

Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, September 28th, 2025. Did you turn up the heat in your house this week or this morning?! We turned up the heat in the sanctuary because it was cold when we got here.

My name's Kent Dixon and it is my joy to be the pastor here. It must be warmer towards the back of the sanctuary because people tend to congregate back there.

Now, if you're thinking of sneaking out, I can't see everyone, so... This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World.

And so for anyone who's visiting this morning, if you feel like you've been thrown in head first into the book of Acts, it will be okay, I promise. In this ongoing series, we've been digging into the history of the early church together.

We've been looking at what we can learn from the people and places and events that we read about. And so I see that my wife is advancing slides.

[1 : 0 6] That's okay. Keeping me on my toes. So, grab your Bible. Or grab a Bible from the pew in front of you and you can also listen as I give you the audiobook version.

Our passage for this morning is found in Acts 21, verses 27 to 40. So, turn to that in your Bible and I'll read it for us as well. And so for anyone who is, again, jumping into this head first, you can always go to our website and all of the sermons from this series are there.

So you can get your crash course in the book of Acts there. And besides, he's brought Greeks into the temple and defied this holy place.

They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with Paul, and assumed Paul had brought him into the temple. The whole city was aroused and the people came running from all directions.

Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops and the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.

[2 : 3 1] He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

Then he asked who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. And since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.

When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, Get rid of him!

As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, May I say something to you? Do you speak Greek? He replied. Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?

Paul answered, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.

[3 : 38] After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, colon, so we pause there.

So our sermon this morning is titled, Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem. And why did I stop right as Paul is about to speak? I'll get there in a second. So our sermon this morning, as you see, is Paul's arrest in Jerusalem.

So Paul was traveling to Jerusalem, if you remember, at the end of his third journey. Remember, he felt God's call to go to, to return to Jerusalem. So we know from Acts 20, verses 22 and 23, that Paul knew that chains and tribulation were awaiting him in Jerusalem.

And we learned in our sermon last week that it would be the Jews who would deliver him to the Gentiles. Do you remember the prophecy that that man named Agabus gave with Paul's belt, right?

He came up to Paul, took Paul's belt, and then bound himself. And so it was a prophecy that he gave that the man who owned that belt, guess who?

[4 : 47] Paul would be subject to persecution. So in spite of all these warnings and prophecies that bad things would happen to him, Paul still went to Jerusalem, right?

He was not dissuaded from his goal. We also learned last week that part of Paul's plans to go to Jerusalem involved delivering contributions that other believers had given to him to help needy Christians, Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Do you remember that part as well? So we learned from Acts 21, 17 to 19, that when Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem, the disciples and church elders and James warmly greeted him, Scripture tells us.

So Paul also gave a detailed report of what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. So remember, as we've learned along the way in Acts, not only was it Paul's practice, his *modus operandi*, to begin preaching in a community in the synagogue, it was also part of his standard practice to report back to church leaders on what had been happening as he visited churches.

So the church leaders also enlisted Paul's help, we read, in helping with some of the issues in local church community. And we know from Scripture that a lot of Paul's writing was to help church leaders and Christians in general to know how to act and behave according to a godly way.

[6 : 24] So the gospel message and Paul's reputation preceded him wherever he went. And so then it was only a matter of time before people who were against Paul's message, against his preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus, folks took notice and got riled up enough to take action.

I wanted to get riled up in there, I don't know why, it just made me feel old-timey somehow. But that's what happened, right? They got worked up, we learn. So the riot in the temple, when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, we're going to go through a bit of these events, some of these events.

We've heard from our passage this morning that the tensions were prompted by Jews from Asia who recognized Paul in the temple. So they were either in the temple or passing by the temple and they went, wait a minute, we know this guy.

And these obviously weren't fans, right? We get that from this passage. These were people who strongly disagreed with Paul and were in fact angered by his message.

So when they saw him, they immediately became intense and got riled up, right? They acted quickly and immediately against him. So as I was reading and preparing this sermon, scholars suggest that diaspora Jews, I don't know if you know that term, that is Jews who had traveled to and settled in other regions beyond Jerusalem, right?

[7 : 55] So they were Jewish people who had originally come from Jerusalem and settled in other areas outside of Jerusalem. And these folks were still very passionate about the temple in Jerusalem.

So we can recognize then that seeing this man that they disagreed with in this treasured and cherished place for them would cause this strong reaction.

And Paul had already faced strong opposition in trials at the hands of Jewish opponents in Israel. We know that. We learned that this group that was against Paul brought actually accusations of false teaching.

Pretty serious stuff. They also accused him of, as we read this morning, defiling the temple, right? Talk about ratcheting up the pressure against him.

He had, in their minds, defiled the temple itself by bringing a Gentile into it with him. Although it seems that that may not have actually happened.

[8 : 59] So whether they were assuming this had happened or pretending it had, these were serious charges they brought up against him. So maybe you remember way back in Acts 6, 9-14, we learned about how a group of Jews stirred up trouble for Stephen.

Does that ring a bell? Stephen had been preaching and they even brought Stephen before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders. They brought false witness to testify against him.

Right? So this is not the first time this kind of thing had happened. And verse 27 from our passage this morning tells us that this group of Jews who spotted Paul and knew him, it says they stirred up the whole crowd.

So they weren't happy enough just to, in their little group that were all like-minded, come after Paul. They wanted to get everybody after him. So Luke doesn't actually tell us what it was that specifically stirred up this larger group of people.

So what did this small group say to the larger people? Luke doesn't say here. But we know, I think all of us could agree, that sometimes one person's views or passions, right or wrong, can too easily resonate with the larger group and then cause them to get worked up as well.

[10 : 24] Right? We see that all the time. So not only did this group of Jews stir up a larger group, but they also seized Paul. Right? They weren't just happy to stand by the side and say, get this guy.

They acted on it and they grabbed him. So this got people even more worked up. Right? People came from everywhere around the city, we hear, to join in the efforts to get him.

We read that they dragged Paul from the temple. So likely from the temple itself, the main part of the temple, into the square outside. And so for anyone who's been at the chosen viewing and discussion sessions on Tuesday night, I promised them this past Tuesday there will be a connection between the episode we watched and my sermon on Sunday.

So, but it's, I'll be clear here. So, this area outside the temple was known as the Court of the Gentiles. So they pulled Paul out of the temple into this larger courtyard area to kill him.

So if you, if you're curious, the Court of the Gentiles was the outermost courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem. And it was the only area of the temple where non-Jews were allowed.

[11 : 43] And as its name implies, the Court of the Gentiles was accessible to Gentiles and foreigners and anyone who would be considered to be impure. So the idea was that people were welcome to worship if they were non-Jews.

They could come and worship, but they were welcome into the Court of the Gentiles. So that's where you see if they assumed that Paul brought a Gentile into the temple, that's a huge no-no. Huge no-no.

So it was in this area, the Court of the Gentiles, that non-Jewish worshippers could mill about. They could exchange money. They could even buy animals for sacrifices.

And that's a whole other story, as you can imagine. And we'll leave that for this morning. So Romans to the rescue. How often do you hear that?

Never. However, it's not often that we think of that, right? Romans to the rescue! Because as we know in the history of the Roman Empire, they don't tend to rescue. They tend to dominate and subjugate.

[12 : 44] But that's kind of what happened here, really. I have to wonder if God used them with a little bit of a wink and a sense of humor, right? There was a large Roman citadel built by Herod the Great called the Antonia Fortress.

And so this area, it was named after, maybe you can guess, named after the Roman politician and general Mark Antony. So the Antonia Fortress.

It was located on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, where the temple was located. So not only did the fortress serve as this formidable symbol of Roman power in Jerusalem, it housed Roman soldiers whose main role, this is interesting, was to protect both the temple and the city.

So the Roman forces would also assist the temple guards in the instance of broader issues of civil unrest. Case in point. So the local troop commander heard about the riot.

We heard that in our passage this morning. He took some men with him to check it out, right? They heard the commotion. This is part of their job. So he took a group with him.

[13 : 59] Scholars suggest that this Roman contingent, I think we tend to, and we've talked about this many times over the years, we tend to underestimate numbers or quantities in scripture sometimes.

So scholars suggest that this group of Roman soldiers may have included two centurions, so two top guys, and their troops. So this may have amounted to as many as two hundred Roman soldiers.

So this isn't a couple of guys, a couple of detectives on the beat. Go and check it out. This is a full force of Roman soldiers coming to check this out. So fortunately, maybe you noticed this in the passage this morning, fortunately for Paul, when the mob saw the Roman soldiers coming, they stopped beating him.

I think they realized, uh-oh. So we read that when the Roman commander arrived on the scene, he arrested Paul. So that's interesting, right?

He had him bound in two chains, likely one for his hands and one for his feet. And I found that interesting as I thought about it again, preparing this, that he didn't question him first before he arrested him.

[15 : 16] So it may have been that he wanted to take Paul into custody for his own protection. I think that's a pretty, pretty reasonable, uh, suggestion here. But also maybe for appearance's sake to placate this mob, right?

To diffuse the situation. Maybe a bit of both. So it seemed to be a fair interaction. That's something else I noticed. There's a sense here that the commander wasn't making assumptions or presuming guilt, right?

He didn't come in and say, you're the problem, you're in jail. So rather than asking Paul what he had done, which is interesting, the commander starts by asking the crowd.

Not the best choice, maybe, right? And of course, the crowd responds, as we hear, by shouting all kinds of different things. And if they didn't all know what the issue was, they were just stirred up, who knows what they all yelled.

So the commander right away goes, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, wait a minute. So then he asked Paul who he was and what he had done. So the crowd obviously couldn't agree on what Paul had done, who he was, what they wanted done with him, except for maybe imprisonment or even execution.

- [16 : 35] But since the Roman commander couldn't get any clear or straight answers from the crowd, he actually ordered Paul to be brought back to the barracks. Again, we have to wonder for his own safety, perhaps.

But the crowd really, really didn't like that. So we don't know what they wanted. Did they want the Romans to just kill him on the spot? But they were, again, riled up, right?

But they likely took him back to the barracks to defuse things and for possibly for his own protection. So this was probably a very wise move because, as we read, Paul had already been beaten by these people.

So they clearly weren't too worried about escalating things. They wanted him dead. So there's echoes for me here as I thought more about this passage of the intensity of another mob that desperately wanted Jesus killed.

So what was Paul thinking as all of this happens? One of the questions I want to ask him one day is, so what about that?

- [17 : 43] What were you thinking then? Why did you say that? So, yeah, very interesting conversations to come one day. So it's one thing to say that we're willing to be persecuted for our faith.

Right? I don't think any of you, if I asked you, say, yep, I will never deny Jesus. Even to go so far as to say, I would die for what I believe.

I would die for Jesus. But what would it be like if that cold, hard reality actually stared you in the face? In the middle of everything, we read that Paul asked to speak with the Roman commander.

And the man asks Paul if he speaks Greek. So we get the sense then that Paul, a very educated person, would have responded in not street-level Greek, but educated Greek.

Right? The Greek that he would have used in his debates and his presentations when he met with Gentile audiences. And we get a sense that this seemed to have surprised the commander.

- [18 : 54] And it's interesting. I don't know if you noticed this, but it feels, it almost gave me whiplash a little bit. The commander assumes very specific details. He assumes that Paul might be an Egyptian insurrectionist and a person who had led a group of 4,000 rebels.

And that seems like a pretty odd and really specific kind of assumption to make. So possibly that revolt and maybe the results, the repercussions of that revolt, maybe on his career, on some other things.

For whatever reason, that revolt was top of mind. But Paul right away identifies himself as a Jew from Tarsus. And then he politely asks to speak to the people.

So it's impressive that in all of this, Paul speaks with great politeness and respect, especially under these circumstances. Right? He is not panicking, at least as far as we can tell.

And the commander gives Paul permission to speak to the crowd. Then after quieting them down, he addresses them, we read in the passage, in Aramaic.

- [20 : 06] So he's just spoken in Greek to the commander, educated Greek. And then he's prepared quite easily to address this crowd in Aramaic. So that is also, we can recognize, the language that the majority of this crowd would have spoken and understood.

And Paul's speech to the mob continues in the next chapter. And so we're going to be looking at that next week. Reflecting on some of the things that we've just explored together, what are the things that we can observe about Paul's arrest?

Let me lead us in that. So there were accusations against Paul. That's the first thing we need to recognize. They were made by this very specific group of Jews from Asia who knew Paul, did not like his message, and got riled up.

They possibly already had conflicts with him, some of them, maybe all of them. They were likely biased against Paul and his message already from past experience.

And then we get a sense that they actually misrepresented what Paul had taught. They say that he taught against the Jewish people. I don't think that's accurate. That he taught against the law of Moses.

[21 : 23] That he taught against the temple. I think any of those things are accurate. But what Paul really taught was that Jesus Christ was Israel's hope and fulfillment.

And we'll see that in the future when we study Romans together. So the accusations against Paul were false. I think we can agree. And based on faulty assumptions.

Paul had been seen in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian. And then his accusers incorrectly assumed Paul had brought him with him into the temple which was forbidden.

But I think we can probably assume Paul knew the rules and would not break them that way. What I think we can see clearly in all of this is that people with a bias and an agenda often resort to half-truths or even lies to mislead and manipulate other people.

Think about that for a moment. The reaction of the people I think is a perfect example of a concept that is often referred to as mob mentality.

[22 : 38] Maybe you've heard of that. Sometimes it's known as herd or herd herd mentality which is for cooks. herd mentality.

Sometimes it's also called the bandwagon effect. So this is what tends to happen when people are influenced by their peers. What they see other people doing what they hear other people saying I think we see that at work a lot these days.

As someone who came from the communications world I often think to myself social media that terminology it is neither social nor media.

Discuss. It is anti-social at best. It is a great opportunity to beat people with what you think rather than have honest face-to-face conversations.

But I think what we see most often in a mob mentality situation we see that at work in large gatherings like political rallies or concerts sporting events go Oilers large group groups of people I think tend to be swayed by the perspective that if many believe such and such ooh we should probably believe that too right?

[24 : 03] It must be true. Sometimes it's also the perspective that if everyone else is doing or saying something we should do it. And unfortunately I think the mob mentality that idea can often cause individuals to be influenced by the collective actions or opinions of a group.

They may act ultimately in ways that they wouldn't on their own even in a less thoughtful or even dangerous manner at times. People can be more easily swayed when they are in large crowds letting go of their personal beliefs or ethics letting down their guard and following the herd versus making potentially better choices.

The Roman commander we've been talking about this morning is later identified as Claudius Lysias in Acts 23 verse 26. So in the middle of this mob atmosphere he kept a level head and actually sought the truth.

He was willing to ultimately let go of the incorrect assumptions he had. The incorrect assumptions that the crowd had given him. Once he learned the truth he was willing ultimately to let Paul speak for himself.

He was willing to listen to the whole story before coming to any final conclusions or passing judgment. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem shows people both at their worst and at their best.

[25 : 50] Their worst allowing religious prejudice and mob mentality to attack the innocent. The best allowing the search for truth to change an initial opinion and being open to more information.

Friends, how can we avoid the effects of a mob mentality? Of being misled and manipulated by someone else with their own bias?

I believe we need to strive to be people who listen more than we speak, especially nowadays. To be open to understanding and respecting what others believe or their unique points of view.

Let's ask God to help us be people who make truth our priority. Help us to think for ourselves and not just blindly follow the crowds.

Remember what happened before the flood in the wilderness in the Holocaust blindly following a crowd rarely ends well.

[27 : 05] In fact, it's often far more likely that the majority may be wrong, especially if they're following their own agendas and passions.

Jesus told us in Matthew 7 verses 13 and 14, enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction.

And there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it.

And brothers and sisters, resist following the crowd. Resist listening to other voices and focus on following Jesus.

Amen. Amen.