***Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - No. 2
Romans 15:30-33
RO191-01***

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**Paul's Need For Prayer Support**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 15:30-33. Our subject is Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - Segment Number 2. As the apostle Paul closes the formal part of this letter to the Christians in Rome, he makes an appeal to them for their prayers. He asks that they join him in the strenuous ministry of prayer to God. Paul wants the Roman Christians to become partners with him through prayer, in fact, in the very ministry of the apostle Paul. This, for them, would be a means of earning rewards in Heaven. Any time you pray for the work of the Lord, for the work of the ministry of another believer, you have in fact shared in the divine good accomplishments, and you will share in God's recognition of blessings at the Judgment Seat of Christ for that.

**Paul Asks Prayer for Safety From Unsaved Jews**

Paul appeals for their prayer support on the basis of their mutual relationship to Jesus Christ, and because of the love which the Holy Spirit has created in them for Paul and for God's work. Paul knew very well that genuine Christian service is the product of God responding to the prayers of believers. Paul asks the believers in Rome to pray specifically for his mission to Jerusalem in delivering the Jerusalem relief fund, which he has gathered from the Gentile churches. Paul asks prayer for his personal safety from the unsaved Jews in Jerusalem who hate him for preaching that Jesus Christ is the Messiah Savior of Israel. Paul calls these unsaved Jews "the disobedient ones," because they have rejected the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The unsaved Jews of Jerusalem were, in fact, enraged by Paul's teaching of free grace salvation apart from the keeping of the rituals of the Mosaic Law. These Jews, in fact, falsely accused Paul of defaming their nation and telling Jews not to practice the customs of Judaism, which they had inherited from the Mosaic Law. That was not true. Paul never discouraged the Jews from practicing their traditions.

**Examples of Man Silencing God's Communicators**

Paul had learned, however, from past experience that these spiritually blinded unsaved Jews would not hesitate to kill him if they could. Paul knew that this was the historic way that rebellious Jews treated the messengers of God which were sent to them. If they didn't like what the messenger was saying, even though he was God's spokesman, they dealt with it by killing him. We have several examples of that from the past history of the Jewish people.

For example, 2 Chronicles 36 is one example. In 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, "And the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;" God, because He is a God of great love, repeatedly sent information through the prophets to the Jewish people, warning them, instructing them, alerting them. What was their response? 2 Chronicles 36:16, "but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy." The Jews foolishly thought that they could continue doing this with impunity. The result was they didn't think that God would ever finally come and drop the ax on them, which is exactly what he has done and which is why they are where they are today.

God informs His people. But when you turn your back and thumb your nose at what He tells you, the time will come when you have cause to regret that deeply. For the Jews, everything kept spinning along. They had a good life. They were prosperous. They were achieving their own personal goals in life. They just didn't think that there was any problem with what they were doing to God's messengers. You cannot ignore the Word of God and think that you are going to get away with it. You'll not get away with it in this life. You certainly are not going to get away with it when you stand in His presence to be judged for what you did with your life.

Another example of this historic attitude of the Jews to silencing the messengers of God was found in Isaiah 30:9-11. Isaiah says, "For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD; Who say to the seers, [the seers, those who saw visions from God,] 'You must not see visions.' [We don't want you to see what God is letting you see.] And to the prophets, 'you must not prophesy to us what is right. [Can you imagine that? That's crazy to say to a spokesman from God, "I don't want you to tell me what God has said."] Speak to us pleasant words; prophesy illusions.'" This is a historical fact. These people said, 'just tell us nice things.'

Many years ago, I had a lady say, about the second year I was here in Berean Church, the first or second year, 'I don't want to come to Berean Church anymore because when I come, I hear all kinds of problems and burdens and I have plenty of my own. And I don't want to hear about things like that. I'd rather hear about noncontroversial things.' She's a nothing today.

These people said, 'tell us nice things. In fact, just prophesy illusions, things that aren't even true. Just make us feel good. If you do, we'll come back to your service.' Isaiah 30:11, "'Get out of the way, turn aside from the path. Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.'" That's a chilling thing to read, 'Get out of our way. You're standing in the way of our ambitions and the way of the things we want to do. Don't be telling us any more about God and what He wants you to do and what He has to say.'

In Jeremiah 11, another example of the Jews historic attitude toward silencing their communicators. Jeremiah 11:21, "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the man of Anathoth, who seek your life, saying, 'Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, that you might not die at our hand.'" Here, Jeremiah, who is called 'the Weeping Prophet,' because he shed so many tears over the obstinacy of the Jewish people in the face of enormous blessing and enlightenment, and these people come to him, their prophet, (And they know he is God's spokesman, there is no question about that.) they come to him and they said, 'Now, we're going to tell you once and for all Jeremiah, you button up about these prophecies you're making about our imminent destruction as a nation. You stop talking like that or we're going to kill you.' Now what's the preacher to do?

Jeremiah was not silenced, but he paid an enormous price because they finally threw him into a prison. They finally threw him into a deep pit, a slimy hole creeping with animals. They said, 'See how you like this for a while, as long as you will not speak pleasant things to our ears.' Jeremiah 26:8, "And when Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, 'You must die.'" You see, he didn't listen to them. They gave him fair warning that if he did not stop telling them these unpleasant things that God was delivering to them, they would silence him. Now they proceed to do that.

Beginning at Jeremiah 26:11, "Then the priests and the prophets spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying, 'A death sentence for this man! For he has prophesied against this city as you have heard in your hearing.' [Jeremiah 26:12,] Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying, 'The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. [Jeremiah 26:13,] 'Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will change his mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you. [Jeremiah 26:14,] 'But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. [Jeremiah 26:15,] 'Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.'"

Hooray for Jeremiah, a tough and hardy soldier of the Lord, who in the face of earth could say, 'yes, it may cost me my life for me to perform my ministry for your good because of your hard necked obstinacy, but that's up to you. You kill me, I'm going to Heaven; and you will have all eternity to regret what you have done.

In the New Testament, the Lord Himself referred to this same characteristic of the Jewish people, we don't want to listen to the preacher who is an expository teacher who explains to us the Word of God. See, in the Old Testament, God spoke directly to the prophets in a variety of ways. They delivered the message and then the Lord said, 'Now write it down so they don't forget it.' Out of that, we secured our Old Testament Scriptures; the New Testament produced in the same way. Those who have followed the prophets of both the Old and New Testament, in the form of the evangelists and the pastor-teacher, are also prophets, but only in the sense that they reiterate, they explain, the completed prophetic delivery of the Old and New Testament prophets. Today, God does not give new revelation to anybody. Only the charismatics, and other nuts like them, claim to receive prophecies directly from God. All the prophetic revelation is now complete. Our job today is very similar to the job of the prophets of the Old Testament. We are now alerting people to the very same divine viewpoint, eternal truths that they must know.

In Luke 11:47, we read, Jesus said, "Woe to you!" Speaking to the Jewish lawyers and teachers and scribes, the Pharisees, He says, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. [Their fathers killed the prophets, and then they built memorials to them to honor them after what their fathers did to the men of God.][Continuing in Luke 11:48,] "Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. [Luke 11:49,] "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them the prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, [Luke 11:50,] "in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, [Luke 11:51,] "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation."

Paul says, "You people who are building memorials to the prophets that your very fathers have killed, instead of condemning your fathers, are in fact by that act becoming part of their murderous work. These people did just exactly that to the prophets. They were brutally cruel in the way they dealt with the prophets, in the way they put them to death.

In Acts 7:52-54, another illustration. Acts 7:52, "'Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have become; [Acts 7:53] "'you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.' [Acts 7:54,] "Now when they heard this, [this is Stephen speaking to the Jewish leaders, when they heard this condemnation of them and their fathers before them toward God's truth, when they heard this,] they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him." Luke 7:59, "And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' [Acts 7:60,] "And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep."

Here is one of the saddest examples of silencing a man of God with the truth of God. It is a terrible thing when the people of God will not listen to God's truth. One of the best ways for you to silence the voice of God to you is to stay home on Sunday morning and Sunday evening from these church services. Because I assure you, there is no entertainment services here. There's no inspiration about the events of the day or irrelevancies. You are hearing the explanation of the visions, the prophecies, the revelations of almighty God recorded in Scripture. You cannot subsist without it. You cannot have a life that is meaningful without it. And when you stay home, you silence the voice of God. If you do not have this information, you are at an enormous disadvantage.

Well, Hebrews 11 tells us how they killed these men. Tradition tells us that one of the kings of Israel took Isaiah and had him cut in half with a saw, a most cruel and brutal, torturous death. And they're doing this to God's communicators.

Well, we're not like that today. We're more enlightened. And in our day, everybody wants to hear what God has to say. No, it's not any better today. The last letter that the apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul gave him a little insight of how things are going to be toward those who want to be teachers of doctrine in the Christian community in the last days before the Lord returns. 2 Timothy 4:3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; [2 Timothy 4:4,] "and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths." Paul says, 'in the last days, believe it or not, Christians are going to go for the emotional, inspirational pop Christianity and they're going to abandon the in-depth doctrinal teaching churches.' That is what has happened in our day. And the most popular preachers, if you stop to think about it, in our day are indeed the emotional, inspirational pop Christianity type. They're the ones whose churches are flooded because people want entertainment. They want to have their itching ears scratched. They do not want to hear some of the serious and terrible things that God has to say to them.

Paul was a loyal, dedicated soldier of Jesus Christ who is ready to suffer for the Lord. And he knew that his life, because of Israel's historical treatment of God's communicator's, he knew that his life was in danger. However, he asked for their prayers because he was not eager to become a martyr. So he asked for their protection when he goes to Jerusalem against these unbelieving Jews. Paul's message was a simple one that proclaimed entrance into Heaven only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ apart from any human effort, but strictly as an accepted gift from the hand of God. He never compromised this truth for popular approval or popular support.

**The Apostle Paul - God's Man of Grace**

Now, the apostle Paul also was aware of the fact that he was under threat because he had some previews of what was in store for him. And I want to help you get a little feel of the apostle Paul as a real living human being like yourself. We think of him in some kind of wonderful way. We forget that he was flesh and bones, that he had to eat and he had to get up in the morning and he had to rest, and he had to take a bath, and he had to do all those things that human beings have to do, and that he had all the needs of life that human beings have, and he had to worry about taking care of all those things and within the limitations of the ancient world.

This morning, I want to help by going through some of the historical background of this particular point of Paul's life so that you will have a little greater appreciation for the great apostle of the grace of God, because somewhere down the line in a week or so, we are going to come to grips with a great challenge to the grace of God, which is now raging through the biblical Christian community, not out there in the liberal realm, but in the biblical Christian community. And it has to deal with what is saving faith. Christians in congregation after congregation are being torn apart by doubts concerning whether they are going to Heaven or not. Can you say, 'Yes, I know I'm going to Heaven? Whenever I check out and they carry me out feet first, I will already have advanced to the Gloryland.'? Can you say that without a shadow of a doubt, without a personal question in your mind? It all depends what you base that answer on, what you base that issue on. And a very serious misconception has been interjected through a very popular book. We'll be looking into that.

The apostle Paul was a great man of grace. The apostle Paul was the advocate of Free Grace Salvation: God does it all, you accept it or you reject it, and that's it. It doesn't matter how you lived before or after you're saved relative to salvation. It matters a lot how you live after you're saved relative to the discipline of God, to how you feel, to whether maybe you have an early death, to what God will do with you in terms of using your life, it matters that way. But salvation, what is it based on?

The apostle Paul had a great number of enemies and the things that the Jews hated him, not only the unbelieving Jews, but even the Christian Jews in Jerusalem were very uneasy with Paul. They heard about his free grace salvation teaching among the Gentiles. They heard that the Gentiles don't keep any of the Mosaic Law. They don't care about not working on Saturday. They don't circumcise their male children. They don't give to God on the basis of the Tithe. They don't have any altars; they don't have any festival days. They don't have anything. And Paul says, 'That's all right, folks. That doesn't apply to you. Those were shadows of a picture of God's performance for you. Christ has fulfilled all those shadows, all the symbols now turned into reality.' So, as Paul meditated upon this, this was a human being. The wonderful Book of Acts preserves for us some of those inner turmoils and concerns that Paul had.

**Paul Asks For Prayer**

In Acts 20, the apostle Paul, as he thought about this trip to Jerusalem, and God the Holy Spirit speaking to his mind, Paul had some bad vibrations. He had some bad signals that gave him some real concerns. Acts 20:22 Paul says, "And now, behold, bound in spirit, [That is compelled within my human spirit, that which is my point of communication with God, my spirit, and I am compelled before God on the one hand, to do this,] I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, [not specifically knowing what's going to happen, but he says, "It's not going to be good. I do know," Acts 20:23] "except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. [Acts 20 24,] "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel" of what, Lordship Salvation? No, of the gospel of grace salvation, Free Grace salvation. And Paul put his finger right on the thing for which he was hated, and for which you in this day will be hated by most Christians who believe that going into Heaven depends on what you do, not just on what God has done for you through Christ in atoning for your sins on the cross.

Now, Paul had a great love for the Jewish people, and in his human spirit, he was driven to take this Jewish relief fund to Jerusalem. Others among the Christians were saying, 'Paul, let the committee take the fund. You stay out of Jerusalem. God has revealed to us (because God was revealing things to prophets and Christian leaders directly in those days,) that it will not go well for you if you go to Jerusalem.' Paul says, 'But I am bound because of my love for the Jewish people. I must minister to them. And this offering gives me a chance to minister in a very distinct way.' He wanted to demonstrate, for example to the unbelieving Jews, what love and unity this offering represents between Gentile and Jewish believers. This was inconceivable. Jews who hated Gentiles as one would hate a mangy roaming wild dog, that Jews would accept Gentiles as equals in the family of God, this was unthinkable. Paul said, 'I want to take this offering. The unbelieving Jews will know that the famine has been relieved for the Christian Jews and they will know that it was provided by Gentile Christians.'

There was also, of course, a great deal of legalism among the Christian Jews in Jerusalem. They resented the freedoms in Christ from the Mosaic Law, which was practiced by Gentile Christians. So, Paul, knowing that these people were so slow to give up their religious rituals, their holy days, their classification of foods, their circumcision, and their attitude of excluding Gentiles from Divine favor, he hoped that the Jerusalem relief fund would open the hearts of the legalistic Christian Jews to grace orientation and at the same time be a signal to the unbelieving Jews of the power of the gospel of the grace of God.

**Paul's Warning From the Holy Spirit**

So, Paul was disturbed in his human spirit. Nevertheless, he felt driven to Jerusalem no matter what. However, he was realistic. He wasn't just imagining that he was going to have faith it would all turn out for the best. He knew that it probably wouldn't. This was indicated in the Acts 20:25 when he stopped off at Ephesus and he asked the pastor-teachers from all over the city of Ephesus, from the various house churches, to gather with him down at the dock of the ship there on the beach where they had knelt together to pray just before he left. Acts 20:25, Paul says, "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more." Paul knew that this was the last time he would meet with this particular group of Gentile believers. This was his last hurrah in Ephesus, he'd never come back again. And indeed, he did not. So, Paul had a warning, as God the Holy Spirit burdened his own human spirit, that serious consequences would follow from taking this offering to Jerusalem.

**Paul's Second Warning**

Enroute, when he arrived at the city of Tyre, he got a warning again. Acts 21:4, "And after looking up the disciples [in Tyre], we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem." 'Don't go! God has alerted us that serious consequences are awaiting you!' In Acts 21:5 it tells how they stood by Paul. He felt before God he had to do this. So, it says, [Acts 21:5] "And when it came about that our days there [in Tyre] were ended, [And they had to move on.] we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. [Acts 21:6,] "Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again." A very precious demonstration of Christian concern and Christian support for this man who had been the source of such great Church Age doctrines to them.

When he got to Caesarea, which is 62 miles from Jerusalem, almost there, he got another warning from one of God's prophets, a man named Agabus. Acts 21:10, "And as we were staying there [in Caesarea] for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. [Acts 21:11,] "And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."' [Acts 21:12,] "And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents begin begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. [Acts 21:13,] "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' [Acts 21:14,] And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done.'" They didn't think it was a good idea. But Paul was his own priest. Paul had to make this decision. He made it, and the other believers said, 'We still sustain you and back you. You can count on our support. Whatever happens, we commit you now to the will of God.'

**Paul Arrives In Jerusalem**

So, Paul covered the last 62 miles and arrived in Jerusalem. When he got to Jerusalem, he proceeded first of all to meet with the elders to deliver to them the famine relief fund. In Acts 21, we read about that in Acts 21:17-18, "And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. [18] And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present." James was the pastor of the leading church in Jerusalem. He was the leading pastor-teacher. There were many others along with him; and all of these men from these various house churches in Jerusalem, Christian groups, met with Paul and received the fund. It is at this point that the money was officially turned over to them.

Then Paul reports to them on his missionary work among the Gentiles, Acts 21:19. Acts 21:19, "And after he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." The elders themselves, who listen to this report, were of course delighted to hear about this. They glorify God. But then they proceeded to warn Paul about the antagonism that existed in Jerusalem toward him, both by unbelievers and even by Christian Jews, and about false reports about what he had been teaching the Gentiles. Acts 21:20, "And when they heard it [his report about his work among Gentiles,] they begin glorifying God; and they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law. [So that now there were thousands of Jewish Christians in the city of Jerusalem who were still hanging on to the lifestyle of Judaism. Acts 21:21,] "'and they have been told about you, that you were teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. [Acts 21:22,] "'What, then, what is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.'" Now, they brought up a legitimate problem. The elders said, 'we should tell you that you've got a bad reputation in this town, and that there's a lot of antagonism and they are going to know that you're here.

Now, the elders were very sincere. They wanted to keep Paul from, well, they were concerned for his life and wanted to preserve it from injury. They did want to open to him an avenue of ministry. So, they came up with an idea that they thought would do it, and they made a suggestion to him. They advised him to sponsor four poor men who were going to perform one of the Jewish ceremonies. One of the ways of expressing dedication to God was to take a vow in a certain respect, to perform a certain thing. And one of these vows was the Nazarite vow. They needed somebody to pay the expenses of the sacrifices which would be offered at the end of that period, about a seven-day period. So, they made a suggestion to Paul. Acts 21:23, "'Therefore, do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; [Acts 21:24,] "'take them and purify yourself along with them [perform part of the Mosaic ritual with them], and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.'" They said 'Paul perform an act of legalism. You go ahead and make these sacrifices. You become one of these fellows and show them, "Hey man, I'm one of the boys. I do the same things that you fellows do. I'm not antagonistic to the Jewish lifestyle."'

These Gentiles found no fault in the teachings of the apostle Paul to the Gentiles. They approved of what he had told them. They were not under the Mosaic Law. They only wanted them to do what they had decided in Acts 15 as the Gentiles should do. The Gentile Christians should be careful; they don't do certain things that are particularly offensive to the Jews. Acts 21:25 says, "'But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols [Don't eat meat that had once been on a idol's altar in offering.] and from blood [Don't eat anything from which the blood has not been drained.] and from what is strangled [No blood is drained from any animal that's been strangled. That's contaminated meat, to eat that.] and from fornication.'" These things are particularly offensive to the Jews and therefore should not be done for moral reasons and for dietary law, sanitary reasons. So, they had no objection to Paul teaching the Jews, but beyond these limited areas of respect for Jewish opinion, they were on their own.

Well, I think, unfortunately, and there's some debate about this, but I think, unfortunately, the apostle Paul took some bad advice here and agreed to do this. Acts 21:26.

By the way, you see why we ask you to bring your Bibles to church. If you don't have a Bible, you're stuck here this morning, because we're going to do a lot of reading and you should be able to follow this. Otherwise, you're going to go out and start quoting me and you know where that'll get you with your friends. I've already got some of your relatives down on me, me and Paul.

Acts 21:26, "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them." Paul took the vow and everybody said, 'Oh, you see, that's a bunch of scuttlebutt that we've been hearing about Paul, his antagonism toward the Jewish way of life. He's part of us. He's one of us.' And everybody became his friend. Nooooo!

Acts 21:27, "And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, [There were a lot of them there at this time from the provinces of Asia.] upon seeing him in the temple [And remember, Paul's ministry had been in Asia. These were the Jews who had come right up against Gentiles who refused to be under the Mosaic restrictions. These Jews were particularly hateful toward him! and upon seeing him in the temple,] begin to stir up all the multitudes and laid hands on him, [Acts 21:28,] "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 [That is, the temple.]; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.'" A lie, he didn't do that. It was not true, Paul would not have done such a thing to bring a Gentile into the areas that were forbidden for Gentiles; he would not have brought them beyond the Courts of the Gentiles.

**Paul Caught in a Riot**

Acts 21:29, "For they [Why did they say this? Well, they] had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul brought him out of the temple." They saw Paul walking with one of his Gentile friends and they made an assumption that he had taken them into the temple grounds. [Acts 21:30,] "And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut." So, Paul was seized and immediately his life was indeed in danger.

The riot became so bad, the mob so enraged, that the Roman soldiers, the authorities were alerted, and the Roman soldiers had to rush in to rescue Paul. Acts 21:31, "While they were seeking to kill him, [Now, you can put yourself in the place of this living, breathing human being, the apostle Paul, with these hands grabbing him, trying to snatch him, some wild Iranian-Arab-like mob that you've seen on TV, trying to snatch the life out of this man. This became scary now, and they were seeking to kill him.] a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

[Acts 21:32,] "And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions [officers], and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. [They knew that they could not do this, and particularly to a Roman citizen. Acts 21:33,] "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. [Acts 21:34,] "But among the crowd, some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. [Acts 21:35,] And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob." This thing became so bad that they could not even let Paul walk by himself. The soldiers had to surround him and they literally had to pick him up off his feet and carry him up the stairs into the barracks area to get him away from the mob.

Acts 21:36, "for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, 'Away with him!'" So, here they are up to the old tricks of their fathers. Here is a communicator of God's true truth; but I don't like it, I doubt it, I question it, and I don't just put it on the back burner and think it over, or I don't just leave it in the hands of God to work out, I'm going to silence the communicator. And the best way to silence him is to kill him. There they are, following in the traditions that we have already seen characterize the Jewish people: kill your preachers.

Acts 21:37, "And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, 'May I say something to you?' And he [That is, the commander,] said, 'Do you know Greek? [Acts 21:38,] "'Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?'" They'd already had somebody who created a riot in Jerusalem, an Egyptian who had let in a group of assassins. And the commander thought 'this guy has come back out of the desert.' When he heard him speak Greek, which Egyptians could not, he said, 'you must not be that particular criminal. You must be someone else.'

[Acts 21:39,] "But Paul said, 'I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.' [Acts 21:40,] And when he had given him permission, Paul standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect [That is in Aramaic.], saying." So, the apostle Paul is on the steps, surrounded by soldiers. The commander very graciously allows him to speak, hoping that this will settle this riot.

**Paul Tells His Salvation Story**

Paul proceeds to speak to this people and in Acts 22:1-20, you can read about his salvation experience, how he was struck to the ground, how he looked into the light that eventually for three days turned him blind. And in that light, he saw the unbelievable: the very Jesus that he said was a fraud, who was dead as a doornail, and whose body had been stolen by His own disciples so they could pretend that He'd been raised from the dead, he looked up into Heaven and there in glory light, (and he knew it was the glory of God,) he saw Jesus standing and speaking with him, asking him why he was doing what he was doing and the fruitlessness of fighting against the truth. And in that moment, the apostle Paul accepted Free Grace salvation and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Acts 22:10, his immediate response indicated that: he said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And he accepted Him as the Savior and as Deity because the word "Lord" meant "God." He was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians because it was a capital crime to say that Jesus was God and to worship Him and to pray to Him. Here, he immediately admits 'You are God and I call you Lord.'

He goes on to say how he was told to go into Damascus, how a man of God came to him, explained to him what was going to happen to him, baptized him, and then how he had to escape from the city in order to save his life and that he had been part of those who stood by while Steven was stoned to death for the very testimony that Paul now believes. Paul said, 'I stood there, I didn't throw any rocks, but I guarded the garments and the clothing of those who took off their outer-garments so they could be freer to heave those huge boulders to crush the life out of Stephen that they had thrown in the pit. But he says, 'God said to me, "I am going to send you to the Gentiles."' Paul was declared by God Himself to be His special agent to the Gentiles.

So, beginning in Acts 22:21, "And He said to me, [That is, the Lord Jesus.] 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" [Acts 22:22] "And they listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!'" What infuriated them? The fact that he said 'God Himself from Heaven told me that I am the special messenger to bring deliverance and salvation to the Gentiles so that they come into the family of God on equal footing with any Jew,' they could not tolerate that. They could not accept the fact that a Gentile was just as saved and had just as much privileges with God now, as did the Jews who had once been the leading and sole inheritors of that privilege, but who had turned their back upon it.

**Paul Before the Romans**

In Acts 22:23, "And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust in the air, [Acts 22:24] "the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way." Boy would this make a good movie. I wonder if Spielberg knows about this: these guys throwing their cloaks, throwing the dust in the air, stomping and screaming, and carrying on. Finally, the poor officer in charge says, 'Take this guy into the barracks, let's beat him up a little and give him the third degree, and see if we can find out what he's done.'

So, [Acts 22:25] "And when they stretched him out, [stretched his hands out] with thongs, [ready to beat his back and] Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, [I love this, the way it says. 'Tell me something, my good man.'] 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?'" 'What? What? What did you say? You're a Roman citizen?' That's bad enough. You can't ever beat a Roman citizen, and without trial? Ho, ho, ho!

[Acts 22:26] "And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.' [Acts 22:27] "And the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.' [Acts 22:28] "And the commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, ['Oh, really?'] 'But I was actually born a citizen.'" The commander had to buy his citizenship. Paul says, 'I was born a Roman citizen, I'm in a higher class than you are and you got me stretched here with thongs, ready to beat my back knowing the trouble you'll get into if you do that to a Roman citizen?' [Acts 22:29] "Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; [I love it!] and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains."

**Paul Before the Sanhedrin**

The next event was that Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin. The commander decided, 'OK, this is a religious question. I'm going to give you a chance. Talk to the ruling body, settle this as a religious question among the religious leaders.' You may read about this in Acts 22:30 on through Acts 23:9, Paul's meeting with the religious leaders. And the result of this is that Paul notices that half of them are Pharisees and half of them are Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body; they were the Old Testament fundamentalists. The Sadducees were the liberals, and they didn't believe that anybody would ever be raised from the dead.

So, Paul very cleverly says, 'You want to know why I'm here? I am here because I preach resurrection from the dead.' Of course, he meant unto eternal life through Jesus Christ. Well, the Sadducees pick that up and say, 'What do you mean?' The Pharisees say, 'You know very well what he means.' 'No, I don't.' 'Yes, you do.' And pretty soon the Pharisees and the Sadducees were at each other's throats. There was a riot in the Sanhedrin hall and in come the soldiers again.

Acts 23:10, "And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks." You can see poor Paul on one side, this will be a good scene. The Pharisees grab him on one side. The Sadducees pulling him: 'He's ours.' 'No, he's yours?' And this poor guy's getting his clothes torn. The commander says, 'Get him out of there. They're going to kill him just by arguing over to whom he belongs,' because now he created a theological discussion among them.

Well, this is a man, a human being who breathes, who lives, who has maximum integrity in God's service, a soldier of Jesus Christ on whose body are the marks of that service. And finally, he's all alone. They've got him away from the riot. He's now in protective custody. And I'm sure one of the thoughts that must have come to his mind, 'I'm never going to get to Rome. I'm never going to get to see those people. And if I don't get to Rome, I'm never going to be able to move on to Spain.'

**The Lord Assures Paul**

That night, Acts 23:11, the Lord appears to him. "But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.'" That was good news. What a comfortable night's rest he must have had. He knew that he had indeed made a very forceful testimony in Jerusalem. The Lord said, 'Be encouraged. You're going to get to Rome.' It's a good thing he didn't know how because it was a very painful procedure. But he got there.

Now you see what's happened. Paul has taken a Jewish vow; he's taken an act of legalism. And he intended to have a few days visit with the folks in Jerusalem, deliver the money, have some fellowship, do a little teaching, and hop on a boat and head for Rome. Indeed now, it didn't look like he was ever going to get there. Suddenly everything has come to a screeching halt and indeed, as it turned out, it would take four long years before he'd get to Rome. That's what that act of legalism cost him. That's what that act of turning away from the grace of God as a lifestyle cost him, four years of imprisonment, of lost freedom.

**Paul Saved Again**

But the trouble was not over here for him yet because they were bound and determined to kill him, the Jews. And in Acts 23:12-22, a group of them get together and they form a conspiracy and they make a solemn oath never to taste anything until they have killed Paul. They're going to fast until they have murdered Paul. And they made a plan to ask the authorities, the Roman authorities, to bring him down so they could interrogate him and then they were going to wait in an ambush and kill him. By the grace of God, Acts 23:16 says that the son of Paul's sister, his nephew, heard of their ambush. He came and he told his uncle Paul, what was going to happen. Paul told the centurion and the commander came in.

The word was given to him and the commander took immediate action: 'The Jews have agreed tomorrow in the council to ambush you and to kill you.' So, then in Acts 23:21 we read, "'So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.' [Acts 23:22] "Therefore, the commander let the young man go, instructing him, 'Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.'" The boy was released and told to keep this information secret.

Acts 23:23-35 detail for us the plan of the commander. He decided that Jerusalem was too hot a place for Paul to remain. You may read that section at your leisure. But he decided to move Paul 62 miles back to Caesarea out on the seacoast. A very lovely place, and nice place if you ever going to be in prison, that's the place to be in prison. So, Paul was taken with a very large contingent of soldiers to guard him. In order that nobody would know what was happening, they moved out about two or three in the morning and they quietly moved him 62 miles to Caesarea. There, he now faced the man who could give him freedom or could in fact order his death as he came and faced the Roman governor there, Felix.

If you wish to know what happens next, please come back next Sunday morning as we pick up this exciting story of Paul's journey to Rome, a man dedicated to integrity and the Word of God, but who finds himself at the mercy of people who do not understand the Word of God and who are ready to silence the messengers of God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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