

2008-03-15

Acts 21: 27-36 Paul's Arrest

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Let's pray. "Father in Heaven, we've heard beautiful music today and had a touching scene as parents prayed with their children, and Lord, we are about to open Your Word, and we are praying for an outpouring of Your presence now. We pray that You would be the one who teaches us and instructs us from Your Word. You would inform our hearts, You would inspire us and You would change us Lord. We ask for miracles to take place, and we pray for this in Jesus name, Amen."

I've been reading the memoirs of President US Grant. He writes them when he is on his death bed basically. I don't know the entire story, but apparently, his family came into a tremendous misfortune financially. And his hopes were that the money from the book that he wrote would be enough to take care of his family after he passed away. And he even writes about that a little bit in the *Forward*. Is a fascinating tale, I've read it years ago and just decided to pick it up again. He writes about growing up in Ohio and how he ended up at West Point. And when he graduated how he was sent to the West to a fort near St. Louis. Short time after he was sent there, his company was sent South, and then into Texas. And the war broke out between the US and Mexico. It was in the late 1840's. And he writes about the experiences of riding across Texas, he and another officer and how they would gage the herds of buffalo and antelope by tens of miles, just solid animals all the way across. It's a fascinating account.

One of the stories that he tells about it's a particular battle that took place during the war with Mexico. And he was told to do something. He was a young lieutenant during this time. And he was given specific orders which he carried out. And when he was done, he was pretty well satisfied that he hadn't accomplished much. And he wrote about it this way, "My exploit was equal to that of the soldier who boasted that he had cut off the leg of one of the enemy. When asked why he did not cut off his head, he replied 'Someone had done that before.' This left no doubt in my mind but that the battle would have been won, just as it was, if I had not been there."

Have you ever said that, "If I had not been there?" If I had not been there! I would tell you this week, Eliot Spitzer, the former governor of New York, is saying that a lot. If only I had not been there, and all the ramifications associated with "there." And how it came crumbling in upon him, and now how does he look at his wife and those three daughters of his, and come up with any reasonable explanation? If I had only not been there! It happens to us in life from time to time, something we would all have said, something we should have said. Circumstances, they come crashing in upon us and we wonder, "O, if only I had not been there." It can happen to us out of innocence as well. We may do something wrong and have it happen; we may do something right and have it happen. And that's what I would like to study with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 21 as we continue our series through the Book of Acts. We are studying about the Apostle Paul and his arrest. Last week, we looked at the first part of chapter 21, this week we'll look at the later part. Actually, excuse me, I need to correct that. It was the middle part of chapter 21 last week. Verse 27, chapter 21 verse 27: "And when the seven days have almost ended, the Jews from Asia seeing him at 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 has also brought the Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And 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. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, 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 into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldier because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, '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 some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?' But Paul said, 'I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.'"

Paul, if you were here last week, as you know, he was going to sponsor four men in a special vow, which he did. He went into the temple area this arrest takes place on the seventh day. While Paul is in there, some Jews from Asia, probably from Ephesus, saw him. They knew him; Paul had dealings with them in the past. And there, at the temple area, these Jews cried out, "Men of Israel, help. Help us! This is the man, he speaks against us. He speaks against this place. He speaks against the temple, and he has brought Gentiles into the sanctuary." Well, there was a sign, and the sign was written in the number of languages. And there was a barrier and it said that if you are not of the nation of Israel, if you cross this barrier, you are responsible for your own death." The Jews would kill any Gentile that crossed that barrier. And the Romans would allow it. There would be no trial, there would be no court, there would be no appeals, you would be killed. The Romans accepted it, and the Jews practiced it. And it was assumed because Trophimus had been with Paul some other place in the city, that one of those four men maybe was a Greek or a Gentile.

So a riot takes place. They are beating Paul, trying to kill him, and there in the North-West corner of the sanctuary precinct is a large fortress called *Antonio*, and it is there where the soldiers live and they are already on high alert because it's the Pentecost season. And they know that thousands will be coming in from around the Mediterranean area, and it's always a time when these people get stirred up. And when you are a Roman, one thing you don't allow is a riot. And so the soldiers are on high alert, when they hear the screaming, and the hollering, and the beating that is taking place. Somebody says the whole city is in a riot, and the soldiers came down those stairs, came right down into the area near the temple, and they seized Paul. The only reason the crowd stopped beating Paul was that the soldiers arrived. In fact, when the

soldiers started to take Paul away, the crowd was so violent they had to carry him. And you almost picture them carrying him on their hands, above their heads to a stairway because the crowd was trying to beat him. Paul is arrested.

Now, while they take him to the stairway, ready to whisk him off back to the castle, it's called in some versions of the Bible, Paul says to the commander, "May I speak to you?" The commander is surprised that Paul can speak Greek. He assumes Paul is an Israelite who was from Egypt. Because they had had a problem not too much sooner than this, not too long ago, I should say. There was a man from Egypt who was Jewish, who stirred up according to Josephus, a historian, forty thousand sicarii. Now sicarii were assassins. These were dagger men they are called. They carry daggers in their cloaks and they would kill people. And these forty thousand men gathered with the Egyptian on the Mt of Olives, just east of the city. They could overlook the city and see the temple area off the Mt of Olives, and they were gathered there when the Egyptian had made the promise that God had told him that the walls are going to collapse in the city of Jerusalem. And when they do, they are to rush down of the hill and attack the Roman soldiers that were in the Antonio...

Excuse me... last week I had a beginnings of the flue, went home Saturday night, and I really didn't get out of bed until yesterday. It shifted to a cold now. I don't know if you've had a cycle like that? It kind of reminds me of a story I told at second service though. There was a man, he had this perennial cold, it just kept coming and coming and coming. He could never get rid of it. He kept going to the doctor, and the doctor told him, "Okay, I want you to stand in the shower, ice cold water, and then I want you to stand outside in the snow." And the man said, "If I do that, I'll catch pneumonia." The doctor said, "I know, I can cure pneumonia."

So anyways, Paul is talking to this leader of the army. And the guy is surprised because he assumes Paul is that Egyptian. Well, what happened in the insurrection, obviously the walls didn't fall down, the Romans heard about it and went up there on the Mt of Olives and slaughtered a lot of the Jews, but the Egyptian escaped. So he was thinking that maybe the crowd was upset because the Egyptian's prophecies didn't come through, and Paul was that Egyptian and it wasn't true. So he is surprised, "You speak Greek?" "Yes!" Paul tells him, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, a citizen of no average town."

Well, Paul asked the man for permission to speak to the people. Verse 40: "So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in Hebrew..." Now try to picture this. The whole town it said is in this uproar. These people are very tumultuous in their personality, very expressive. They've been trying to kill this guy. The soldiers drag him away, he is on the stairway, and Paul has permission now. So he signals them, he just kind of waves his hand like this, and the people stop. And there is dead silence. And Paul begins to speak to them in Hebrew. None of the soldiers would understand what Paul was saying, but all of the listeners, all of the Hebrew people would understand what Paul was saying.

And Paul tells a story. He tells a story of how he grew up Jewish. He was a Pharisee. He grew up very strict, very careful, very zealous for the law, how he was schooled in the best schools. His personal teacher was Gamaliel, and how he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the great scholastic school of Hallel. And how he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and how he had one approval of

the priests, "You can ask any of the priests, and they are the ones that would tell you. They gave me permission, and I went about arresting people who were Christians." And he went on describing the story how he was headed to Damascus, and how Jesus appear to him, and how Jesus arrested him the first time, you might say, and stopped him on his course.

Now, everyone listened carefully. Everyone was listening politely until we come to verse 21 of chapter 22. Please look at Acts 22, verse 21: "Then Jesus said to Paul..." alright, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles. And they listened to him 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 dust into the air..." so the riot began again. Everything was going smoothly until Paul mentioned the word, "Gentiles." Boom, explosion took place again. Now they take their outer garments, they are slapping them on the ground, taking dirt and throwing it up in the air, and they are hollering and screaming, they want this man dead. They want him to die.

So the soldiers drag him off to the castle. They take him into the barracks and we come to verse 24. And verse 24 is worthy of reading. It says, "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." Now this is the old-fashioned, low tech, lie detector machine. And the way that it worked, is they would seat a person on a bench. They would be seated with their legs out in front of them, kind of like it's going to be here on the piano. They would strap their legs down, then they would take a log, lay it across their stomach, tie their arms and pull them forward across that log so that their back, shoulders and arms were completely stretched as far as the body could go. In that position, that's when they would scourge them.

Now as you know, the scourge was about eighteen inch handle, and maybe twenty inches long with the leather straps, they would be intertwined with led and bone. And a man could hold it with two hands, and come down with a lot of force. Now, when that force would hit, skin and muscle, and sinew and tissue and whatever else is back there that was stretched like that, it would do optimum damage. This was how they did their lie detecting back then. Somebody that was arrested, they would beat him up a little bit, and they were convinced that they would then tell the truth. So that's were Paul is. And Paul is going to plead here for help. Verse 25, he says, "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?'"

Well the answer to that is, no, it is not lawful. Roman citizens held certain rights. That's why it was good to be a Roman citizen if you could be. You were not allowed to be beaten, scourged, or even tied up unless you had been to a trial. And if the judge said that needed to happen then it would happen. Otherwise, you are never even supposed to be bound. "When the centurion..." verse 26, "...heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, 'Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.'" Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" Paul said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." Then immediately those who were 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." Now he is afraid he is going to get in trouble because he had bound a Roman.

Well Paul will spend that night in jail. It says in verse 30: “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 priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.” This fellow, this military leader needs to know why Paul was so accosted by the crowd; he’s got to write a report. And he needs to know if he needs to send this to higher jurisdiction or what? So he wants to meet with the court there in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin. He tells them, you are going to meet. So they meet. The soldiers bring Paul to the Sanhedrin council. And here we read a very interesting account.

Chapter 23 verse 1: “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’” Paul is essentially saying, “I’ve served God the best I could all my life.” It doesn’t seem like a harmful statement, but it’s not taken well. Look at verse 2. “And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.” Now I will tell you, Paul is one of my heroes. He is one of my heroes for a number of reasons. And one of them is right here in this story. I don’t know if you’ve been in those debates with people about turning the other cheek and resisting evil, and what you are supposed to do, and all that type of stuff? But you know, it’s not really clear, it is a bit confusing. But I will tell you, common sense says, we need to strive for justice. And we ought not to be doormats and let people just stomp on us and be rude and crude to us.

You know, if a woman comes to Karen and me, and she is describing a husband who is rude and mean, and shoving her around, I say, “You don’t have to take that.” But the Bible says to turn the other cheek. It’s not talking about that. Is just not talking about that! If you want to know what it’s talking about, I’ll just, look – Jesus is talking to a people who are occupied by a foreign army. And that army was a rough bunch. And He is teaching them how to get along with them. “If that soldier smacks you across the cheek, don’t give him an obscene gesture, turn the other cheek quietly. It will stop the beating. If he tells you to carry his pack a mile, carry it two. You’ll take the hatred out of his heart.” I am telling you brothers and sisters, if the people had done that, their temple would not have been destroyed. But they garnered this hatred inside of them towards the occupying army so much, that ultimately, it broke out in the open war.

When you are being abused in life, Jesus is not telling you to turn the other cheek and just take it. That’s a different situation. If you have a question with it, please talk to me afterwards. I might not have the answer, but I’ll sympathize with you in your question. But here is why I like Paul. Here he is, he says: “I served God with a good conscience all my life to this day.” And he is ordered to be struck on the mouth. POW! He is slapped! Here is what Paul says. Paul says in verse 3: “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!” Now I like that. I can relate to that. What is he saying? You whited wall, or you whitewashed wall. He is saying, “You big hypocrite! You look like something you aren’t.”

Jesus used the phrase when he talked about our righteousness in the context of being religious and being righteous because we are religious. Jesus says, “That is like whitewashed tombs.” Looks good on the outside, but it’s full of death on the inside. And that’s all that we have to offer when it comes to righteousness. We might look good on the outside. After all, we have our church best on today. But inside, there is nothing but dead man’s bones. There is nothing

but death in our heart to offer to the Lord. And when He comes in, He turns it, cleansed it, and puts life there instead.

So Paul said: “God strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?” I just appreciate it that the man stands up for himself. He is not going to be shoved around. We are supposed to be following rules here. Well then what about this rule? Well, verse 4, “And those who stood by said, ‘Do you revile God’s high priest?’” And you can hear Paul swallow and under his breath say, “Oops.” Verse 5, “Paul said, ‘I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” In other words Paul is saying, “Had I realized that he was a high priest, I wouldn’t have said anything.”

He is very respectful. He is in control. He hasn’t lost it. He knows what’s going on. He is just not going to be bullied around and shoved around. I appreciate that so much about him. And it goes on in verse 6: “Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out. ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’” Paul saw the Sanhedrin council, noted the spirit, understood what was going on, realized this is going nowhere, and it’s going nowhere fast. He basically takes out a stick of dynamite and he lights it, and he throws it in the assembly, and the explosion is going to take place. He says, “I was arrested because I am a Pharisee and I believe in the resurrection of the dead, that’s why I am here.” O, now the explosion takes place.

Notice what happens, verse 7: “And when he said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection – and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.” Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.” Another night in jail! Another day in jail after that!

And Paul, you wonder, what he is thinking? You know, nothing is going well for him at this point. Things have really turned sour. He’s got to have some questions, some doubts and some confusion. He’s got to be wondering, ‘Is this it? Is this how his life ends?’ Is this how his ministry comes to a close? ‘This is it?’ He’s got to be wondering, ‘Should I have come to Jerusalem to begin with?’ All along the way, there were the warnings, “You are going to get arrested; you are going to get arrested!” ‘Did I discern the voice of God correctly or not? If only I had not been there, maybe I wouldn’t be here. Should I have sponsored those guys in order to appease the legalists? Maybe I shouldn’t have done that. Should I have brought those Gentiles with me? After all, what is their impression going to be now? Wow! What are they going to think of God’s people and how they act – throwing dirt around and acting crazy, and here I am supposed to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And what kind of impression is happening with the Romans towards God’s people?’ All these things, he’s got to be thinking.

He’s got to be wondering, you know, in this point in his life, he basically is alone. The church doesn’t know what to do with him. The Gentiles that he brought, there is nothing they can do for him; the Romans wonder what is going on; his own closest friends don’t understand him. He

is truly alone. He is truly alone. He's going to be asking himself, "If only I had not been there, down in the temple area, maybe I wouldn't be here." It's in that context that verse 11 of chapter 23 takes place. "But the following night..." He spent all day in jail. "...the following night, the Lord stood by him..." Those, my friends, are some of the most comforting words in all of the Bible. "The Lord stood by him! The Lord stood by him!" It doesn't mean the Spirit of God stood by him, even though He is Lord. It means Jesus Himself stood by him, stood right there, right by him.

"And the Lord said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.'" The Lord stood by him. Paul had done nothing wrong and he was suffering tremendously for it. And the good news is if that should ever happen to us, here you have it, right there in the Bible, the Lord will stand by you. The Lord will stand by you. But I have even better news for you. And that is, when your world is caving in because of things you have done, the Lord will still stand by you. He will not forsake you. He will not leave you. He will not cast you off. He will stand by you.

I met a man in the summer of 1977. He wasn't a very big man, about five foot seven, maybe a hundred and thirty pounds. He was a minister from out west. He was on his way to the mission field in Africa. He told me a story about the Lord standing by. He got a phone call one evening, and in that phone call, the person on the other line said that he needed to talk to an Adventist pastor and said he needed to meet with him personally. Could he meet him down at the parking lot? And the pastor didn't want to go. He could tell the fellow had been drinking, he didn't want to go. But the fellow insisted. So the pastor called his first Elder who had had a drinking problem in the past, and he said, "Can you go with me?" "Yes." So they went to this parking lot.

When they got there they saw this hawk of a man, six-five, two hundred forty pounds, huge, construction worker type guy, just this huge fellow. And he was very, very agitated and very, very upset. And he told the story to the pastor and to the elder. And he said how he had accepted Christ as a Savior some months before, but he tried to share Christ with his brother but he got discouraged. And so he went back into drinking alcohol, and he has done all kinds of manner of evil since then. And about the time that this fellow is talking to the pastor, his voice changes and it's obvious he's got a demon inside of him. Well the head elder got back in the car, and the pastor is standing there by himself. And there is quite an exchange. Ultimately, the pastor prays, and the demons out of the man. And so the pastor kneels down to the fellow and says, "Ask Jesus into your heart, ask Jesus into your heart." And the guy says, "I did that once," and immediately the voice of the devil was back.

And the pastor kept saying, "You got to keep Christ in your heart, man you can just do that once," and they quite an exchange back and forth. I'll not tell you all the details of it, but I will tell you this much. As it was coming to an end, this fellow, in frustration beat the windows of the vehicle in with his knuckles until he was just all blooded, and he picked up this pastor with one hand. He was holding him up just like this, fist thrown back, threw the pastor down, and the devil said through him, "I can't kill you, I can't kill you." And the devil said, "And you don't even know why." And the pastor is not saying a word. And the devil said, "Jesus is standing right next to you and He won't let me."

Brothers and sisters, the Lord stands by us. Many times in situations we don't know. I think we are most vulnerable when we are discouraged because of our sin. "If only, I had not been there. This all wouldn't be crashing in on me." The good news is this. As Jesus promised Paul, "You will testify for Me in Rome just as you testified for me in Jerusalem;" when you feel like you have failed God just something horribly, note that promise. It might not be Rome literally, but it certainly will ultimately be heaven. Because throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity we will share with whoever will listen, what Jesus did for us – how He saved us, how He pulled us out of these pits of despair that we find ourselves in, these difficulties, these things that have closed in on us and the destruction we may have brought upon ourselves. The Lord will deliver us out of them all. He'll cleanse our heart, and He'll give us hope.

And maybe, you are in the situation because of trying to serve God. He is with you. He is with you right now, standing by your side. You see, I don't know what's going on in your life but I do know this based on God's Word and the authority of God's Word. You are not alone in your life. The Lord is standing by. If you would like to say, "Thank you God for standing by. And I would like a deeper experience in You" if you would like to say that, then just stand.

"Father in Heaven, here we stand. Thank you that You are standing by us. Let us sense Your forgiveness and Your love. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."