
Day 345 – December 11

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Paul's Arrest and Trial

Readings: Acts 21:17-23:35

Reflections:

- **Plan for unity:** Paul meets up with the leaders in Jerusalem and we see again in the story the key role that James, the half brother of Jesus plays in the leadership. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are very nervous about Paul's reputation and so we see James comes up with a plan to ensure that everyone can visibly see that Paul is adhering to the Law. What is interesting is that Paul doesn't fight back against the concerns and refuse but rather goes along, even at his own expense, to ensure people realize that he is not trying to be a rebel for rebellion sake. Paul again and again models mutual submission. He is willing to submit to religious legalism so as to win the trust of the religious community so that he can then tell them that religious legalism doesn't matter at all to God. We see here in this text as well a real concern for Jewish Christians to remain separate from the Roman religions (meat sacrificed to idols, drinking blood in a pagan worship service, and sexual immorality were again a normal part of pagan worship).
- **Jews seize Paul in temple:** Paul is falsely accused and seized by violent religious leaders and they attempt to kill him as someone who defiles the temple and rejects the Torah. It is interesting how Paul is now experiencing exactly what he used to do as a young man.
- **Paul arrested:** Roman authorities rescue Paul from being killed. Even though the Roman officials were a threat to the Christ-following movement, we also see how God can use them to further his purposes. Paul is bound hand and foot ("two chains") and he is taken away to barracks to be held under arrest.
- **Paul asks to speak:** Paul uses his citizenship in Rome ("a citizen of no ordinary city") to gain the trust of the soldiers and the privilege to speak to the crowd. They think he is a revolutionary, a wanted criminal, at first but he clarifies this. It is interesting to see how both Jesus and Paul are associated with revolutionaries. It is a subtle comparison but profound as both Jesus and Paul are revolutionaries for peace and reconciliation.
- **Defense to the crowd:** Paul addresses his enemies with the utmost respect, "Brothers and fathers..." He speaks in Aramaic to again help to win their trust and a listening ear. Paul tells his story and we can again see the consistency of the facts he shares. He obviously highlights his training under Gamaliel in light of how widely respected this Rabbi was. Luke's decision

to capture these different messages of Paul is for a very important reason. These were common teachings and testimonies shared among the churches and Paul wants to make sure the facts are recorded accurately. Paul uses the word *trance* to describe his intense prayer time before God. Sometimes prayer can be so intense it is almost we are more locked into God than to anything else.

- Roman citizenship asserted: When Paul mentions his call to the Gentiles, the religious leaders go crazy. We see their obvious hate for the Gentiles. We can see how clearly they have lost touch with their original calling before God to be both a blessing to the nations (Genesis 22:18) as well as a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). The crowd of religious leaders goes crazy throwing dust in the air, ripping off their cloaks, and shouting. They are like a mob that is out of control. The Roman guards decide to flog Paul and he has to use his Roman Citizenship to save himself the torture of flogging. We see in this section how valuable and valued Roman citizenship was. It was something worth a great deal of money and afforded Paul significant protection and privilege.
- On trial before Sanhedrin: We can see the tension between Paul and the religious leaders as the Roman officials put Paul on trial before the Sanhedrin in an attempt to determine what the real issues are. Paul is not intimidated. He stares them down. Paul's words are maybe not as offensive as his stance and tone. This is different as Ananias is the son of Nedebaios (Josephus, *Antiquities* xx. 5. 2) and presided during both of Paul's trial in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 23:2, 24:1-5). He officiated as High Priest from about AD 47 to 59. Quadratus, governor of Syria, accused him of being responsible for acts of violence. He was sent to Rome for trial (AD 52) but was acquitted by the emperor Claudius. Being a friend of the Romans, he was murdered by Jewish people at the beginning of the First Jewish-Roman War. Not the nicest guy as we see from his call for Paul to be struck. Even though this High Priest was using abusive force, once Paul realizes he is High Priest he still apologizes for calling him a whitewashed wall. The phrase for "whitewashed wall" is an idiom for hypocrisy. Anything whitewashed was false and pretending to be something it wasn't. It is interesting that Paul calls for Ananias to be struck and we know from history he is ultimately murdered by his own people. Paul in his apology quotes Exodus 22:28 and again models humility and a desire to honor those in authority, even when they are abusive.
- Contention arises: Paul shows his shrewdness by distracting the religious leaders with one of their own internal disagreements. One of the qualities of religion is that people quickly disagree and divide with others who disagree because they value their claims to ultimate truth and beloved traditions than they value relationships with others. Paul uses his belief in the resurrection to cause the Pharisees to become more loyal to him and to ignite an internal fierce debate. Interesting that the Roman officials now have to rescue Paul out of the religious leaders midst, not because they are trying to kill him but because they are becoming so fiercely violent. Luke uses vivid language to help the reader grasp how terrible this situation had become. Once again in the night the Lord draws near to Paul and stands at this side. Although this is not described as another resurrection appearance, it has the

markings of personal, intimate connection between Jesus and Paul. Jesus' words are prophetic and affirming of his calling on Paul: "Take courage! (Paul needed to hear this because of all the near death experiences he was having. God doesn't expect us to be superhuman. He understands when we are afraid and he wants to encourage us.) As you have testified about me in Jerusalem (the center of Israel's world), so you must also testify in Rome (the center of the known world)." We will see that Paul will get to Rome but through an unexpected route. This should be a lesson to us. God will at times tell us his will and then in time will demonstrate that his way of fulfilling his will is completely unexpected.

- Conspiracy to kill Paul: This plot to kill Paul has all the elements of a great thrill novel. Forty men bound by oath to not eat or drink until they kill Paul? How intense is that! The plot is well designed and they execute with precision expecting that within hours Paul will be dead in their hands.
- Paul's nephew gives warning: We are now briefly introduced to a relative of Paul, his sister's son. It is interesting that there is no other mention in Scripture of Paul's natural family. It is possible that this nephew was connected with the Pharisees in some way and for this reason overheard the plot to kill Paul. God's use of this family member demonstrates God's ability to accomplish his will regardless of what people try to plot or scheme. God's purposes will always be fulfilled. We see this over and over again within the story of God.
- Preparation for transfer: The Roman commander wants to protect this Roman citizen and so wants to move him to a more secure facility so he can be tried properly. The large detachment of soldiers, horsemen and spearmen show how much concern he felt about the religious leaders' ability to incite the people. It is fascinating that Luke includes the letter. Luke must have been with Paul at this time and possibly even read the letter himself or heard it read. It definitely adds a dimension to the story.
- Paul removed to Caesarea: Paul is moved into the security of Herod's palace under guard to await his accusers and his trial. We are reminded of the tremendous danger that accompanies obeying God. Full obedience to God's will is the fast way to learn total dependence and faith. No doubt Paul was glad to be safe and secure but we must also remember that he is now facing a very long stretch under arrest. Paul will increasingly be spending time in prison as a consequence of his calling. It will be in prison that some of his most important letters will be written. In time these same letters will become the foundational teaching documents for the Church for almost 2000 years. When everything goes wrong around us we must trust that God can still work through our lives in ways we may never imagine or see in our lifetime.