LESSON 22:
PAUL IN PRISON, PART 1 (ACTS 21:37-22:29)

Paul's third missionary journey ended with his arrest in Jerusalem. Despite his efforts to demonstrate he was not against the national and cultural expressions of the Law of Moses, many Jews still saw him as an enemy. He had now been taken into custody by the Romans.

PAUL ADDRESSES THE CROWD (ACTS 21:37-22:2)

21:37-22:2. Paul asked the Roman commander (Claudius Lysias, Acts 23:26) if he could address the people. Paul's use of Greek seemed to surprise the commander. Depending on translation, Paul's use of Greek is said to either have confirmed or denied the commander's suspicion that he was an Egyptian insurrectionist. This insurrectionist had, a few years earlier, claimed to be a prophet and led people with the professed threat of causing the walls around Jerusalem to fall (like Jericho in Joshua 6; see Josephus's *Antiquities* and *War*). Though the Roman governor Felix had attacked the rebels, the Egyptian had escaped. However, Paul assured the commander he was a Jew from the important city of Tarsus. The commander allowed Paul to speak, and Paul gave his defense before the Jewish people in Hebrew (Aramaic, the language of Palestinian Jews). This impressed the crowd, causing them to listen more intently.

PAUL'S PAST (ACTS 22:3-5)

22:3-5. Rather than speaking harshly to the Jews, Paul demonstrated how he had been like them. Though he was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, he was brought up in Jerusalem and educated in the Jewish Law and ways. In fact, he was educated by the most respected Jewish rabbi of the time – Gamaliel (a member of the Sanhedrin, Acts 5:34). Paul identified that he followed the Jewish law strictly (according to the sect of the Pharisees, Philippians 3:5). He also described himself as having been zealous (passionate, fervent) for the Law like those Jews demonstrated themselves to be. In fact, Paul had zealously persecuted the Way (those who followed Jesus), even being involved in putting people to death and arresting them (Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13). But, they did not have to take Paul's word for what had happened around 20 years earlier. The high priest and council of elders (Sanhedrin) could attest to these things, particularly concerning the letters they had given to Paul to arrest Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2), whether through verbal confirmation or written record.

PAUL'S CONVERSION (ACTS 22:6-16)

22:6-10. Paul now moved to identifying what changed (as recorded in Acts 9). Paul (Saul) was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished (Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5), but had this mission interrupted by Jesus. While he was traveling, a bright light flashed around him that caused him to fall to the ground. Saul heard the voice of Jesus (also saw Jesus, v. 14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:8), asking why Saul was persecuting Him and identifying Himself as Jesus the Nazarene Saul had been persecuting. Those who were with Saul saw the light and heard a sound (Acts 9:7), but did not see Jesus or hear what was spoken. Inquiring of the Lord Jesus what he should do, Saul was instructed to get up and go into Damascus to hear everything that had been appointed for him to do (Acts 26:15-18). Note that Saul was not yet saved, as he needed to go to Damascus to hear what he must do.

22:11-16. Saul was not disobedient (Acts 26:19) and went to Damascus, being escorted by the hand. There, he met Ananias (his brother in a Jewish sense). Notice Paul described this man who would teach him to this Jewish audience as someone who was a Jew who was devout in adhering to the Law of Moses (evidently in faithful obedience before his conversion and likely in some points concerning custom and heritage after) and as having a good reputation with the Jews in Damascus. Ananias then healed Saul of his blindness and told Saul that God (the God of their ancestors) had planned for him to know His will, see the Righteous One, and hear words from His mouth (Galatians 1:15-16). Not eliminating Saul's free choice to accept or reject Christ, God knew what would happen and knew His plan for Paul to become a witness to all people (both Jews and Gentiles) of what he would see and hear. Hearing this, Saul was instructed not to delay in being baptized (immersed in water) so his sins would be washed away (forgiven, through the blood of Jesus, Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:20-21; Romans 6:3-4), explaining the purpose of his baptism (Acts 9:18). In baptism, Saul would also call on the name of the Lord Jesus by confessing His name, expressing dependence on Him for salvation, and coming into the possession/ownership of the Lord (Romans 10:8-13; Acts 2:21, 38). This marked the point of Saul's forgiveness!

PAUL'S MISSION (ACTS 22:17-21)

22:17-21. After some time, Paul returned to Jerusalem (perhaps three years later, Galatians 1:17-18; Acts 9:26-30). While he was in the temple praying, he fell into a trance and saw Jesus telling him to get out of Jerusalem quickly because the people would not accept Paul's testimony about Jesus. Paul, however, reasoned that the people in Jerusalem had known him and all that he had done to persecute believers in Jesus (including imprisonment, beating, and involvement in killing Stephen, Acts 7:54-60). Yet, Jesus knew how the Jews in Jerusalem would respond (Acts 9:26-30) and told Paul to leave Jerusalem, sending him far away to the Gentiles. In this, Paul demonstrated that leaving Jerusalem and preaching to the Gentiles was something the Lord had instructed Him to do (Acts 26:16-18).

RESPONSE TO PAUL'S SPEECH (ACTS 22:22-29)

22:22-29. The people listened until Paul mentioned being sent to the Gentiles. At this, they raised their voices, saying he should be taken away from the earth and not allowed to live. They shouted, threw off their outer garments (cloaks), and threw dust into the air (demonstrating hostility toward Paul). Seeing this scene turn negative, the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. There, the commander intended to have Paul scourged (a severe flogging) to extract the truth from Paul through this beating. As they stretched out his body (likely bound with straps), Paul questioned the centurion there whether it was legal to scourge a Roman citizen who had not been tried and found guilty (as such was prohibited by Roman law). The centurion reported this to the commander, who confirmed Paul's claim by establishing that Paul was born into his citizenship. The commander, however, had purchased his citizenship through a large expense (making Paul's citizenship more honorable than the commander's). This immediately stopped the scourging, and the commander was deeply concerned because they had violated what should be done to Roman citizens.

CONCLUSION

After being falsely accused and having his identity misunderstood, Paul remained in Roman custody. Now, Paul's Roman citizenship had kept him from being scourged. Yet, the commotion in Jerusalem still left the commander needing to sort through the confusion.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Who did the commander think Paul may have been?

How did Paul's use of language impact people?

What was Paul's past connection with the Jewish Law and customs?

What happened when Paul (Saul) was traveling to Damascus?

What was Saul told when he arrived in Damascus?

When and how was Saul saved?

Why had Paul left Jerusalem?

What happened to Paul after he stopped speaking?

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