

Hated for the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Emmaus Road Church this spring, and something you might know about Acts is that a lot of it follows the life of the Apostle Paul. From his time as a persecutor of the church to his conversion in chapter 9 and through a good portion of his ministry as well.

And one of the most important aspects of his ministry was his missionary journeys, where he spent years spreading the gospel throughout the region.

And he took three missionary journeys in the book of Acts, and our passage today is picking up at the tail end of his third and final missionary journey.

Paul decides to end this journey by bringing his ministry to Jerusalem. And this is risky for Paul, and he knows it. He knows that the Jews there know him, and that they will oppose him.

In fact, earlier in chapter 21, he was actually warned by the prophet Agabus through the Holy Spirit that he would be bound.

[1 : 12] And imprisoned, and imprisoned, if he went to Jerusalem. But of course, this is Paul. That doesn't scare him. He goes anyway. And even more boldly than just going to Jerusalem, Paul goes to the temple.

And that's where our passage picks up today. He is in Jerusalem. He purifies himself for seven days, according to the law, and then heads to the temple.

And that's where our passage picks up today. So with that in mind, hear God's word as we read Acts 21, verses 27 through 36.

And the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help!

This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

[2 : 17] For they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with him in the city. And they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together.

They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. And at once, the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd. For the mob of the people followed, crying out, away with him. This is the word of the Lord.

[3 : 27] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have spoken to us in your word. We ask that you would give us ears to hear and hearts that are ready to receive your word this morning.

Lord, may your Holy Spirit be working in us, teaching us, informing us more and more into the image of Jesus. It's in his holy name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, when you look back over the last century or two of human history, what do you think has changed our culture more than anything?

What's had the most impact? Maybe your mind goes to events like World War II or 9-11.

Maybe you think of important thought leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr. Or maybe you think of technological advances like the atomic bomb, Internet, AI. All these things, all these people have had a huge impact on our culture. And all of them have been highly controversial in their time.

[4 : 51] But perhaps nothing has impacted our culture quite as much as the invention of the telephone. Nowadays, the telephone is practically extinct, right?

Maybe some of us might still have a hardwired phone at work. But I'm guessing that a large percentage of this congregation has never seen or used a payphone.

Many of you have probably never seen or used a rotary phone. Even the idea of a home phone is completely foreign because we all have cell phones in our pocket.

And yet, the invention of the telephone was a huge deal. And even it came with its own deal of controversy. Listen to this quote.

This comes from Herbert Kasson, who was a historian in the early 1900s. He wrote about the history of the telephone just a couple decades after it was invented.

[5 : 55] And this is what he said about this new invention of the telephone. The telephone was not welcomed at once. It was ridiculed, denounced, and resisted.

Many people believed it would prove a public nuisance. Others declared that it would destroy privacy and make the transaction of business impossible.

It was said that no respectable person would wish to have his house invaded by such an instrument, through which anyone might intrude at any hour.

The new invention seemed likely to break down the ordinary safeguards of social and commercial life. Throughout history, there have been some major inventions, some major revolutions in thought, some major events that have threatened to change the status quo, to turn society on its head, to rock the boat in some very uncomfortable and even scary ways.

And when the status quo is threatened, when people's comfort or their stability is at stake, people will rise up and they will oppose whatever threat that might be, whether it's real or just perceived.

[7 : 23] And that's what we see in our passage today. We see different groups of people afraid of Paul's teachings.

Not because he's teaching anything harmful. Not because he's teaching anything false. But because he teaches the message of Jesus.

And that message threatens their status quo. What do you think? Does the message of the gospel still threaten the status quo today?

Does Jesus challenge our modern concepts of comfort and power and stability?

You know, many people in our context here in Wisconsin, they don't oppose Jesus for just intellectual reasons. They don't oppose him because there isn't enough evidence or because they think the Bible is an untrustworthy document.

[8 : 40] Those might be the things that they verbalize. But behind that, many people oppose Jesus because his message turns their world upside down.

The gospel of Jesus threatens people's idols. It threatens their autonomy. This idea that I'm in charge of my life.

I decide what is true. I answer to no one. It is very uncomfortable and unappealing to many people to have those concepts challenged.

It's uncomfortable to your atheist friend. It's uncomfortable to maybe your relative who never wants to have anything to do with spiritual conversation.

And it's uncomfortable even to many of us who proclaim the name of Christ. We, too, believe those lies. And we share some of the same idols as unbelievers.

[9 : 49] The message of Jesus is transformative. See, Jesus is not like a vitamin.

He's not something you can just add to your life. Something you can take in the morning and feel a little bit healthier that will enable you to just continue doing what you've already been doing.

If you receive Jesus, he's not going to just make you some better version of yourself. He's going to make you into a new creation.

He will change you from the inside out. He will give you new desires to obey him and to glorify him joyfully. Secondly, the gospel transforms people.

And because the gospel transforms people, it will also be opposed by people. And there are two ways that this passage shows us that the transformative power of the gospel will be opposed.

[10:57] First, the gospel will be scorned by many. And second, the gospel will be suppressed by many. So first, because the gospel is transformative in power, we can expect it to be scorned.

Verses 27 and 28 say that the Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple, and they stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help!

This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

If you're familiar with the Old Testament and some of the rules and the purposes for the temple, you know that the temple was built for God's people, the Jews.

No person of any other nationality was to enter into the temple. They even had signs on the outside warning them. This was common knowledge to people.

[12:06] Only Jews were allowed in the temple, and it was a big deal to them. Now, of course, in our New Testament context, there is no distinction of holiness between male, female, Jews, Greeks, any type of person.

But these Jews, they were still living under Old Testament law, and to them, a Greek entering the temple was an egregious offense.

Here's the problem. Paul didn't bring a Greek into the temple. In verse 29, we see that the Jews had seen this Ephesian, Trophimus, with Paul around Jerusalem, so they just supposed or assumed that Paul had brought this Greek into the temple.

The author of Acts, Luke, he uses the Greek word *enamazon* here, which means to suppose or assume or believe, and that's exactly what this is.

It's a belief. It's an assumption. The Jews are jumping to conclusions. They're assuming the worst of Paul based on no evidence other than the fact that they had seen him with a Greek combined with their already existing scorn for Paul.

[13:37] I'm the youngest of four siblings. and my next oldest sibling is my brother who is five years older than me. It's a bit of an age gap. With that age gap, my older siblings didn't always want to hang out with me when I was younger.

I get it. A lot of times, I had to entertain myself. Sometimes, when I was playing outside and I would want someone to play with, I would try to befriend some of the wild animals.

I don't know, I probably watched too many Disney movies. So I would see, like, a robin or a squirrel or a rabbit, whatever, and I would try to approach them as slowly as possible so they wouldn't run away.

I would do everything I could to try to not scare them away, but of course, without fail, you get close enough, they always run away or fly away. All I wanted to do was to pet them and to love them and to squeeze them.

But it's hardwired into those animals to fear humans, even small children, and they assume the worst of us. And that's kind of the reaction that we get here from the Jews.

[14:56] They don't really have a good reason to believe that Paul brought this Greek friend into the temple, but they just immediately assume the worst. In their eyes, Paul is the enemy.

Paul is a threat, not only to the things that they believe, but to their entire social order. This isn't just about the Jews wanting to protect the holiness of the temple.

This is about them wanting to protect their social status. They don't want to accept Greeks, Gentiles, non-Jews, as equal to themselves before the eyes of God.

See, what's at stake here for the Jews? It's not just religion. It's power. It's status. Have things changed in our time?

Richard Niebuhr, in his book, *Christ and Culture*, he writes about this. He says that unbelievers are hostile toward Christianity because, in their eyes, believers do not care enough about the temporal existence to engage in all-out struggle.

[16:24] That the Christian's reliance on the grace of God is actually detrimental to human achievement. That culture is the highest power. That there is no life beyond culture.

what he's saying there is that the unbeliever looks at the Christian and sees someone who is wasting their time thinking about eternity when this life is all that matters.

The unbeliever sees this short time here on earth as the only thing that matters. Christians and in their eyes, Christians aren't doing their duty as humans.

They aren't investing every bit of their effort into social institutions, into politics, into success and achievement because they're focused on eternity.

well, Jesus in Matthew 6 addresses this and this is what he says. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

[17 : 46] Now for the Christian to take that command seriously to focus on living for the life to come rather than for the time here on earth is viewed by the unbeliever as foolish as detrimental to the social order and so for that reason we can expect the gospel to be slandered.

We can expect it to be hated. people will assume the worst of it and they will assume the worst of you. Probably all had that happen to varying degrees and the thing is that this passage it doesn't really show us how to respond to the unbeliever and often time that's what we want right?

We want a playbook for how to respond to people who attack Christianity but we're not shown that here. there are good examples and instruction for that throughout scripture but in this passage we're simply shown that we should expect opposition.

We should expect people to attack to assume the worst maybe even from other Christians.

think about it do we ever slander other types of Christians other types of churches maybe other denominations or well-known Christian pastors to assume the worst out of another denomination or church or pastor to slander them to others those are the actions of someone who opposes the church those are the actions of someone who opposes Christ hear me it is good and right to call out the sin of our fellow Christians of course in a Matthew 18 kind of way and it is good and it is right to oppose false teachers that's not what I'm talking about we ought to be careful we ought to be real sure about the way that we are talking about the church the bride of Christ and about the shepherds of the church that God has placed over his people it is really easy for a good and proper passion for the truth of God's word to turn into pride and contempt and a slanderous heart so be careful how you talk about other churches and other pastors the world is already filled with scorn for them the gospel is transformative in power it will be scorned as a result but not only will it be scorned it will also be suppressed we see in verse 31 that word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion the tribune was the

[21 : 30] Roman officer who was in charge of keeping order and in verse 32 we see that when he heard that there was basically this riot going on he at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them and when they the mob when they saw the tribune and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul so the mob is basically beating up Paul this unarmed man until like the cops show up so everyone stops now you would think that the Romans would get to work arresting those people who are beating up this unarmed man but what they actually do is they arrest Paul they bind him with not one but two chains and they start asking the crowd what has Paul done it blows my mind that rather than arresting the people who are committing this crime the Romans again they assume the worst of Paul they assume obviously this man did something pretty bad to get beat up like this it's pretty unfair the reason that they did this is because they weren't really concerned with justice they weren't concerned with who was in the right or who had done what no they just wanted to restore order to be fair that was their job to just keep the peace peace but this crowd is still really worked up and we see in verses 34 and 35 that the Romans actually had to bring Paul back to the soldiers barracks which was not common and they had to even physically carry him into the barracks because the crowd they were just still trying to get their hands on Paul the scene ends with the crowd crying out away with him when I read that

I can't help think of the crowds who cried out similarly to the Romans during Jesus' trial crucify him crucify him and what's worse is in the next chapter in chapter 22 Paul finally gets the chance to defend himself to the crowd but it just makes them even more angry and they do end up calling for his execution and before you get any ideas that the Romans here are the good guys who are saving Paul from getting murdered no in the next chapter they continue to assume that he's guilty of something and they're even willing to flog him until he confesses to something that they can execute him for both the crowd and the Romans they just want an excuse to get rid of this guy once and for all because of his message of the gospel when I was 11 years old

I had this paper route in our small town of Dale and I would ride my bike all around town delivering newspapers and you know back then in Dale at least they didn't have mailboxes at the street I had to actually go up to the door and open the door drop the newspaper inside shut the door and without a doubt the most stressful part of this job was dogs I got attacked by dogs multiple times they tore up my clothing I got bit a couple times and I love dogs but you can only get bit so many times before you start getting nervous so I had to figure out a way to deal with these aggressive

dogs and one thing that I learned is that if an aggressive dog is chasing you it usually won't stop chasing you you can't just keep running away from it so one day I was riding my bike along my route when this dog started chasing me and chasing me and we were far away from its home and it's still running after me on my bike it's barking it's growling

I know this dog is going to bite me so in the moment I decided if flight doesn't work I'm going to try fight so I slam on my bike brakes I get off my bike I actually step toward the dog and I dig up the biggest deepest 11 year old voice that I had and I started barking back at the dog now I'm not sure if I scared the dog or just really confused it but either way it kind of like recoiled and looked at me and just walked away and went home so from then on that's how I didn't always work that well so if you're going to try that do it at your own risk now here's the thing if one of the neighbors had just happened to look out their window and catch the tail end of that interaction they just saw a kid barking at a dog they might think

I'm crazy or I don't know maybe I'm really angry at this dog what they wouldn't realize is that I was just scared this dog was a threat to me you know oftentimes when people are threatened they react with what looks like anger it's really just fear that's what's happening here the Jews view Paul's message as a threat to their social standing and so they react with aggression the Romans assume that Paul is riling up this crowd and threatening the peace and the order of the city and so they react with aggression and all of this aggression it's all aimed at neutralizing at suppressing the threat the threat of the gospel you know we probably take for granted far too often the fact that we live in the [28:10] United States where religious freedom is so protected you know that's not the case in a lot of the world it hasn't been the case through the majority of human history it's not normal and so the ways that Christianity might be suppressed in our culture it's probably going to look different than in other cultures we don't have police dragging Christians away but people still do suppress the gospel in their own ways!

before I was a Christian in my early twenties I hated it when my Christian friends would talk about faith I would do anything that I could to steer the conversation to something else anything else that was my way of suppressing the gospel maybe you know someone who does that maybe you know someone who gets hostile anytime you bring up faith maybe you know someone who just avoids the church or anything to do with Jesus at all costs avoidance hostility ignoring these are all ways that the unbeliever suppresses the message of the gospel thing is this believers do it too we probably all suppressed the message of the gospel ourselves maybe even without thinking about it in that way one way we do that is by neglecting the spiritual disciplines things like reading the Bible praying going to church there are a lot of different reasons why maybe we don't do well at those things but one of the reasons might be that we just don't want to hear it maybe you don't want to hear what God has to say to you in his word maybe you don't want to pray to him maybe because you're too angry with him or maybe you're in a season of habitual sin that just makes you feel very distant from him maybe you feel shame I don't know whatever it might be even Christians sometimes suppress the gospel we don't want to be confronted by it we want to go on living our lives how we want to live them and so it makes me wonder when we read this passage who are we in the story are we innocent

Paul being persecuted for his beliefs unfairly or are we the crowd who wants nothing to do with the truth of God's word we probably all had that moment where you go down into the basement of your house and you flip the light on and you see movement out of the corner of your eye a lot of times it's a mouse scurrying away the reason it runs away is because the mouse loves the darkness right it loves to be hidden where no one can see it but you turn the light on and it exposes it now the problem is not with the light but with what it exposes Jesus said in John chapter 3 the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed when the gospel shines it reveals our sin see people don't oppose the gospel because it's false they oppose it because it exposes because it transforms our idols our pride our autonomy our self centeredness and it brings transformation not through white knuckle trying harder but by surrendering your life to christ by stepping into the light and being exposed before him and accepting his transforming grace through faith we can admit that that can feel scary this idea of your sin being exposed we might feel like the mouse that we need to run back into the shadows like there's only safety in the darkness where we can hide the truth is there is no safer place than in the light you know why because the light is

Jesus he loves you he will forgive you you do not have to live in hiding there's a better way to live you can live in the light of God's grace and in the peace that surpasses understanding that same light the light of the gospel it will be opposed by many it will receive scorn it will be suppressed but let us not be ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you are greater than this world we thank you that sin death and the devil are all defeated enemies under your feet lord we pray that we would be ready for the opposition of this world we ask that you would shape our hearts to be bold messengers of your truth while at the same time being gracious and tender as your son [35 : 17] Jesus and it's in his holy and righteous name that we pray amen who who