

Introduction

1. One of the things we've seen throughout Acts is that Paul (and his companions) constantly faced injustice:
 - a. He suffered injustice at the hands of fellow Jews:
 - 1) They persecuted him and drove him out of the city at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:44-50)
 - 2) At Lystra, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium beat Paul, dragged him outside the city, and left him for dead (Acts 14:19)
 - 3) Later, at both Thessalonica and Berea, they again agitated the crowds and ran Paul and his companions out of the cities (Acts 17)
 - 4) At Corinth, they tried to get Paul arrested and tried by Gallio, the Roman proconsul (Acts 18:12-13)
 - 5) Most recently in Acts, the Jews seized him in the temple, dragged him outside and were attempting to kill him before the Roman commander intervened (Acts 21:28-31)—we'll see additional attempts by the Jews to assassinate Paul later in Acts
 - b. He also suffered injustice at the hands of Gentiles:
 - 1) At Iconium, the Gentiles tried to kill Paul after being worked up by the Jews (Acts 14:4-5)
 - 2) In Philippi, the Gentile fortune tellers dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace and had them arrested and thrown into prison on trumped up charges of throwing the city into confusion (Acts 16:19-21)
 - 3) At Ephesus, the Gentile tradesmen and idol makers actually caused a riot and dragged two of Paul's traveling companions into the theatre (Acts 19:28ff)
 - c. He even suffered injustice at the hands of government officials:
 - 1) The chief magistrates in Philippi stripped Paul and Barnabas naked and had them beaten with rods before throwing them into prison, all without a trial (Acts 16:22-24)
 - 2) And, in an ironic twist, in Jerusalem in last week's passage Paul was the one arrested and bound with chains after the Jews dragged him out of the temple and tried to kill him! (Acts 21:33)
2. Paul and his companions were not alone:
 - a. Jesus obviously faced injustice...to the point of death
 - b. Peter, John, and the other Apostles were threatened, arrested, imprisoned, and flogged by Jewish officials, including the high priest (Acts 4-5)
 - c. Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:54ff)
 - d. Thousands of saints in the early Church were run out of Jerusalem by Saul, with some chased down, arrested, imprisoned, and even put to death for their faith
3. As much of a downer as it is to talk about persecution as often as we have throughout our study of Acts, it's necessary; God would not have included it in the Word if it wasn't
4. With that said, what I want to focus on today is not the persecution itself but what our response to it should be:
 - a. We're going to look at three responses Paul had to persecution

- b. One comes in Acts 22:22-29 which is our main passage for today, but I'm going to save that one for last
- c. The other two responses are found in passages we've already studied, and I want to begin with those

A. Paul's first response was that he did not allow fear or the threat of persecution to deter him from his mission (various):

1. You will remember that when Paul began his journey to Jerusalem, he was aware that he would face persecution there (READ Acts 20:22-23):
 - a. He didn't know the specific details yet
 - b. However, the Holy Spirit testified to him that he would face "bonds and afflictions" in every city
 - c. So, he faced such things as a pattern (something which we have seen throughout Acts) and he was certain he would face them at Jerusalem
2. You will also remember that when Paul arrived at Caesarea, he was specifically warned about the dangers he faced in Jerusalem by a prophet named Agabus (READ 21:8-11):
 - a. More information was revealed to Paul at this point
 - b. The Jews at Jerusalem would bind him and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles—in other words, they would have him arrested and handed over to the Romans for prosecution
3. However, none of this deterred Paul from going to Jerusalem:
 - a. Paul was willing to risk his life for the sake of finishing the ministry he received from the Lord (READ 20:24)
 - b. He was willing to go to prison, even die, for Jesus (READ 21:12-14)
4. Takeaway: like Paul, we must not allow fear or the threat of persecution to deter us from the mission Jesus gave us:
 - a. Unfortunately, many Christians and churches have been deterred
 - b. Some have compromised on doctrine and practice in an attempt to appease the world, thinking it will make them more attractive to the world and avoid persecution
 - c. Others have simply chosen to avoid certain topics or activities for the same reason
 - d. But neither Jesus or Paul did that; they didn't allow persecution to deter them from their missions and neither should we

B. Paul's second response was to turn most situations—even persecution—into opportunities to advance the Gospel

1. We saw him do this in the Jewish synagogues, in the marketplace while making tents, in the Greek school of Tyrannus in Corinth, and even before the city council in the Areopagus in Athens—he faced persecution in many of these
2. Then, over the past two weeks, we saw how he took a dire life-threatening situation and turned it into an opportunity to share his personal story of how he became a disciple of Jesus Christ:
 - a. When he first arrived in Jerusalem, and delivered the great news about what God had been doing through him among the Gentiles, he learned of the false claims the Jews had made against him (READ 21:20-21)

- b. When he tried to counter these false accusations by participating in a purification ceremony at the temple at James request, the Jews attacked him, dragged him out of the temple, and attempted to kill him before he was rescued by a Roman commander
 - c. In an ironic and unjust turn of events, the commander arrested Paul instead of the mob, bound him in chains, and ordered that he be taken to the barracks
 - d. One would think that the only thing going through Paul’s mind at this moment would be the overwhelming sense of relief for being rescued from the angry mob
 - e. However, what we see instead is Paul begging the commander for an opportunity to address the mob and then sharing his personal story of conversion to Jesus:
 - 1) He first revealed his former misguided zeal for God
 - 2) He went on to describe his personal encounter with the risen Jesus
 - 3) From there he established the essence of his calling—that God appointed him to witness to men everything that he saw and heard about Jesus
 - 4) Finally, he declared that his ministry among the Gentiles was specifically given to him by Jesus and he was operating under His divine authority (READ 22:18-21)
3. Takeaway: persecution often provides an opportunity for the Gospel:
- a. No one wants to experience persecution, and it’s reasonable to want to avoid it or flee when we face it
 - b. In fact, there were times when Paul decided to flee persecution (e.g. when he and Barnabas fled Iconium when the Jews tried to stone them; Acts 14:5-6)
 - c. But, there were other times like this one in Jerusalem when Paul took advantage of the persecution as an opportunity to further the Gospel
 - d. I am certain that persecution here in the U.S. will continue to grow and we need to make a decision: are we simply going to try to avoid it or are we going to look for ways to further the Gospel in the face of it?

C. Paul’s third response was to exercise his legal rights as a Roman citizen
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- 1. This takes us to our passage today and it’s this last statement—Paul’s claim that Jesus commanded him to go to the Gentiles—that caused the Jews to become even more enraged (READ 22:21-24):
 - a. Up until this last statement the Jewish mob seems to have settled down to some degree and was listening to Paul
 - b. It wasn’t until he mentioned his God-given mission to the Gentiles that they once again became enraged:
 - 1) They began shouting that he had no right to live: **“Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!”**
 - 2) They started throwing dust in the air, and even tore off their cloaks in preparation to kill him
 - c. What was it about Paul’s comments regarding the Gentiles that was so offensive?
 - 1) We know from Peter’s words in Acts 10:28 that Jewish tradition taught that it was unlawful for Jews to associate with or visit with Gentiles (presumably in their homes)
 - 2) However, they did not believe that Gentiles could not worship God:
 - a) We know this partly because there was a large court for Gentiles surrounding the temple; they just weren’t permitted within the inner courts or the temple itself

- b) We also know from history that there were a large number of Jewish proselytes in the 1st century
 - c) The Jews appear to have been open, maybe even welcoming to some degree, to Gentile converts, but only as long as they adopted the Jewish communal practices and moral laws (but not necessarily all of the ritual laws)
 - d) Equally as important, though, is that they didn't believe it was their purpose or mission to convert Gentiles
 - e) So, it was fine if Gentiles wanted to become worshippers of God all on their own, but it was a whole different matter to go out proselytizing and trying to convert Gentiles
- 3) They were already convinced that Paul was teaching Jews to forsake Moses and the Law, preaching against the Jews, and defiling the temple:
- a) But the claim that God had actually sent Paul on a mission to convert Gentiles was TOO much!
 - b) What's interesting is that Jesus received a similar reaction when He mentioned something similar (READ Luke 4:24-30):
 - Jesus shares that God sent Elijah to the Gentile Zarephath in the land of Sidon during the famine but not to Israel, and that God healed Naaman the Syrian but none of the lepers in Israel
 - This enrages the Jews in the synagogues so much that they drove Jesus out of the city
2. Seeing the rage, the commander intervened and ordered that Paul be brought back to the barracks to be interrogated (READ 23-24):
- a. The phrase “**examined by scourging**” means that Paul was going to be brutally tortured with a Roman scourge (straps of leather imbedded with glass, metal and bits of rock designed to tear flesh off the body)
 - b. The commander's purpose was to “**find out the reason**” why the Jews were so enraged with Paul
 - c. This wasn't an honest inquiry to get to the truth; it was torture designed to elicit some kind of a confession
3. At this point we see Paul's third response: he exercised his rights as a Roman citizen (READ 25-29):
- a. To understand what's happening here there are a few things we need to know:
 - 1) Roman citizens had rights that non-citizens did not, and only 5-10% of the people in the Roman empire were actually Roman citizens
 - 2) These rights included:
 - a) Roman citizens could not be jailed, beaten, or scourged without being found guilty by trial
 - b) They had the right to be tried before the emperor rather than a local court
 - c) And they could not be executed by crucifixion
 - b. Paul had been arrested, bound with chains, and was about to be scourged all without a trial; he knew his rights as a Roman citizen, and they had clearly been violated:

- 1) So, as he is being stretched out and bound between two posts, he poses a rhetorical question to the centurion: **“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”** (22:25)
 - 2) The obvious answer was, **“No, it is not lawful”** and the centurions who were about to torture him and the commander knew this
 - 3) Their reactions also indicate they knew something else: the penalty for violating a Roman citizen’s rights in this manner was execution, even for Roman officials (RE-READ 22:29)
 - 4) We saw something similar from the city magistrates in Philippi when they arrested, beat, and imprisoned Paul and Barnabas; when they learned they were Roman citizens they apologized profusely and repeatedly begged Paul and Barnabas to leave the city (Acts 16:35-40)
4. Takeaway: God has afforded us with certain Constitutional and legal rights as citizens of the United States and we shouldn’t hesitate to take full advantage of those rights to defend ourselves from persecution:
- a. Paul not only exercised his rights, but even called out the city magistrates for violating his and Barnabas’ rights (Acts 16:37)
 - b. He continued to exercise his rights, even appealing to be tried in Caesar’s court
 - c. While there are times when we should voluntarily choose not to exercise certain rights (e.g. suing believers), when it comes to defending ourselves from persecution God doesn’t expect that we simply lay down and play the martyr
 - d. In fact, exercising those rights can often serves as an opportunity for the Gospel (e.g. the testimony of the many Christian business owners who have been sued)

West LaFayette Indiana City Council’s proposal of Ordinance 31-21: specifically designed to target Faith Biblical Counseling Ministry, the largest Biblical counseling ministry in the nation. If passed, the ordinance will make it illegal for pastors, counselors, and others to discuss what the Bible says about human sexuality with minors during counseling sessions and threatens fines of up to \$1000 per day per incident. Faith’s Christlike response to those proposing this ordinance, as well as fighting it legally, has provided opportunities to witness.