

Acts 21:16-40

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to Acts chapter 21. We are starting at verse 17 in this chapter.

It's page 930, if you're looking in a pew Bible. It's a hot morning.

If you're on the sides and not getting any breeze, there's still space in the front three rows. So feel free to move if you desire. Acts chapter 21, starting at verse 17.

Starting at verse 17. When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed.

[1 : 09] They are all zealous for the law. And they have been told about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads.

Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. When the seven days were almost completed, 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 everywhere, 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 : 37] 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.

Recently, my wife and I, on some nights when we're home after the kids have gone to bed, we've been watching a documentary series about John Adams and the American Revolution. It's been a fascinating reminder some of our, this country's founding history.

[3 : 47] And one of the striking aspects of John Adams in particular is how he often found himself in between two opposing sides. On the one side, there were the British loyalists who objected to some of King George's policies but were ultimately never going to break away from the King of England.

On the other side, there were the patriots who occasionally broke out in rowdy and even violent demonstrations. One winter night, some patriots formed a mob around a group of British soldiers standing guard in Boston.

They began shouting threats and throwing snowballs, stones, and sticks. Finally, one of the British soldiers fired shots into the crowd and five men were killed. Adams, a trained lawyer, defended the British soldiers in court.

Successfully. But later on, as a delegate from Massachusetts to the Constitutional Convention, Adams played a leading role in the independence movement, persuading Congress to make a decisive declaration of independence from Great Britain, writing much of that declaration and nominating George Washington to lead the American army.

The same pattern continued later when he became president. Adams was strongly opposed on one side by the Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson, and on the other side by members of his own party, the Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton.

[5 : 07] Now, I wonder if you've ever found yourself in the midst of a complicated conflict between two groups of people who have a long history of mistrust and misunderstanding.

Now, maybe it's on a personal level. Maybe you've tried to come alongside two friends who've had a falling out, encouraging them to talk to each other again and begin to work out their differences. And maybe that process has been harder than you expected it would be. And it's exposed deeper levels of mistrust and misunderstanding and historical stuff that you didn't even realize was there. Or maybe you find yourself in between two rival groups, maybe at work or in an organization that you're involved in. And these two groups strongly disagree with one another or compete with one another.

And maybe you agree with one group more than the other, but you see some validity in what both of these groups are. You recognize some good ideas in both groups.

[6 : 07] And so you maintain some connections to both. You don't simply take one side or take the other. And yet, people in both groups distrust you because if you're with them, then you shouldn't be with them.

And if you're with us, then you shouldn't be with them. Well, this is the situation in which the Apostle Paul found himself in this chapter. Now, so far, there have been 21 chapters of the book of Acts which have covered approximately 25 years from A.D. 33, the day of Pentecost, to A.D. 57 when Paul arrives here in Jerusalem.

But the next three chapters, chapter 21, the middle of 21 through the middle of 24, cover a period of only 12 days. And so Luke wants to highlight these events that happened in Jerusalem during this period of less than two weeks as extremely important for the message he's seeking to convey.

And what we see today is that in the midst of a complicated and politically charged situation, fraught with misunderstanding and mistrust, Paul sought to faithfully live out the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as we look into this chapter, I think we'll gain some insights into what it looks like to follow Jesus and be faithful to him in the midst of conflicts, in the midst of situations or relationships that are fraught.

[7 : 32] So this morning, we want to look at three things. First, the complicated situation that Paul found himself in. Second, a careful response from Paul and the Jerusalem elders. And third, the result.

So first, the complicated situation Paul found himself in. Now, this is a little complicated, but let's dig in. Now, remember, a little background. Paul was a Jewish man by birth. He had been circumcised on the eighth day, brought up in Jerusalem, trained under the well-respected Rabbi Gamaliel, well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, observant of the traditions of his people.

And then, Jesus Christ had called him to become an apostle to the Gentiles and to proclaim that Jesus was not only the Messiah for Israel, but also the true Savior and Lord for the whole world.

And so Paul considered it his mission to carry the good news of Jesus crucified and risen throughout all the nations, in particular throughout the Roman Empire. His next goal was to get to Rome and then on to Spain, sort of as far west as he could see.

on the edge which would have been thought of as the ends of the earth. And when Paul went to the Gentiles, calling people to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the father of Jesus Christ, he didn't say, you have to become exactly like the Jews have been for hundreds of years.

[8 : 59] You have to obey all the Old Testament laws and everything that Moses taught, all the ceremonies. No. He said, through Jesus Christ, you can be made right with God and you can be

included in God's people simply by trusting and believing in him.

So Paul was from a Jewish background but he became the apostle to the Gentiles but still, as the apostle to the Gentiles, he was still, he still loved his own people, the Jews.

And so in every Gentile city where he went, his first stop would be the Jewish synagogue and he would go there and he would proclaim and he would say, this Jesus that I'm proclaiming to you, he's not a Gentile God, he's not another pagan God, he's the Jewish Messiah.

He's the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures, what God had promised to our people long ago. And so he would always go to them first and proclaim his message. And here, he also was showing his love for his Jewish brothers and sisters at a time when they were, when many of the Jewish people in Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were financially struggling.

And so as we've seen, he collected an offering, a large financial gift from several of the Gentile churches and went on this long journey all the way to Jerusalem with representatives from several of the Gentile churches to bring this gift.

[10:23] It was a gift of grace, a gift of generosity, and a gift of peace, expressing the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. So that's just the background. Paul's a Jewish man by birth.

He was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles and yet he still had a heart and a love for his own people. So he was between, he was loyal to both. Now, when Paul first arrived in Jerusalem, everything seems pretty good.

Verse 17, the brothers and sisters received us gladly. Verse 18, on the following day, Paul went in with us. Us would be the whole sort of delegation, traveling along with Paul to James, who was sort of the most prominent leader of the Jerusalem church at the time and all the elders.

So this was sort of the leadership council of the Jerusalem church. Now, at first, they seem a bit cooler in their reception toward Paul. Verse 19 says, Paul greeted them.

It doesn't say they greeted him. But at least they listened to what Paul had to say. Verse 20, they listened to Paul's report of what God had done among the Gentiles and they glorified God. And that's the same way, if you remember, back in chapter 11, when Peter came and reported what God had done in bringing Cornelius and his family, the first sort of, the first large-scale Gentile conversion, people coming to faith in Jesus.

[11:48] And Peter went back to the church in Jerusalem and said, look at what God has done among the Gentiles and it says they glorified God. And they recognized what God was doing among the nations. So the Jerusalem elders were supportive of Paul's work among the Gentiles.

Verse 25, they also explicitly reaffirmed the decision of the Jerusalem council. Now this is back in Acts 15. And basically what had been discussed at that council is what, should Gentiles who come to believe in Jesus, do they need to be required to fulfill the Old Testament law, just like the Jews? And the answer was, no. Paul, James, the Jerusalem elders all agreed that Gentiles are reconciled to God by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ on the same basis as Jews and not by circumcision, not by the other works of the law.

And so the Jerusalem council had given a directive to Gentiles, which they're quoting here, that they should basically abstain from idolatry and sexual immorality and perhaps from some of the cultural practices that would have been most offensive to their Jewish brothers and sisters.

That's probably what blood and eating blood and eating the meat of strangled animals, those things would have been sort of most obviously offensive if Gentile Christians were doing that alongside Jewish people who had come to believe in Jesus, who were part of the church with them.

[13:21] So, so at first, it seems great, right? Paul comes to Jerusalem, here's what God's doing in the rest of the world. Yeah, wonderful. Verse 20, the Jerusalem elders say, here's what God's doing here.

You know, while you've been traveling around the empire, God's still been at work here. Thousands of Jews have come to believe in Jesus here in Jerusalem and Paul would have praised God for that too.

But then, it gets complicated. You see, this wasn't just a happy reunion of long separated friends. There was lots of tension in the background. Now, for one thing, the political situation in Jerusalem was extremely volatile.

Tensions were rising between the native Jews who had a longing for independence and the Romans, the imperial overlords, who were increasingly oppressive. The Jews were a minority group struggling to maintain their identity, cultural and religious in the midst of a pagan, powerful empire.

Jews lived throughout the empire, but Jerusalem was the center of Jewish nationalist sentiments. And so periodically, around this time, Jewish men would initiate violent uprisings and then they would be severely repressed by the Roman authorities.

[14 : 37] So just three years before Paul arrived, there was an Egyptian Jew who led 4,000 followers into the desert. He was sort of acting like Moses all over again. And he organized his followers to march into Jerusalem and he said, God's going to do what he did with Jericho.

The walls are going to fall down and we're going to march in and I'm going to rule, I'm going to be the king in Jerusalem. And the Roman governor killed 400 of his men, captured 200 others. Somehow the Egyptian escaped. This led to a general Jewish rebellion, looting and burning the homes of Romans and Roman sympathizers. Luke refers to this event in verse 38, so does the Jewish historian Josephus.

It was also dangerous if you were a Jew in Jerusalem who had any loyalty to the Romans. There were these men who were called the assassins and they carried daggers in their cloaks.

And they would even sometimes murder Jewish aristocrats who were suspected of collaborating with the Romans in the temple, in the temple precinct itself.

[15 : 41] And they'd get away with it. So when Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, arrives in Jerusalem with a whole bunch of Gentiles from all over the empire coming with him, the immediate response of many people was not gratitude and joy, but rather suspicion and hostility.

Now particularly, this would have been a case among Jews who were, as verse 20 says, zealous for the law. Now that's a phrase that should catch our attention.

Some Jews called themselves simply zealots. They were sort of the political revolutionaries who were leading violent uprisings. Other Jews, especially Pharisees, called themselves zealous for the law, which meant they might not have advocated immediate violent revolution, but they were committed to carefully upholding the law and carefully preserving their distinctive Jewish identity, trying to carve out a place where they could be themselves in the midst of this larger world that wanted everyone to just sort of be part of the big empire and be part of the melting pot and lose their identity.

And so they were very concerned about carefully observing the law and carefully keeping their traditions and carefully handing down their Jewish identity from one generation to another, and they were hostile toward anyone who claimed to be a Jew but didn't actually keep the law.

Now before his conversion to faith in Jesus, Paul described himself in the same terms. Philippians 3, he says, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church.

[17 : 24] Paul was hostile toward Jewish followers of Jesus because he believed that they were corrupting the Jewish people and leading the nation astray. Now, so that was Paul before he came to faith in Jesus.

Now, some of these Jews in Jerusalem had been very zealous for the Old Testament law and for their traditions and they came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They believed that he was the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel but they didn't immediately abandon all of their cultural traditions and they didn't go from being staunch defenders of an independent Jewish state to being staunch supporters of the pagan Roman Empire.

I mean, you know, what exactly would have been the Christian political view back then? Do you support a Jewish independent state? Well, some people are doing, are leading violent revolutions or do you support a pagan Roman Empire?

Well, it's complicated. You know, as a side point, this is one illustration of why it's important that Christianity not be rigidly identified with only one ethnic group or one set of cultural traditions or one political party or one nation.

Now, obviously, being a follower of Jesus should shape all those things, should reshape our ethnic identity, our political views, our cultural traditions, and on some issues, the implications of that are more clear, but in other areas, it's complicated and it often takes time to discern what it means to faithfully live out the gospel of Jesus in different situations.

[19 : 02] So, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, by and large, continue to be zealous for the law, zealous for their traditions, cultural and religious traditions. They would observe the Sabbath, they'd observe Passover, keep kosher, circumcise their sons, and they would recognize as believers in Jesus that the deepest meaning of these rituals was found in the Messiah Jesus, but they held pretty tightly to the traditions they had inherited all the way back from Moses.

Now, not only that, second problem, they were also, or here's a problem, they were also misinformed about Paul, verse 21. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walking according to our customs.

Now, that word forsake is a very strong word. It's the Greek word from which we get the English word apostasy. It meant political and or spiritual rebellion and sort of desertion of the Lord and his people.

So, here's the problem. Thousands of followers of Jesus, especially new believers in Jesus, who are zealous for the Jewish law in Jerusalem and they've heard that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is telling all Jews everywhere, forsake the law, forsake your traditions, forsake your people.

And so, Paul comes to Jerusalem with all these Gentiles wanting to deliver this gift to promote peace and unity in the church. You know, you might wonder, why didn't, why doesn't Luke actually tell us about this gift right here?

[20 : 39] Paul would have delivered it. I think the reason is he didn't highlight the gift because it didn't have that effect that Paul had hoped for.

Right? These Jewish believers zealous for the law, here's that Paul's coming and Paul had supposedly taught all the Jews ever to forsake the law and he brought all this money to the Jerusalem elders.

Their response most likely would have been, is he trying to bribe them? Is he trying to pay us off to forsake Moses? Is he a secret agent of the Roman Empire trying to destroy our nation?

This was the complicated situation Paul found himself in. Fraught with mistrust and misunderstanding and all kinds of historical baggage. Now, second, Paul and the Jerusalem elders' response.

Verse 22 to 26. So the Jerusalem elders make a proposal. They say, Paul, here's how you can set things straight. How you can show everyone that you're not teaching all Jews everywhere to forsake the law of Moses, but in fact, as a Jew, born as a Jew, and still loving your people, you respect the law and you're willing to live by it.

[21 : 55] You see, what people were saying about Paul wasn't exactly true. Paul never commanded Jewish believers in Jesus to immediately forsake their distinctive cultural traditions.

He didn't say, you must stop observing the Sabbath. You must stop celebrating Passover. No, he never said that. Now, he did say that that's not necessary to be right with God.

That's not necessary for Gentiles. To do those same things. And he said to Jewish believers, he said, you have to accept Gentile Christians as equal members of the family of God, not as second-class citizens.

Now, now you might ask, what about these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, zealous for the law? Was that the most mature Christian view to hold so tightly to observing the Sabbath, celebrating Passover, keeping kosher, circumcising your children?

Well, Paul would have said no. Paul's attitude was, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but a new creation in Christ. Galatians 6.15.

[23 : 10] So, Paul didn't share these Christians' zeal for the Jewish law. He was willing to abide by it. He was willing to live by it when he lived among the Jews. But, you know, he didn't think it was that crucial in the end.

So, he would have disagreed with them a little bit about their priorities. But he still recognized them as brothers and sisters in Christ and he extended himself in order to demonstrate love for them.

And Paul's an example here of a Christian who sees another group, Christian, or group of Christians and says, you know, I don't think they have the best understanding of some of these things.

I wouldn't totally agree with them. But you know what? I'm going to extend myself to love them. I'm not going to just keep my distance because I don't like them and I don't like quite the way they do things.

But I'm going to do all that I can while being faithful to Christ to show that I love them and care for them. So, here's a proposal. Verse 23, Jerusalem elders made a proposal.

Here are four men, Jewish believers in Jesus, who made a temporary Nazarite vow. If you want to know about a Nazarite vow, read number six. It was basically a vow of temporary devotion to God, a special devotion to God for a temporary period.

[24 : 30] In particular, it involved a commitment to abstain from alcohol, from grapes, from grape juice, from haircuts, and from dead bodies. Now, that might seem a little odd to us, but it was sort of like undertaking an extended fast, or choosing to never drink alcohol, or going on a missions trip as an expression of devotion to God and service to his people.

All right, it's not something that every Christian has to do, but it's a legitimate expression of devotion, of faithful devotion to God. So these men had taken on this vow for this temporary period. They were coming to the end of their vow. When they would complete their vow, they'd go to the temple, shave their head, and they'd offer their hair, sort of symbolizing this whole time that they had set themselves apart for special devotion to God.

They would offer it as a sacrifice. It would actually be burned up on the altar, and they would also offer a quite expensive offering. One male lamb, one ewe lamb, one ram, one basket of bread, plus a drink offering for each of them.

And that would be the completion of their vow. And some of those offerings would be shared and eaten as a sort of celebration. So they would sort of be making an offering to God and hosting a big party for everyone who was there at the same time.

[25 : 55] So, the Jerusalem elders say, Paul, why don't you go with them, purify yourself along with them, go through the purification ritual, and that way you can be ritually pure, you can pay their expenses.

And that'll be a public sign, and everybody will see that all these accusations are clearly false, and so they won't be offended by your coming here to Jerusalem. Verse 26, Paul agreed to the plan. Now maybe some of you are wondering, should Paul really agree to this plan? I mean, how could Paul, believing that Jesus had broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, how could he go back into that temple in Jerusalem and participate in worship there any longer? Was Paul compromising his principles and going along with a misguided plan which ended in disaster? But Luke doesn't give us any indication that the plan was misguided.

Or that Paul's intentions were wrong. In fact, in chapter 23, verse 11, the Lord Jesus stood by Paul and said, take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me here in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

[27 : 11] So the Lord Jesus himself comes to Paul and encourages him and says, you faithfully testified about me here in Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And it's also consistent with Paul's principles in his letters.

So in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says, to the Jews, I became like a Jew to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

In other words, Paul is willing to stretch himself and extend himself to love the people that he was with. Now, and particularly he was willing to do this because the Jerusalem elders were very clear in what they said to him, we're supportive of what you're doing among the Gentiles and we agree with the Jerusalem council, salvations by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and that's it.

So that was clear and because that was clear, Paul could go along with a temple purification ritual because it wasn't wrong. It wasn't off limits.

So two implications before we go on. I know this is complicated. I know it's hot. Hang in there. First, as a follower of Jesus, some beliefs and practices are non-negotiable and others are not.

[28 : 30] Right? There's one unchanging gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the one and only, the crucified and risen, Lord and Savior. The moral law of God is also unchanging in Old Testament and the New Testament which is summarized in love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

And things like the Ten Commandments sort of flesh some of that out. And the New Testament teaching of Jesus and the apostles fleshes that out. what does that mean to love God above everything else and love our neighbor?

And that's something we don't, we cannot compromise on. Now the ceremonial law was different. It was a temporary shadow pointing forward to the reality in Christ. So there's some things that are non-negotiable as Christian believers, but other things are.

In different situations, the practical application of some of these biblical principles, what does it look like to love your Jewish neighbor? What does it look like to love your Gentile neighbor?

That was going to look different for Paul. You know, what does it look like in today's world to love your Muslim neighbor? Well, that might look a little different than what does it look like to love your secular, happy pagan neighbor who doesn't really want anything to do with any religion at all.

[29 : 55] What does it mean to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to very different kinds of people who are coming with very different assumptions about what Christianity is about and what it means to follow Jesus?

It's the same message. We're not just changing the message to, you know, please whoever we're with, but there will be different ways of communicating it.

Second, it's worth the trouble to build bridges with other Christians who have different ethnic backgrounds, different political views, different cultural traditions.

Right? It would have been much easier for Paul to do one of two things. Stay in Jerusalem his whole life, hang out with the Jerusalem Christians, and observe the law without fail.

Or, hang out with the Gentiles. Stay out in the Roman Empire, don't bother with those, you know, fussy Christians in Jerusalem. But no, Paul was going to build bridges because he loved them and he recognized that we're all part of the family of God through Christ together.

[31 : 05] And so, the gospel calls us not to just surround ourselves with other Christians who think the same way you do about everything and earn roughly the same amount of money or in the same stage of life as you or have about the same amount of formal education, but to intentionally extend ourselves to people who are different and who are part of this church or part of another church and to make the effort to express that we're part of one body in Christ.

So, we've seen the complicated situation Paul found himself in. We've seen a careful response from Paul and the Jerusalem elders and finally we see the result. Paul extended himself to show his loyalty to his own people.

The result was not that everyone recognized him for who he really was and loved him and was so grateful and recognized all the sacrifices that he had made traveling hundreds of miles all the way to Jerusalem to show his love and build bridges.

No, people turned on him, falsely accused him, beat him, and tried to kill him. Ironically, Paul was accused in verse 28 of defiling the temple when he was in the process of carrying out a purification ritual.

As a Christian, especially if you're a Christian leader, you may be at times, despite your best efforts, misunderstood. You may be falsely or even irrationally accused.

[32 : 35] As we read earlier, Jesus said, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Now, those last two phrases are important, falsely and on my account. It doesn't mean blessed are you when people revile you and say all kinds of evil against you for whatever reason just because you're a jerk. No, falsely on the account of Jesus.

Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. See, at different times in his ministry, Paul took the heat from both sides. In Philippi, he was seized and dragged into the marketplace by pagan Gentiles who said, these men are Jews.

They're disturbing our city, advocating customs that aren't lawful for us Romans to practice. And then he gets to Jerusalem and he's seized and dragged out of the temple by law-observant Jews who shouted, men of Israel, help.

This is the man who's teaching everyone everywhere against our people and our law and our temple. He got it from both sides. Of course, both accusations can't be true at the same time.

[33 : 43] Part of what Luke is trying to do in the book of Acts is to sort of show all the accusations that were thrown at Paul and the early Christians and to say, well, if you look carefully, none of them are true.

Now, interestingly, the other Christians in Jerusalem don't appear in the story again. Unlike the believers in some other towns, they don't visibly come to Paul's defense when he was attacked. Now, perhaps they wanted to but simply weren't able to because of the mob. Perhaps they were afraid of their own safety, their own reputation, and they held back.

We don't know. By God's providence, it was the tribune, which is the Roman military commander, who stepped in and saved Paul's life from the angry mob. So God accomplishes his purposes in all kinds of ways.

Now, our passage ends with verse 36. The soldiers carrying Paul up the steps into the barracks, into the fortress, and the mob of the people cried out, away with him.

[34 : 56] Paul came all the way to Jerusalem to demonstrate grace and peace from Jesus Christ to the Christians there, and to show love to all his fellow Jews, Christian and non-Christian.

The end result was he almost got crucified. Now, of course, he didn't get crucified. And in the next few chapters, what we'll see is that Paul is actually vindicated.

And all the accusations that were thrown against him, he's pronounced, he's publicly declared not guilty. And so we'll see Paul's defense over the next several chapters and acts of himself and of the gospel of Jesus.

But, you know, when you step into the middle of a complicated conflict between groups of people that have a long history of mistrust and misunderstanding, when you seek to faithfully live out the gospel of Jesus and extend grace and peace through Jesus Christ, part of the message of this passage is that you might get beat up, falsely accused, and rejected.

It doesn't always go well. But if that happens to you, you won't be the first and neither was Paul the first. Before Paul, there was Stephen, the martyr in Jerusalem.

[36 : 25] And before Stephen, there was Jesus Christ himself. And what did Jesus Christ do when he came into this world? He stepped into the middle of the most complicated and fraught relationship of all.

The relationship between a holy and pure God and his sinful and rebellious people. The history of opposition and enmity stretched all the way back to the beginning of the human race.

The Gentiles, the nations of the world, had walked in darkness of idolatry and immorality, having exchanged the glory of the one true God for the love of created things.

The descendants of Abraham had been called by God to be a light shining in the darkness. And yet, over and over, they had refused to listen to God's word and often became no better than the nations around them.

And so, in the fullness of time, Jesus stepped into the middle of that complicated and messy and volatile relationship between the creator God and rebellious humanity, between the God who had made covenant promises and his unfaithful people.

[37 : 47] And Jesus came to extend grace and make peace once and for all. And he came to the city of Jerusalem where God had promised to make his name known to all the world.

And he was arrested, slandered, beaten, mocked. And the mob of the people cried, away with him. And the Roman authorities, though they formally declared his innocence, handed him over to the crowd to be crucified.

You see, Jesus Christ paid a great price to reconcile us to God. And that's what Luke wants to remind us of above all.

That Paul was following in the footsteps of the crucified and risen Messiah, Jesus. And that Jesus stepped into the middle of the relationship between humanity and God so that we might receive his grace and know his peace through his death and through his resurrection.

And it's because of what he has done and the power of his spirit working in us that we are also enabled to enter into the midst of sticky situations and sometimes to bear the brunt of others' mistrust and misinformation and accusations and seek to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ in the middle of that.

[39 : 22] Jesus was crucified but he was also resurrected. And God vindicated him, God proclaimed to everyone that he was the righteous Savior and the risen Lord.

And God promises that as we follow Jesus that whatever sufferings we are called to endure along the way, that he also promises eternal glory. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that in your great love for the world that you sent your one and only son so that whoever would believe in him would have, would not perish but have eternal life.

We thank you, Father, for what you have done to reconcile us to yourself. Lord, we pray that you would make us peacemakers in a troubled world, peacemakers between different people, peacemakers especially in your church.

And Lord, that we would be messengers of this gospel of peace, that because you stepped into the middle of the relationship between people and God, that we can be reconciled with you, that we can be forgiven of our sins and welcomed into your family forever.

[40 : 53] Lord, we thank you for that great good news. We pray that you would be our vision. Lord, that we would fix our eyes on you, the author and finisher of our faith.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.