

# LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Acts 21:27 – 22:30 / May – June 57 A.D.

Learning to love our enemies is hard in large part because we most often feel justified in hating them for what they have or are doing to us. If ever there was a man who faced that internal struggle, it was the Apostle Paul. We pick up the story in Acts 21:27.

## **Acts 21:27-30 Paul Attacked by Jews from Asia**

Paul may very well have been in the Temple proper completing what was necessary for the four men who had completed their vows. He was seen by Jews from Ephesus who were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. They had seen Paul in Jerusalem with a gentile named Trophimus whom these Jews recognized from Ephesus. They assumed or lied that Paul had brought Trophimus into the Temple Proper, crossing the barricade barring gentiles from the Temple. Paul's accusers dragged him out of the Temple. The Temple gates were immediately closed to prevent violence from spilling into the Temple. Once out in the court of the gentiles, Paul's accusers began to beat him to death.

## **Acts 21:31-39 Tribune Claudius Lysias Saves Paul's Life**

The reputation of the Jews for violence was so well-known King Herod built a fortress attached to the north wall of the Temple complex called the Antonia Fortress. The soldiers were dispatched directly into the court of the gentiles where they rescued Paul, chained him and carried him back to the fortress. When they reached a certain point on the staircase, Paul asked permission to speak to the thousands of Jews below him in the courtyard.

Keep in mind, Paul had just been physically beaten by these people. His face was bruised, one or both eyes swollen shut, lips split, nose broken, patches of his beard torn out. He likely had broken ribs, maybe a broken arm, bruised kidneys from kicks to his torso. He may have had to lean on one of the soldiers, but Paul was determined to reach his people with the Gospel!

## **Acts 21:40 – 22:1-22 Paul Speaks to His Enemies**

There is some question whether Paul spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew. Whatever the case, it impressed the crowd and made them even more willing to hear Paul out. In verse 17 Paul was referring back to his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion in Damascus. Paul received this vision of Jesus in 37A.D. Paul actually argued with Jesus believing that his fellow Jews would see the radical transformation in his life and be convinced Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah and Savior. But Jesus made it clear they would not be. To what did the crowd react? The command that Paul go to the Gentiles. Contained in that command was the implication God was taking the Kingdom away from the Jews and giving it to the Gentiles.

## **Acts 22:23-30 Paul Shrewdly Exercises His Rights as a Roman Citizen**

Notice Paul's timing; he waited right up to the first lash to make his Roman citizenship known. The centurion and tribune came within a hair's breadth of committing a serious crime under Roman law. They had already violated Roman law by chaining Paul, but they could possibly argue this was part of providing Paul protective custody. Paul shrewdly exercised his rights as a Roman citizen to deliver himself from an unwarranted flogging.

Paul's love for his fellow Jews was unflagging. Any other man would have railed at and reviled these people who had nearly killed him. But not Paul. It gives credence to what Paul wrote to the Church in Rome in 56A.D.

ROMANS 9:1–5 (ESV)

*I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

Paul's response to his enemies was also the embodiment of what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:43-48.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We, too, are called to love our enemies. How do we get there?

Like Gracia, we need to have a brutally honest realization of our true condition and the incredible grace God has shown us. And then, like Paul, we need to see our enemies through God's eyes. They are people whom God created in His image, whom He loves and for whom Jesus died. I say this humbly knowing that some of you have suffered far more at the hands of your enemies than I. I have no doubt that coming to the place where we love our enemies is a process and a struggle requiring a lot of prayer, a lot of self-discipline, a lot of tears. But we all know it's the right thing to do and it's the only way to keep our hearts free from bitterness and all the nasty things that come from bitterness. And through loving our enemies, God can do miracles in the lives of our enemies.

**Voice of the Martyrs Needs for December: fleece blankets and hairbrushes.**

**Save on postage! Use our Christmas Card Exchange to send Christmas cards to fellow members of Grace Church.**