

Day 7 : Acts 22:30-23:10 – The Sanhedrin

Prayerfully read: Matthew 22 (encounter with the Sadducees)

Understanding

Again, Luke shows us that Paul experienced everything the Jewish apostles did – now coming before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council). The high priest (Ananias) is not the same man as 20 years earlier (Annas).

Paul's words in verse 5 either are to be taken literally, showing us that Paul was not infallible but was ready to humbly admit his mistakes... or they were spoken prophetically, indicating that God no longer recognised Annas as being any kind of ruler to God's people. The former seems much more likely – Paul's words in verse 3 were true, but out of keeping with the respect which a leader ought to be given for the sake of good order in society.

The Sadducees (the majority) denied the existence of angels, the spirit world, God's providence, and any future resurrection and judgment. The Pharisees on the other hand believed in all these things (v7). In Paul's mind, faith in resurrection was the crucial issue at hand – he was on trial because of his testimony to Christ's resurrection. The Pharisees were in the majority, but sufficiently influential, when this was made the controversy, to defend Paul. Again we see God providentially using those who weren't necessarily believers to protect his church.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- We are commanded to give respect to our leaders (Exodus 22:28). God has given his authority to governments to rule in civil affairs. Sinful human government is by far better than anarchy – and so Christians must never be those found cynically mocking their leaders because the alternative may be far worse.
- A crucial plank of the gospel is its insistence that the dead shall all live again – and be judged (John 5:24-29). This is proved by the resurrection of Christ, which has already happened (Acts 17:30-31).

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Think of ways in which newspapers, TV programmes, etc., disobey the commandment to respect properly appointed leaders. What effect on you does this have? How can you be ready to stand against it? What reasons are there to do so?
- What does it mean to “live in light of the resurrection”? How should this future event challenge our thinking about what we do today?

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 14 (Chapter 21:1-)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, visit
<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Day 1 : Acts 21:1-14 – Journey To Jerusalem

Prayerfully read (above and): Luke 9

Understanding

From now until the end of Acts, Luke writes about how Paul (and the gospel) arrived in Rome, via Jerusalem. Rome was the heart of the empire – explaining how Paul arrived there will complete Luke's purpose, to explain how Jesus' promise of Acts 1:8 was fulfilled.

The journey reported in verses 1-3 takes Paul from Miletus (just down the coast from Ephesus on the western tip of Asia) back to Syria, north of the land of Israel.

Verse 4 seems puzzling – did Paul disobey the Spirit? One explanation is that Paul was told to not go to Jerusalem *yet*. A better explanation is that Luke left out some of the detail – the Spirit revealed to the believers what sufferings Paul would endure in Jerusalem (as he did to Agabus, v11), and then the believers in response urged him not to go.

Notice how in Tyre the travellers stayed seven days – so that they would be with the believers on the Lord's Day. In Ptolemais too they made contact with the disciples (v7).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Wherever Christians find themselves on the Lord's Day, they ought to follow Paul's example and search for believers to worship with. Though there are many local churches in the world, together they form one church. Our fellow believers are scattered across the globe – but in heaven we shall be gathered together, and so we ought to behave now as if that were true.
- In the early days of the Christian church, revelation was given directly by the Holy Spirit. It was never intended, though, that this should always be so – God's plan was that in due time we would have all that he wished us to know in written form (the Bible), and to use those writings with wisdom and prayer to determine his will.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What difference does it make to you that all believers are ultimately part of only one church? How does this passage help in our thinking? What kind of changes could we make to bring ourselves into line with Paul's practice?

Day 6 : Acts 22:17-29 – Paul The Roman

Prayerfully read: James 2

Understanding

When Paul mentioned going to the Gentiles, that was too much. The pride of his hearers led them to become enraged. The idea that Israel's God would tell a prophet to not speak to Israel but to the Gentiles instead! The clear implication was that Israel was under God's judgment – and being bypassed. This was something that they could not bear to here.

Because Paul had spoken in Hebrew, the commander had not known what was said. The “scourge” which he commanded (v24) was an instrument used in interrogation. “It had leather thongs in which bits of knucklebone and metal were embedded, so that each lash not only inflicted pain but also bruised and tore flesh.”

Again (as in Philippi, chapter 16) we see Paul asserting his rights as a Roman citizen. We again see that Christians acted legally and properly – it was others who were constantly acting illegally against the church.

Falsely claiming to be a Roman citizen was a capital crime, so Paul had nothing to gain from it, whether or not he was carrying any official records with him.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Pride is a great barrier to conversion. Many people do not come to Christ, because they can scarcely tolerate hearing anything against themselves – that they are sinners, and need a Saviour just the same as everybody else. Pride is also a great barrier to Christian growth. If we are unwilling to examine our lives carefully, and confess the sin we find – however uncomfortable it is to do so – then we will accomplish little for the Lord.
- Christians are commanded (Romans 13:1-8) to recognise, obey and honour the state. This duty implies a privilege – to make use of the rights the state gives us when it is appropriate (not out of mere selfish ambition).

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- How do I react when somebody accuses me of something – is my reaction angry and proud, or restrained and humble? Do I examine my own life carefully to see what is restricting my growth?

Day 5 : Acts 21:37-22:21 – Paul's Testimony

Prayerfully read: Acts 26 (Paul again recounts his conversion)

Understanding

The commander thought Paul might be a particular Egyptian terrorist whose movement had recently been put down by the Roman procurator, Felix. Paul's polished Greek, however, and his insistence that he was a full citizen from a city in Cilicia (the opposite direction to Egypt), persuaded him otherwise – and gained Paul the opportunity to speak to the crowd.

Paul spoke to the crowd in Hebrew, to gain their sympathy, respectfully addressing them as “brethren and fathers”. Paul showed that he had by no means rejected his Jewish upbringing – an upbringing which probably very few of them could rival (v3).

Paul was able to tell the crowd “where you are today, I have been”. But, Jesus had intervened dramatically, and changed everything. But even then, this was not a rejection of his Jewish roots – but a fulfilment (v14). Paul's description of Ananias underlines this point (v12-13).

Paul underlined his own willingness to serve the Jewish people in Jerusalem. He loved the temple – but he had had to flee both it and them because of the revelation he had received, not because he wanted to (v17-20). He had gone to the Gentiles not because he had invented new beliefs, but because the Jesus who had converted him had given him instructions (v21).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- A Christian can often appeal to his own testimony - “Where you are now, I once was!”. But the main goal of our testimony is not to point to ourselves – but to Jesus, and how he wonderfully intervened with his grace and mercy into our lives. This is true Christian testimony.
- God is able to turn the most violent, hate-filled opponent of the faith into one of its boldest advocates – willing to plead with and offer Jesus' mercy even to the mob that has just been trying to beat him to death!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- *“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”* - Matthew 5:44. Compare these words of Jesus with your own actions. What needs to be changed? What steps can you take? Remember that all true change begins with confession, repentance and prayer, relying on Jesus – not on our own will-power.

Day 2 : Acts 21:1-14 – Journey to Jerusalem II

Prayerfully read: Acts 8 (Philip the evangelist)

Understanding

The title “evangelist” is not used much in the New Testament (here, 2 Timothy 4:5, Ephesians 4:11). Some Christians believe that the special role of the evangelist, like the apostle, only existed in the early days of the church. I believe, however, that it still exists today – whereas a pastor watches over and instructs an existing church, an evangelist is someone who goes to a new place and preaches the gospel to plant a new church: what we normally call a “missionary” (whether in this country or abroad).

Agabus is the prophet who previously revealed that there would be a famine in Judea (11:28). Now, he, in the style of many Old Testament prophets (e.g. 1 Kings 11:29-32, Isaiah 20:2-6, Jeremiah 13:1-11) performs a “prophecy in action”. Some of the believers responded by urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But this was an emotional, not a rational response - if the Holy Spirit had revealed that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem, then he had also revealed that Paul would be going there in the first place!

In his gospel, Luke had emphasised the necessity of Christ going to Jerusalem to die, and his determination to do so (e.g. Luke 9:51). Now he shows us that Paul was a good servant of his master, by showing his willingness also to go where the Spirit was leading even though it would mean great suffering.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Whilst there is nothing good about deliberately seeking suffering, it is also true that a Christian must not make avoiding suffering his greatest priority. The greatest priority for the church is that the Lord's will is done through the gospel being spread everywhere. This will often inevitably mean opposition and suffering. We must be willing to embrace suffering if it brings honour to the Lord.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What does this passage say about suffering? Look in detail at Paul's response to the prophecy and what his fellow-believers said in response. Have you got this kind of heart? In what ways does our thinking need to change? Are there particular areas of life in which you are taking the easy way out of difficulty, but where it is not bringing glory to the Lord?

Day 3 : Acts 21:15-25 – Arrival in Jerusalem

Prayerfully read: James 1

Understanding

It is possible that Mnason would be one of those who Luke carefully interviewed as he compiled his account of the life of Jesus and the early church. He certainly had plenty of opportunity to meet such believers.

We have met James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, before (12:17, 15:13). James informed Paul that false reports of Paul's Gentile missions were circulating in the church at Jerusalem. It was being said that Paul was teaching Jews to drop their Jewish distinctives. In fact, Paul did no such thing. He taught the Gentiles that these distinctives were not binding upon them, but a matter of liberty. When Paul was amongst the Gentiles he did not practise them himself (in case he offended or confused Gentiles about the gospel); when he was with Jews, he did practise them (in case he offended or confused Jews about the gospel). To Paul, these distinctives were not binding – but he was free to practise or not practise them as he thought best. He insisted on nothing, except the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

James urged Paul to show that he did not teach against the Mosaic Jewish rituals – indeed, to show that he himself respected them. He would do this by taking a vow of ritual purification together with four other men, and he would himself pay the expenses of all the men for the necessary sacrifices at the end of the period of separation under this vow. By doing this, though Paul might not win over those who were opponents of the gospel, he would show the Jerusalem church that the rumours were false. This would prevent the Jerusalem church from becoming half-hearted in its support of the Gentile missions because of what they were hearing.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- When we are with others who do not believe, we should try to be flexible on everything that is not a matter of principle. We must never budge from insisting on the gospel – but on matters that are not important, we must be ready to please others. In this way, we show just how important the gospel is to us – and ought to be to them.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Is anything causing me to be half-hearted about the work of evangelism?
- Do I cause others trouble over things which aren't matters of principle? How does Matthew 5:41 apply in this kind of case?

Day 4 : Acts 21:26-36 – Paul Arrested

Prayerfully read: 2 Timothy 4 (which mentions Trophimus)

Understanding

Paul carried out the plan James suggested. But before the time of separation was finished, he was spotted by Jews from Asia. We have to remember that this was a day before photos, newspapers, the Internet – Paul had not spent much time in Jerusalem in the last couple of decades, and most people outside of the church would simply have no idea what he looked like. It took Jews from Asia to identify him. Maybe they were from near Ephesus and that is why they knew that Trophimus was not a Jew. Their allegation about Trophimus, though, was false, as Luke points out (v29).

The accusation against Paul mirrors that against Jesus and Stephen. Things have now come full circle from the days when Paul was accusing Stephen (6:13, 8:1) – the anti-Christian accuser has become the Christian accused.

It was not particular unusual for there to be an uproar in the temple – and the commander of the garrison (v31) in fact had his office only a few yards away, which is why he was able to rescue Paul so promptly.

Once again, Luke is making it clear that Christianity was not responsible for the uproars and disturbances which followed it wherever it went – its enemies, the unbelieving Jews, were.

Paul's arrest – grabbed by the Romans from the hands of the Jews – was the unexpected fulfilment of Agabus' prophecy (21:11).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Though Christians act with the best of motives and the highest integrity, yet they cannot expect to avoid being unjustly accused – as Jesus, as Stephen, as Paul. Yet we must not let fear of unfair criticism paralyse us so that we never do anything for Jesus – rather we must ask him to help us to grow stronger through it.
- Every prophecy of Scripture is true and must be fulfilled (2 Peter 2:20-21) – but often the fulfilment are not in the ways that at first seemed the most likely.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What has this passage taught me about how to behave as a Christian?
- What does this passage have to say about God's providence? (i.e. His secret work in circumstances to bring about his purposes).