

Monday - Week Thirty-eight

Acts Twenty-one: Arrested in Jerusalem

Summary: The Roman soldiers who arrested Paul saved him from a crowd that was trying to kill him.

Background and Comments

- Verse four tells us that the disciples in Syria urged Paul “in the Spirit” not to go to Jerusalem. Apparently the Holy Spirit prophesied that Paul would be arrested when he arrived in Jerusalem. The believers tried to talk Paul out of going.
- In Caesarea the same sort of thing happened. A prophet named Agabus prophesied that Paul would be arrested. For whatever reason Paul felt that he needed to go to Jerusalem. He would not be persuaded to stay away.
- The Roman soldiers certainly were good at their jobs. They risked their own lives to save someone they thought to be an Egyptian terrorist. It would have been much easier for them to just let the crowd kill Paul.

Lessons for Today

- In Jerusalem there were still many rumors about Paul. James and the other leaders in the church felt that Paul should join four others in their sacrifices at the temple as proof that he had not turned his back on the Old Testament law. Paul might have thought to himself, “These Old Testament laws don’t mean anything anymore now that Jesus has come. I should just stand my ground and try to get rid of these laws once and for all.” Instead Paul was willing to move slowly and work with the Jews in Jerusalem. There are times when we need to be patient with those who do not have complete understanding. For example, it might be true that having very contemporary music in our worship services would be appealing to young people. To simply make wholesale changes might offend some people.
- Rumors are powerful weapons. The Jewish leaders rallied the crowd by telling them that Paul preached against the Jews and the temple. Why do people believe rumors in the first place? Our sinful nature loves to believe bad things about other people. It takes discipline to search for the truth while disregarding rumors.

Read: Psalm 15; Revelation 21.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, keep me from having anything to do with rumors. When I hear other people gossiping guide me to stop the rumor. Amen.

Tuesday - Week Thirty-eight

Acts Twenty-two: Paul's Speech to the Crowd

Summary: Paul told the story of his conversion. The Jews listened until Paul talked about going to the Gentiles.

Background and Comments

- The beginning of Paul's defense made the point that he was a Jew ... even trained by the famous rabbi Gamaliel. His Christianity was an outgrowth and continuation of his early training. God taught him that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- Paul's Roman citizenship came in handy any number of times in his life. This time it saved Paul from being flogged (it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen). What sorts of things has God used in your life?
- This account is another example of God using other people to bless Paul. God has everyone and everything at His disposal.

Lessons for Today

- We have read Paul's story a number of times yet the story still causes wonder when we go through it again. God prepared everything in Paul's life so that Paul could be the world's foremost missionary.
- Paul witnessed to the crowd by telling them how God had worked in his life. Perhaps that would be a good way for you to witness to others. You could talk about how God gets rid of your sin and guilt and promises to take you to heaven. Be sure to tell others how wonderful it is to be a Christian. Sometimes we forget about that ourselves once in a while. Winning people to Christ begins with knowing how great it is to be won to Christ.
- The Jews showed how strong their hatred of the Gentiles was. When Paul mentioned that he had been sent to preach to the Gentiles they tried to kill him. This deep-seated hatred showed a lack of love in their hearts; they were completely blind to God's love to the world as evidenced in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Hatred can overrun a heart or even the hearts of an entire country. Is there any hatred that has started to take root in your heart?

Read: Psalm 16; Revelation 22.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, when I find myself in dangerous situations quickly remind me that I am still in Your hands. In Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week Thirty-eight

Catechism Review

Read Questions 293-295

1. We Lutherans might be tempted to breeze right over today's topic: the power of the Word of God in the Lord's Supper. We know just how powerful the Word of God is. There have been great debates in the Christian church concerning the Lord's Supper. Even in Luther's day there were people who taught that the Lord's body and blood were only represented in the Lord's Supper. They taught that the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated so that we remember what Jesus did for us ... not to actually receive the forgiveness of sins. What was the root of their error? They seemed to trust their reason more than the power of the Word of God. Since we put so much trust in the words of institution what might be a good activity to build into your preparation for communion?

2. What do you think about before, during and after communion? Obviously these are very personal matters and should not be directed by someone else. When you are receiving the Lord's Supper you might want to listen closely to the words that the pastor or communion assistant is saying. Why?

3. Explain: In the Lord's Supper we don't only listen to the Gospel we taste the Gospel.

Read: Psalm 17; 1 Thessalonians 1.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of the Lord's Supper. Use it to strengthen my faith and my resolve to do Your will. Amen.

Thursday - Week Thirty-eight

Acts twenty-three: A Plot to Kill Paul

Summary: Again God used the Roman soldiers to rescue Paul from a dangerous situation.

Background and Comments

- Paul had strong words for the high priest! After Paul was struck he said that he didn't realize that it was the high priest who had been speaking to him. Paul either didn't see who spoke to him (some scholars think that Paul's thorn in the flesh was poor eyesight) or was being ironic.
- The Jewish leaders forgot that Paul knew just what buttons to push to get the results he wanted. He had been an expert in Jewish law and was perfectly at home in the Sanhedrin. One remark about the resurrection from the dead turned his trial into a religious debate and even won Paul supporters!
- These Jewish leaders would have been perfect candidates for anger counseling. The Roman soldiers had to rescue Paul from the trial because things got so violent. These Jewish leaders took their work very seriously. How seriously do you take your faith? While we would not want to come to blows because someone disagreed with what the Bible says we need to be careful that we don't fall into the modern day trap of thinking that truth is relative. We have the truth; it's always worthwhile to stand up for the truth.

Lessons for Today

- At the most discouraging times in Paul's life Jesus appeared to him. After Paul's trial Jesus came to him and promised that he would testify in Rome. At the most discouraging times in our lives God comes to us on the pages of the Bible and through Christian friends. Do you know someone who is going through an especially difficult situation? Are you there for that person?
- The commander's letter was designed to make him look good. Notice that he said that he rescued Paul because he was a Roman citizen. When are you tempted to subtly change the truth?

Read: Psalm 18; 1 Thessalonians 2.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You came to Paul at just the right times to encourage him in his ministry. Encourage me with Your Word and my Christian friends to be faithful in the work that You have given me to do. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Friday - Week Thirty-eight

John - Lesson Nine: The Woman at the well (4:1-42)

1. Verse 4 tells us that Jesus had to go through Samaria. Sometimes unforeseen changes in plans can bring wonderful opportunities to share our faith with others: God plans out our day - He knows whom we need to talk with that day. Can you think of examples of times when God changed your plans because He wanted you to do something for Him? Explain.

2. Read verses 6 & 7. Give three reasons that Jesus might not have talked to the Samaritan woman.

What are some excuses we might use not to witness to others?

3. What did Jesus mean when He talked about a "living water?"

4. This lady wanted to talk about religion - but she also wanted to change the subject. What happens if we allow people to constantly change the subject when we talk with them?

5. In verses 23 & 24 Jesus says that God wants people to worship in spirit and truth. How would you respond: "I want to worship God as I wish (going for walks on Sunday morning instead of going to church) - it's very spiritual."

How would you respond: "Hey, I go to church - what more is there to Christianity?"

6. Imagine the disciples' surprise when they returned from buying food. Rabbis had said things like "Rather burn the sayings of the law than to teach them to a woman". No doubt the disciples had similar thoughts. Agree/Disagree & why: Christianity elevates women.

Read: Psalm 19; 1 Thessalonians 3.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, guide me as I share my faith with others. Amen.