

#15 Barrier Breaking Faith  
***Attacked for the Gospel***  
Acts 21:17-23:11

Against the warnings from friends and the Holy Spirit Paul went to Jerusalem. Why was he so intent, at the risk of his life in going to Jerusalem?

It was about the church and the purity of the gospel. Paul knew the battle that was raging over the identity of the church. The gospel barrier to the Gentiles was broken in 10:34-36 and chapter 11. Was the church going to become a sect of Judaism under the law at the hand of Judaizers, or was the church going to be a separate movement, known for salvation by grace through faith? Paul's courage came from his conviction to see that the gospel was not changed. See 2 Cor, 11:1-4 "another Jesus" & "a different gospel"; Galatians 1:6-7 *I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - <sup>7</sup> not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.* Background – Galatians 1-2

Today we face similar challenges to the purity of the gospel – "the kerygma" -1 Corinthians 15: 3-8; Ephesians 2:4-10. There have been many heresies through the years. The challenges today have to deal with additions such as works, Mormons, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witness, etc.; and theological demands such as a required Bible translation, or millennial view. There have also been those who would take away from the gospel such as Gnosticism, that would say you only have to know (gnosis) in your mind, but no life change is needed as an indication of an inward change, allowing for blatant sinning. Today's battles over the Bible, the divinity of Christ, authority of church leaders, and hot social issues, divide the church at times.

Paul was attempting to keep the wrong side from winning, leading to the dividing of the church over salvation. Maintaining the purity of salvation in Christ by faith, "the one way of salvation" (Jn. 14:6) and "the only name under heaven given to people by which we may be saved" (4:12), "saved by grace through faith" (Eph. 2:5,8) is a hill to die on. It was for Paul. Even though his friends did not understand he went forward. He would find himself alone with only Luke with him in Rome. (2 Timothy 4:11)

**All Things to All People 21:17-40**

Paul was on a mission to unite the church. He was willing to do all that he could to be a peacemaker. 1 Corinthians 9:20 *To the Jews I became a Jew win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.* (Also see 1 Thes. 2:4 & Col. 1:9-13) He looked for and found a way to not compromise the gospel, but to show identification with his audience by taking a vow of cleanliness or purity. In so doing he hoped to gain favor with his audience in a tense situation. His actions were misinterpreted, and he was falsely accused and beaten, but saved by the Roman soldiers.

Jesus, in doing the will of God was falsely accused of a violation of the law worthy of death. Paul, in doing the will of God was falsely accused of a violation of the law worthy of death. A lynch mob took things in their own hands. The Romans had agreed that any Gentile going into the Jewish court of the temple would be put to death. They erected signs with warnings of death. That is why the Romans were willing to continue the beating with flogging of Paul. Paul turned the matter around by revealing his Roman citizenship. He got the soldier's attention and favor to allow him to speak to the Jews.

Even when we do all we can to identify with traditions or customs, while still acting with integrity, there is no guarantee of success. What is the salvation of people worth to us? For Paul it was worth his life. (21:13b) *I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.* Like His Lord, He was willing to die that others would not perish in eternal damnation outside of faith in Christ. (John 3:16)

**Application:** What are we willing to do for the sake of the gospel? Does it matter that people do not know the truth of their sin, and the truth of salvation in Christ?

### **Two Identities, One Testimony 22:1-29**

Testimonies are personal. Paul spoke in Aramaic, the common language of the people and not understood by the Romans. Paul so wanted the Jews to be saved, (Romans 1:16). He gave an account of the events that changed his life, starting with identifying that he had once opposed Christians too, that he was a Jew and was trained in the law by a very respected teacher named Gamaliel. They were with him until he mentioned Gentiles. They were triggered and all the hot emotions erupted again.

Before the Roman soldiers, who would have put him to death to keep peace in Jerusalem, Paul now reveals his Roman citizenship. Those who were ready to give punishment became afraid of punishment for mistreating a Roman citizen, putting him in chains.

### **A Third Defense 22:30-23:11**

Paul was trained as a defender of the word, a lawyer of the word, as a Pharisee. He had debated Greek Philosophers in Athens (Ch. 17) and knew how to make a defense, as he had previously demonstrated. Now he mounts a defense against the Sanhedrin, who had formerly endorsed him. It was like playing against the team you were traded from in sports. He knew their weaknesses and ended up turning them against one another over the issue of the resurrection.

Paul then found himself alone in protective custody. As he had previously received affirmation from the Lord in 18:9-10, once again he is given affirmation from the Lord. 23:11 *The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, "Have courage! For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so it is necessary for you to testify in Rome."* The voice of the Lord gave him all he needed to continue.

When alone, Joseph in a dungeon, Moses in the face of rebellion, Elijah in a cave fearing for his life, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego in a fiery furnace, Daniel in a lion's den, Jesus in a garden praying and on the cross, heard what they needed to hear to trust God. Psalm 46:1-2 *God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. Therefore we will not be afraid...* Psalm 91:1 *The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. :2 ..the Lord who is my refuge and my fortress...* Isaiah 41:13 *For I am the Lord your God, who holds your right hand, who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'* Matthew 28:20 *I am with you always to the end of the age. (See Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 3; 2 Cor. 4:7-15)* 2 Corinthians 4:16 *Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. Poured out like an offering*

**Application:** What assurance has the Lord given you in a difficult situation? What is your commitment to doing His will, even when friends and family do not understand, seemingly against all odds, and yet with clear direction and assurance from the Lord?