

# Saved by Grace

Week Commencing 19 June 2023

*Notes for next week's sermon on Acts 21:1-23:11 – Gospel and courage*

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## **DAY 1: Read Acts 21:1-16**

Acts 21:1-16 recounts the journey of the apostle Paul and his companions as they travelled from Miletus to Jerusalem. This passage is significant because it highlights Paul's determination to reach Jerusalem despite the warnings and concerns of his friends and fellow believers.

Paul and his companions set sail from Miletus and make their way to various cities along the coast of Asia Minor. At each stop, they are greeted by fellow believers who warn Paul about the dangers that await him in Jerusalem. The consistent message they receive is that Paul will face imprisonment and persecution if he continues on his journey. These warnings from his friends are a testament to the love and concern they have for Paul. They genuinely care for his well-being and want to protect him from harm. However, Paul remains resolute in his decision to go to Jerusalem. He is convinced that he is being led by the Holy Spirit and that he must go to the city, even if it means facing hardship.

As Paul arrives in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus comes from Judea and takes Paul's belt, binding his own hands and feet with it. Agabus then prophesies that the owner of the belt will be bound in the same way by the Jews in Jerusalem, who will deliver him to the Gentiles. Upon hearing this prophecy, Paul's companions and fellow believers, including Luke, plead with him not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul responds by saying, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

Paul's unwavering determination reflects his commitment to the mission he believes God has given him. He is willing to face persecution and even death for the sake of spreading the gospel and testifying to the name of Jesus. This passage demonstrates Paul's courage, faith, and resolve in the face of opposition.

How good to reflect on how important the Gospel is for us. How do we respond now when we face the smallest ridicule for our trust in Jesus? Often, we withdraw and run a mile! May the Lord give us boldness and courage so that we might say, "I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

## **DAY 2: Read Acts 21:17-40**

After reaching Jerusalem, Paul is warmly received by James and the elders, and he shares a report of his ministry among the Gentiles. However, concerns about Paul's reputation among Jewish believers emerge, as they have been informed that he teaches Jews to abandon their customs. In an effort to address these concerns, the elders suggest that Paul participate in a purification ritual at the temple, hoping to demonstrate his adherence to Jewish customs. Though Paul had emphasized the freedom of Gentile believers from the Law, he agrees to the proposal, showing his willingness to accommodate the concerns of his fellow Jewish believers and maintain unity. Yet, this decision leads to unintended consequences.

While Paul is performing the purification rites, some Jews from Asia recognize him and seize the opportunity to create a tumultuous situation. They falsely accuse Paul of defiling the temple by bringing Gentiles into restricted areas. This accusation incites anger and a mob forms against Paul.

The Roman commander stationed in Jerusalem intervenes to prevent the situation from escalating into a riot. He arrests Paul to determine the cause of the commotion but allows him to speak to the crowd. We will explore that speech in the next passage.

We see here some of the trouble that Paul anticipated on arrival in Jerusalem. But we also note that God was protecting Paul. *While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops... and when the rioters saw the commander and his troops arrive on the scene, they stopped beating Paul.* It appears as though the commander arrested Paul for his own protection and when he could not get a straight answer from the crowd (v34) about what Paul was being accused of, he took Paul into the barracks. So through a terrible situation, God was clearly in control. Do you see God at work through your trials today?

### **DAY 3: Read Acts 22**

Paul begins his defence by recounting his background as a Pharisee, trained under Gamaliel, highlighting his zealousness for the traditions of his ancestors. Paul shares how he persecuted followers of the Way, referring to Christians. He moves on to describing his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. This encounter profoundly impacted Paul, leading to his conversion and transformation.

Paul explains that Ananias, a devout man, came to him and restored his sight through the laying on of hands. Ananias informed him of his divine appointment to be a witness and to carry the message of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. This revelation became the core of Paul's mission, emphasizing his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. This reference triggers the crowd's anger, as they considered the Gentiles unclean and unworthy of salvation.

The crowd erupts in fury, shouting and throwing off their cloaks and dust. The Roman commander orders Paul to be brought into the barracks and flogged to ascertain the reason for the uproar. However, Paul reveals his Roman citizenship, which surprises the commander and causes him to reconsider. God is protecting Paul once more!

This chapter provides valuable insights into Paul's conversion, his mission, and the strong reactions his message elicits. It underscores Paul's transformation from a persecutor of Christians to a fervent follower of Christ and his unwavering commitment to sharing the gospel.

Consider how blessed we are a church, by the Apostle Paul. The example of his determination, the strength of his conviction, his perseverance in the face of trial, his commitment to sharing the good news of God's grace has all been a wonderful example to us and gives us strength and encouragement to keep going in following Christ. Give thanks today for Paul's ministry and pray for courage and boldness to live for Jesus - no matter the cost or consequence.

### **DAY 4: Read Acts 23:1-11**

In Acts 23:1-11, the focus is on a tumultuous confrontation between Paul and the religious leaders in Jerusalem, specifically the high priest and the Sanhedrin. This passage sheds light on Paul's boldness, his strategic approach, and the divine intervention that protects him.

The chapter begins with Paul standing before the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish religious council, which includes both Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul, aware of the sharp divide between the two groups on theological matters, seizes the opportunity to exploit this division to his advantage.

Knowing that the Sadducees deny the resurrection and the existence of angels, Paul boldly declares that he is on trial because of his hope in the resurrection of the dead. This statement immediately triggers a fierce dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees within the council, diverting attention from Paul.

Amidst the chaos, the Roman commander in Jerusalem fears that Paul might be torn apart by the quarrelling factions and orders the soldiers to intervene and remove him from the situation. This intervention not only saves Paul from immediate harm but also fulfils the Lord's promise to protect and enable him to bear witness in Rome.

During the night, the Lord stands near Paul and encourages him, assuring him that he will testify in Rome. This divine visitation provides Paul with strength and reassurance in the midst of his trials, affirming that God is with him and guiding his steps.

This passage showcases Paul's strategic thinking and his ability to exploit the divisions among his opponents to further the spread of the gospel. It also highlights the role of divine intervention in protecting and sustaining Paul's ministry.

Furthermore, Acts 23:1-11 serves as a reminder that, even in the face of opposition and potential harm, God remains faithful to His promises. The Lord's presence and assurance to Paul demonstrate His sovereign control over the circumstances and His commitment to seeing His purpose fulfilled.

This passage serves as a testament to God's faithfulness and His ability to work through challenging situations for the advancement of His Kingdom.

Reflect on what it might mean for us in the central west, to be more focused in sharing the gospel message. What opposition from what sources might we expect? What protections might we claim? And how might the Lord (a) protect us and (b) work through us to ensure the advance of the good news of his grace?