tells the crowd this important part of the story, to help them understand that although he thought he was opposing a wayward group of people, he came to understand that he was actually persecuting Jesus, God Himself, the (literally) Shining Lord of Glory.

Ananias, a devout man according to the law...: Paul notes that it was Ananias, a man with credentials as a good Jew who received him into the Christian family. In Paul's sermon, we see that both he and Ananias are both simply acting like good Jews. While God's direction to both men was hard for each to accept at first, they did not resist God, and did not deny their Jewish heritage.

Paul's First Visit to Jerusalem as a Christian ([22:17-21](#))

I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me: Paul recounts here an impressive vision of Jesus while in the temple, but he never referred to this vision in his epistles, and seems to mention it now only out of necessity. Paul's Christian life and faith were established on the bedrock of God's grace and truth, not emotional or even spiritual experiences, and it seems from his writings that he didn't like to discuss his spiritual experiences much.

Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles: When Paul was touched by God in Damascus, he was told then of his call to preach to the Gentiles (9:15), so the words from Jesus to him in the temple at Jerusalem were not new. However, we can see that in his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, it would have been easy for Paul to care so much for the conversion of "his" people -- Israel -- that he would want to concentrate on that. So Jesus gave him the reminder in the temple. So Paul makes it clear that it wasn't his idea to preach to the Gentiles; this was God's plan.

The Crowd Riots in Response to Paul's Message ([22:22-23](#))

And they listened to him until this word: The mob had already wanted to kill Paul, and now having listened to his whole sermon, erupted into rage over the utterance of one word. That one word was "Gentiles." The Jewish mob was incensed that God's salvation could be given freely to believing Gentiles. Paul seemed to have his audience's attention up until this point. They didn't seem to mind all his talk about Jesus, but could not stand the idea that God might save Jews and Gentiles alike and in the same way. The Jews of that day did not have a problem with Gentiles becoming Jews. But this crowd was obviously highly

offended at the notion of Gentiles becoming Christians just as Jews became Christians, because *that* implied that Jews and Gentiles were equal in God's sight, which is not how they have been raised and taught!

Do people today we still hang onto the idea that "good people" must be saved the same way "bad people" or "sinners" are? The Law is a great equalizer in terms of our guilt, but it's very human to grade the relative severity of sin. We must never seek a "gospel" that keeps "us" separate from the "riffraff" – we ARE the riffraff. Thank God that the unique, beautiful Gospel of Jesus Christ is a great equalizer of grace!

Paul in Roman Custody ([22:24-30](#))

The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks: It must have been a strange sight for the Roman commander. He saw Paul passionately address this huge crowd in a language he didn't know. He saw the crowd in rapt attention, until suddenly, they erupted into a riot.

Examined under scourging: It is suggested that Paul be beaten with a scourge. This was quite different from being beaten with a rod or a normal whip (which we know Paul had experienced from 2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Men sometimes died or were crippled for life after a scourging. To be examined under scourging may seem brutal, but was customary in that time – for people who were not Roman citizens, that is.

As they bound him with thongs: Paul's hands were tied with leather straps so his hands joined around a wooden pole and his back was totally exposed. He was ready for a brutal beating, one that would not stop until he had confessed to the crimes he was suspected of. And it's at that moment he announces his Roman citizenship.

Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman: When this became known, the reaction was immediate. It was a grievous wrong to even bind a Roman citizen without due process, and they had already violated Paul's rights by binding him in chapter 21. Therefore, the tribune (commander) was rightly afraid after he found out that Paul was a Citizen, because he had ordered the binding and so was responsible for that infraction.

With a large sum I obtained this citizenship: Roman citizenship could not be bought for a fee, but it could be obtained via a bribe. In any case, Paul's verbal claim to Roman citizenship was accepted at face value, as the penalty for making false claims of citizenship were exceedingly harsh, up to and including death.

Paul reveals that he was born a citizen; his parents (or grandparents) must have been awarded the rights of citizenship for some good done on behalf of Rome.

F. F. Bruce: *"How the citizenship was acquired by Paul's father or grandfather we have no means of knowing, but analogy would suggest that it was for valuable services rendered to a Roman general or administrator in the southeastern area of Asia Minor."*

It is notable that Paul was not at all typical; he was a very rare case of an educated, intelligent, devout Jew who was also a Roman citizen. Of course we know that God would leverage this unique background to use Paul in a special way (even as He wants to use your unique background to use you in a special way!)

He wanted to know for certain why he was accused: All in all, this Roman commander seems to be a fair and upstanding man. Though he is not acquainted with the dispute between Paul and the Jews, he does seem to want to reach a just resolution.

...Commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear: So now, Paul will get what he believes is a dramatic second chance. The opportunity to preach to the mob on the temple mount ended in another riot, but he will get to speak before the Sanhedrin (their council) the next day. The Sanhedrin was effectively the Jewish "congress"; Paul would have the opportunity to speak before this same group that he was once a member of! Acts 26:10 clearly says that Paul had a vote, meaning most likely that he himself was once a member of the Sanhedrin.

God had revealed a plan to Paul right at his conversion: *He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake* (9:15-16). Paul knew the general plan; but just like us, he didn't know how it would all work out. He had to trust God, just like you and I have to!