



Sermon Text: Acts 21:17-40

Sermon Date: September 30, 2018

In our text, Paul finally arrives in Jerusalem to deliver the love offering he has collected for the church. Four themes emerge as the story unfolds.

PAUL'S HUMILITY – 17-26

Although there is substantial disagreement as to the appropriateness of the elders' counsel and Paul's agreement to it, this text reveals Paul's humility. We can see Paul's humility in several ways. First, when he gives a detailed report of his ministry among the Gentiles, God gets all the credit— "he related one by one the things *God had done* among the Gentiles... ". Second, Paul sacrificially serves the Jewish Christians who were suspicious of him. He knew his reputation was in tatters, yet he still determined to love and serve those who thought the very worst of him. Third, Paul humbly submits to the elders' proposal. He doesn't lash out or castigate them for failing to defend his reputation. Even though he is the Apostle Paul, he submits without complaint, difficulty, or delay. In all these ways, Paul reflects the humility of Christ who came to serve those who despised and rejected him.

THE CROWD'S BRUTALITY – 27-36

Unfortunately, the elders' carefully constructed plan does not work out. While Paul is following their instructions, he is spotted in the temple by Jews from Asia who incite the crowd against him. With misrepresentations and false accusations, the bubbling cauldron of Jewish anger froths over into unrestrained violence. Paul is seized, dragged from the temple, and savagely beaten, only to be rescued by Roman soldiers who pour out of a nearby fortress. Luke vividly captures the chaos and intensity of the scene, reporting that Paul even had to be carried by the soldiers due to the crowd's ferocity. The man who came into Jerusalem reflecting Christ's humility is now pictured as sharing in His sufferings. In the very same city with nearly identical words, an angry crowd also cried out for Christ's death.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY – 20:22-23; 21:10-11; 28:17

In this horrifying scene, all that the Holy Spirit had warned would happen comes true. The prophecy of Agabus is fulfilled. The crowd rages, they beat an innocent man, they rebel against God and reject His messenger of salvation; yet, in their rebellion they only accomplish what God had ordained to take place. God is in control. While there is deep, impenetrable mystery here, there are two takeaways from this picture of God's sovereignty. First, God's sovereignty didn't produce a resigned fatalism in Paul. He knew God's had appointed imprisonment and affliction, yet he still took action in obedience to common sense and biblical counsel. Second, God's sovereignty produces confidence. Even when life seems utterly senseless, God is working all things according to the counsel of His will (see Acts 4:23-31).

PAUL'S PRIORITY – 37-40

Even though Paul is beaten and bloodied, having been carried to safety by Roman soldiers, he seeks an opportunity to speak to the crowd. Paul's ultimate priority was to bear witness to what Christ has done. Paul can turn and address an angry crowd because he loves them (see Romans 9:1-3) and because he is not afraid of them—his salvation is secure. May God work in our hearts to create that kind of love and fearlessness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Why is it important to restrain yourself from rushing to judgment and assuming someone else's motivations? How can you guard yourself from doing so?
3. How does God's sovereignty give you confidence and peace in life's uncertainty and pain?
4. Paul's courageous evangelism was fueled by aching love for the lost and fearless confidence in Christ. Pray that God would powerfully produce similar love and fearlessness in your life.