

Jerusalem At Last

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts chapter 21.! We're going to begin reading in verse 17 and read through the second verse of chapter 22.

! Acts chapter 21, verse 17. When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day, Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.

Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul, You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.

They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do?

They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites, and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved.

[1:13] Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food, sacrifice to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.

The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, Men of Israel, help us!

This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and against our law in this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.

They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with Paul, and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area. The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions.

[2:28] Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.

He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

Then he asked who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.

When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great, he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, Away with him! As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, May I say something to you?

Do you speak Greek? He replied. Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert some time ago? Paul answered, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city.

[3:46] Please let me speak to the people. Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic, Brothers, fathers, listen now to my defense.

And when they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Let's hear the preaching of God's word. Last week, we saw that for Paul, it was Jerusalem or bust. He had no plan B. He was going to Jerusalem. And the closer he came to Jerusalem, the more vivid became the prophecies of the trouble that was waiting for Paul when he got there. And the more intense became the pleadings of his friends not to go on up to Jerusalem. And though they broke his heart with their tears, they did not break his resolve to go up to Jerusalem. He had a race to finish. He had a task to complete, the task given to him by the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

[4:57] That was his single-minded purpose. And he would go to Jerusalem and testify to Jews there in the place where Christianity was hated the most.

Oh, but you'll be arrested and imprisoned there. I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

We're hardly ready to live if we're not ready to die. And Paul is that man, ready to die. And so he's free, free from the chains that shackle most of humanity, free to go to Jerusalem and proclaim the Christ there.

And so Paul and his team came to Jerusalem, as verse 17 says, when we arrived in Jerusalem.

Now, we'll see today how Paul received a warm welcome from the believing Jews there in Jerusalem, but how quickly it was followed by the hot persecution of unbelieving Jews.

But through it all, Paul continues to fulfill his life's purpose of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. So first, his warm welcome from the believing Jews.

[6:17] When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly, gladly, joyfully. This is the family of God in action, and there's no family like it on earth.

Wherever you go in the world and find God's children there, you bump into this receiving of one another warmly. People who say any lover of Jesus is a beloved brother and sister and friend of mine.

It's this warm bond that we have in Christ, and Paul finds it in the brethren at Jerusalem. And James is there, the brother of our Lord Jesus, who is the leader of the church at Jerusalem among the elders there.

And so Paul meets with James and the elders, these leaders, and he reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through him. Verse 19.

Notice the God-centeredness of Paul's report. He doesn't attribute the success to himself. Let me tell you what I've done for Jesus. No, he knew that what had happened were things that only God could do.

[7:34] I could plant and water, but only God can give the increase. Only God can bring a dead sinner to life, to where he's alive, to the most important reality in the world, God.

Most of the world is dead to that reality. Only God can bring a man from death to life. Only God can build the church. And every addition to the church is a supernatural act of God.

And so Paul gives God all the credit in his report of what God had done among the Gentiles through him. Therefore, the response of the Jews at Jerusalem was what?

To praise God. Not Paul. Not, wow, what a marvelous ministry you have. What a wonderful minister you have.

No, they praise God. And nothing pleased Paul more than to see people praise God for what he had done through him.

[8:34] To God be the glory. Great things he has done. That's why Paul lived, to bring him glory. Notice that Paul's report was chiefly about what God had done among the Gentiles.

What God had done among the Gentiles. So he's been out on these missionary journeys far from Judea and ministering primarily to the Gentiles though some Jews in the synagogue.

And now he's come to Jerusalem and remember he's got a whole group of Gentile Christians with him who have come from the Gentile churches with their financial gifts to give to their Judean brethren in need.

Years earlier, Paul, when visiting Jerusalem, had met with James along with Peter and John and he tells us of it in Galatians 2.9 that they agreed, Paul said, that we should go to the Gentiles and they would go to the Jews.

And so that's what they did. And the apostles went to the Jews and Paul went to the Gentiles. And now when they're back together and James and the elders now both hear from Paul what God has

done among the Gentiles and see with their eyes specimens of people who have been made alive in Christ, Gentiles, they rejoiced and they praised God for what he had done among the Gentiles. [9 : 58] And then James tells Paul that God's also working here in Jerusalem among the Jews. You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed.

So, you've told us about what God's doing out there among the Gentiles. Let me tell you what God's done here. many thousands of Jews have believed.

Now there's a lesson for us in this and we're going to see four this morning God willing. The first is God's people rejoice in each other's successes in the work of the gospel.

God's people rejoice in each other's successes. In football, when the defense gets a pick six, they intercept the ball and run for a touchdown.

When that happens, are they, the defense, the only ones rejoicing? What about the rest of their teammates on the sideline, the offensive team?

[10 : 59] No, they're rejoicing too. And why? Because they're on the same team. And six points for our defense is six points for us. Maybe not with the scouting squad, but in the team scoring, that's the way it is.

And they share in the joys of each other. That's the way it's to be in the church of Jesus Christ. All true churches of Jesus Christ. Each one rejoicing in each other's successes for the gospel.

So when we hear of other churches of the Lord Jesus being blessed with conversions and with true growth and with revival, we ought to rejoice with them and to praise the Lord.

Their successes are successes for the kingdom of Christ, our common king. We're fighting on the same side. We're shoulder to shoulder against the same foe.

So our victories are shared victories. And in this way, we demonstrate our unity with the one universal body of Christ. Now we do this on Wednesday nights as we read of what God is doing in sister churches here in the U.S.

[12 : 16] Churches on the foreign field and we rejoice with each victory in this family so dear. So here, the believing Jews in Jerusalem rejoiced at what God was doing among the Gentiles out there.

And Paul and his Gentile team rejoiced in what God was doing in Jerusalem. The many thousands converted there. So the same mutual joy that's seen among churches ought to be seen in a microcosm in every local church.

Not only should one church rejoice with other churches but one member should rejoice with other members. so that when God blesses your brother or sister with some success can you rejoice in it as if it were your own.

We're one and so our joys are one. Our sorrows are one in the family of God. That's our first lesson. Now these church leaders at Jerusalem have a concern to share with Paul.

And it's a concern that arises from the fact that these many thousands of Jewish converts in Jerusalem were zealous for the law of Moses. Now when we see that zeal for the law of Moses we are not to think that they were trusting in the law for their salvation.

[13 : 43] That was not it at all. Their zeal for the law of Moses did not mean that they were thinking that they're right with God because they've kept the law of Moses. Now that was the error of the Judaizers which Paul and Barnabas had firmly opposed and the rest of the Jerusalem church had agreed with Paul and Barnabas at that Jerusalem council.

Now when it says that they were zealous for the law of Moses it means that these believing Jews who look to Christ alone for salvation Christ plus nothing yet they also retain their Jewish way of living.

And I want you to notice that what he talks about is circumcision. He's not talking about the moral laws that came through Moses the Ten Commandments and such moral laws.

He's talking about circumcision. He's talking about certain customs. These are the issues here in Jerusalem that besides believing in Christ they were still hanging on to some of the Old Testament customs for the Old Covenant people of God such as they circumcised their children they ate kosher food they kept Jewish Sabbaths on Saturday and other feast days in the Old Testament Jewish calendar and so on.

So they kept many of these laws of Moses that were for the Jews of the Old Covenant many of which were boundary markers that set the Jews apart from all the other nations and would be things that could mark them as uniquely the people of God.

[15:25] Well Paul and the apostles evidently had not given a command forbidding Jewish believers from observing such Jewish customs as long as they did not trust in them for their salvation.

They had only said that the Gentiles believers need not keep such Jewish laws in order to be saved. That was the council at Jerusalem they had said.

We must not put this yoke upon the Gentile converts that they must be circumcised but just tell them to abstain from food sacrifice to idols from blood and meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

That was the Jerusalem council decision and they're still upholding that. but there's liberty granted in these matters of Jewish customs and that's especially the case here in Acts in this transition period between Judaism to Old Covenant to New Covenant.

Now in addition to this zeal for the law Paul's told that a false rumor was being spread about him to these Jewish believers at Jerusalem. So now you put these two together and you can see the concern of the leadership at Jerusalem.

[16:42] Jerusalem, these people, these new Christians, these true believers are zealous for the law and this is the rumor. They have been informed that not only do you not require Gentile converts to keep the Jewish customs of Moses but that you also teach all the Jews who live out there among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.

Now this simply was not true. Paul did teach Galatians 6.15 that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. Now in the new covenant what counts is a new creation. Paul did teach 1 Corinthians 7 for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith that works by love. A genuine faith in Christ that demonstrates its reality by the works of love.

faith. These commands or words from Paul just show that yes he taught about circumcision and uncircumcision but he did not forbid the Jews from circumcising their sons.

He did not command them to stop keeping these customs. Now no doubt far from Jerusalem out there in the Gentile world many of these Jewish believers had stopped keeping some of the customs such as the feast days that three times a year they needed to go to Jerusalem.

[18:16] Well they're not just up or down the road in Bethlehem and just need a short trip. Now they're hundreds and hundreds of miles away and they can't be going three times a year up to Jerusalem.

So the feast days are falling off for many of these Jews. Perhaps they're having difficulty finding kosher food, difficulty keeping the unclean and clean laws because of their contact with Gentiles who were unclean and so on.

And so many of them were dropping these Jewish customs from the law of Moses. And the word got back to Jerusalem and the Jewish saints there that their Jewish Christian brothers out there among the Gentiles are not keeping all these Jewish customs and that Paul's telling them not to. That was the lie. Well James and the elders know it's not the case that Paul is not telling them not to keep them but they're concerned that Paul's ministry here in Jerusalem is going to be undermined by this rumor.

So they say what shall we do? What can we do that your ministry not be affected by this rumor? Well they will they say they will certainly hear that you've come so here's what we want you to do?

[19:33] Just to demonstrate there's no truth in this rumor. Take part with four other men here in an ancient Jewish custom of Moses. It was a temporary Nazarite vow that included at the end of the waiting period of purification the shaving of their heads.

So it's something that would be very visible. You wouldn't be able to miss the fact that Paul has kept this Jewish custom of a Nazarite vow such as Numbers chapter 6 instructed.

Then everyone will know there's no truth in the reports about you but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. Well what would Paul do?

Will he submit to keeping this Jewish custom or won't he? Well he agreed to do what they asked.

So the very next day Paul takes the four men and purified himself along with them and then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them and that's when their hair would be cut all according to number six.

Now what's Paul doing here? Is he vacillating? Is he being wishy washy? Is he compromising his principles just to gain the favor of the people in Jerusalem?

[20 : 58] No not at all. He's actually fully in line with his principles. If the truth of the gospel was at stake Paul would plant his flag and not move a millimeter I'm here I will not give in at all when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

So in Galatians 2 some were putting pressure on Paul to have Titus his Gentile co-worker circumcised and Paul would have none of it. And he tells us why.

This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

We did not give in to them for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. You see they wanted they were false believers brothers they were not true Christians they wanted to add the works of the law circumcision Old Testament customs to the gospel in order to be saved and in that case the gospel would have been perverted and lost and so Paul would not budge that was his principle but in the case of his Gentile co-worker Timothy we read back in Acts 16 3 Paul wanted to take Timothy along on the journey so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area for they all knew that his father was a Greek now at first glance that might look inconsistent he will not circumcise Titus but he does circumcise Timothy but upon a closer look we understand his principle it was

Paul's custom that wherever he went he took the gospel first to the Jews where in the synagogue and then would go to the Gentile Gentiles but here's Timothy and everybody in that region knew that he was an uncircumcised son of a pagan Greek father he's a Gentile and that fact alone would shut the doors of ministry to Timothy there were many Jewish homes he could not enter because of that these unbelieving Jews would never hear the gospel because they would not let a Gentile through the front door lest they be defiled and he would certainly not get into a synagogue to preach of Christ and therefore to remove this stumbling block in his ministry to the Jews Paul had Timothy circumcised because in that situation the gospel was not at stake there was no teaching going on that you've got to be circumcised in order to be saved no it was Jesus plus nothing no Jewish customs like circumcision being required for salvation it was just to remove a stumbling block in evangelism so the principle when the gospel was at stake

[23 : 53] Paul was inflexible he wouldn't budge but when the gospel was not at stake Paul could be very accommodating and flexible especially when it would remove a barrier that would keep Jews from hearing the gospel or any other group of people so that's the guiding principle in taking part in the Nazarite vow here at Jerusalem and did you know that it's not the first time Paul had his hair cut in a Nazarite vow you can see it back in chapter 18 and verse 18 at the end of his second missionary journey so he's not compromising he's acting according to principle a principle that he spells out in 1st Corinthians chapter 9 about becoming all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some that's his principle to the Jews I became like a Jew that's what he's doing here to the Jews

I became like a Jew to win the Jews to those under the law that's the Jew I became like one under the law so as to win those under the law to those who were Gentiles those not having the law I became like one not having the law so as to win those not having the law to the weak I became weak those were the weak conscience I became weak to win the weak I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some I do all this for the sake of the gospel what's the what's the guiding principle of this man and can you see how closely it's allied to his purpose in life I live to testify to the gospel of God's grace that's my purpose and what's my guiding principle on what I will do and will not do in the way of accommodating different people's and habits and customs it's that same passion to testify to the gospel of

God I want to win souls I want to see people saved and if something will remove a barrier then I don't care how customary it's been how traditional how long people have been practicing I will set it aside I don't care if it's a preference that I really care about it's something I really like I will set it aside for the sake of the gospel it's all on the table even his rights he'll willingly do without give it up for the sake of the gospel so that by all possible means I might save some I might be useful I might be heard I might have a hearing for the gospel and that's his purpose that's his passion we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ 1 Corinthians 9 12 so do you see the lesson here lesson number two be willing to become all things to all men in order to win some at our

RB net conference a couple weeks ago pastor Gary Hendricks of Mebane North Carolina challenged us on a ministry that is glorifying to God well salvation of sinners glorifies God and one of his applications was that we need to be very careful that we are not placing any barriers of our own making between us and sinners that would hinder them from hearing the gospel barriers of our own making are we putting any stumbling blocks in the paths of people so that they will not hear and will not give attention to our message any practices any preferences any human traditions our desire for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners and the building up of his church should make us flexible on these things that we're willing to sacrifice and set aside willing to take on after all the son of God was willing to become one of us in order to save us he gives us that ultimate guiding principle of becoming all things to all men he who is

God became man that he might become sin for us that he might become a curse for us that he might save us so let us be willing to become all things to all men that we might save them reflecting the very same spirit of our Lord in self sacrificial service to Christ well how well this plan satisfied the believing Jews we don't know but we do know that it certainly did not pacify the unbelieving Jews there at Jerusalem and the warm welcome from the believing Jews was quickly followed by the hot persecution than of the unbelieving Jews it all happened then excuse me we're told that the troublemakers were some Jews from the province of Asia verse 27 some Jews from the province of Asia now it could be that they were in Jerusalem because it was the time of Pentecost the feast at Pentecost remember Paul was in a hurry to get there for the feast of Pentecost could be that these [29:18] Jews from Asia are here for that same feast very likely they're from Ephesus or one of the nearby cities of Asia Minor because they knew Trophimus the Ephesian whom they saw walking with Paul in Jerusalem and these Jews from Ephesus were good at what they did spreading lies stirring up a murderous riot against Paul so they see Paul in the temple they grabbed him they shouted words that played upon Jewish nationalism and their religion and they threw the whole city into an uproar here's what they said men of Israel help us this is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people against the Jews against our law and against this place the temple besides he's brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place when the temple complex complex there was the outer court of the Gentiles maybe out here and then there was a barrier and inside that barrier was the inner court of the Jews and no

Gentile was allowed to cross that barrier in fact they found signs that have been found and dug up in Jerusalem warning them that they will pay upon the pain of their life if they do it was a serious thing you can go back and read in the Old Testament it was serious it was the death penalty for anyone who defiled the temple and to have a Gentile come into the court of Israel was to defile the temple it was a serious charge and that's the charge they're leveling against Paul earlier they had seen Paul with Trophimus walking the streets of Jerusalem he's the Greek from Ephesus and they just assumed that Paul had also brought him into the temple area that was reserved for Jews I say they just assumed be careful with your assumptions that was not true they assumed he had brought the Gentile into the court of the

Israelites and so had defiled the temple of course he hadn't but truth is not important when you're stirring up a riot and so they make the charge and they are killing words they spread like wildfire throughout the whole of Jerusalem they just come running people are running to the temple when they hear this to get their hands on Paul they seize him they drag him out of the temple and they started to kill him and would have killed him had God not delivered him through the Romans only takes a few to incite a riot and the Romans had an occupying presence right there in Jerusalem right next to the temple complex the fortress of Antonia there it is high fortress lots of steps up into this fortress and barracks where the soldiers were kept they were kept there because the Jews were notorious for being seditious and stirring up trouble and rebellion so the military is right there ready to stomp out any rebellion and to maintain peace and order so when the

Roman troops rushed in the Jews quit beating Paul to death the commander assumes that Paul is the ringleader so he arrests him and binds him with two chains when he asked who Paul was and what he had done the crowd answered and they were shouting one thing and another and it's hilarious when we see what the commander got from the crowd as we see in a moment but when he saw these conflicting ideas and he couldn't get to the truth of it he ordered Paul to be taken to the barracks where he could personally question him when they came to the steps the violence of the mob was so great that as they pressed in to get a hold of Paul that he actually had to be lifted up and carried by the soldiers up the steps to safety and the mob that followed kept shouting away

with him away with him just as another Jewish mob had cried 27 years earlier when the son of God was here on a saving mission and was on trial in Jerusalem and they cried away with him away with him oh yes if they persecuted me they will persecute you and so it all happened didn't it just as those prophecies had said it would that when you get to Jerusalem you're going to be bound you're going to be imprisoned

Paul was bound and arrested at Jerusalem but he's ready for this this will not keep him from his purpose in life to testify to the gospel of God's grace rather it'll just change the audience for his gospel his audience here in Jerusalem it will be primarily Jews antagonistic Jews who wanted him dead the high priests the high court of the Sanhedrin the Sadducees the Pharisees but then in his audience will also be many Roman soldiers some actually chained to the apostles so it's hard to know who was the audience and who was the speaker they were a captive audience to Paul as he's chained to these Roman soldiers and then there would be in his audience governors and their wives kings and their wives and high ranking government officials and lawyers and before he's done there'll be sailors and many more soldiers and even islanders on Malta and the leader of the island and then all sorts of people in Rome including

[35:09] Caesar himself to hear of the gospel of God's grace so can you see this was Paul's purpose and the move into Jerusalem and all that's happened with his arrest did not keep him from his purpose it's what he did with whatever people God brought across this path and when our eyes brothers and sisters are fixed on our purpose in living and we get up in the morning and we say John why are you alive today if not to testify to the gospel of God's grace towards you to others who are dying and going to hell and when we have our eyes on our purpose we'll see those in our audience eight months ago our missionary in France David Vaughn suffered a painful and debilitating sleep depriving shoulder injury I was in Atlanta I saw him try to put a coat on and he winced as he has this frozen shoulder it didn't sideline his testimony of

God's grace but just enlarged his audience because now he needs to see a physical therapist regularly and this physical therapist is so lost he's never attended church he's trying to find his way through life through Buddhism and other Eastern mysticism and spiritism but he's now part of David's audience and he's reading the things David gives him in the next therapy session they're talking about it he has read it he's showing interest he's been to church and this last Tuesday evening he was one of the five in an evangelistic Bible study that will last for six sessions and he's showing interest in the things of God how do you view painful injuries things that deny sleep things that require medical attention you know there are people everywhere needing the gospel of God's grace and some of them are in hospitals some of them are in behind the desk and some of them are the doctors the nurses the therapists in the very places we'd like to stay away from and so our third lesson is that God sometimes shuffles the deck of people in our lives by way of painful providences

I wonder if he's shuffling your deck is he bringing any new people into your life across your path let's be alert to his ways with us looking for new people to tell of the gospel of God's grace counting our lives worth nothing to us if only we might do just that it's persecution in Jerusalem that God used to shuffle the audience of Paul's evangelism now he's got an audience you see that many thousands of Jews all come running gathered in this temple complex oh yes they're chanting for his life but they'll quiet down he's got an audience he's got a pulpit there he is at the top of the stairs ready to go into the barracks right at the top and down the stairs and spreading in the massive temple complex thousands of people he's got an audience he's got a pulpit from which to sound out the gospel of God's grace third he's got a message he's got a message for these people his own testimony his own experience experience of

God's grace to him when he had been persecuting Jesus and killing his people Jesus met him and stopped him and didn't damn him and didn't treat him as his sins deserve but instead he forgave him he loved him and he saved him and he called him to proclaim this saving grace of God in Jesus Christ to tell others about the salvation that could be theirs through Jesus suffering and death and resurrection what a testimony to God's grace both in his words but also in his actions these are the blood thirsty enemies chanting for his life who had lied about him and who had believed the lies about him no one likes to be lied about Paul any more than you or I and yet here he is overcoming evil with good what's he giving to his enemies the most valuable thing in the universe the gospel of God's grace in Jesus

Christ he's loving his enemies by giving them the gospel is that not grace on display in Christ of whom he speaks and in himself as he's preaching to his enemies the kindness and love of God for sinners can we not learn this lesson fourthly from Paul who learned it from Jesus that in assessing your audience for the gospel of God's grace don't overlook your enemies don't overlook your enemies God did not overlook us he sent his son to die for us when we were enemies so how about those difficult people in your life perhaps some that make life a bit miserable for you and you'd rather not see them not have to talk to them you see you're moving toward them with grace and with the good news of God's grace may be the very thing that God uses to melt them and to save them by his grace Paul takes his most precious gospel and he gives it to people who didn't deserve it and probably weren't expecting it that's grace and you too have a message you too have a testimony isn't that a beautiful testimony in the gospel I once was blind but now I see you have a testimony if you know enough to be saved you know enough to tell others how to be saved give them your testimony tell them how instead of treating you as your sins deserve

[41:19] Jesus Christ received the treatment you deserve that you might be treated as he deserves the grace of God in the gospel so they're at the top of the stairs Paul is about to enter the barracks and he just turns and asks the commander may I say something to you and the commander is surprised to hear Paul speaking in the Greek language verse 38 shows us just how far the commander was from getting the truth from this mob for he thought that Paul was the Egyptian rebel who sometimes earlier had started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert oh that's that's not who you are well the uproar had been squelched but the Egyptian leader had escaped and he thinks that's who Paul is but now learning that Paul is an educated Jew who could speak Greek and that he was a Roman citizen from no ordinary city such as Tarsus the commander gave him permission to speak to the crowd and so from the steps at the top of this Antoneo fortress Paul holds his hands out and he's motioning to this crowd that's shouting away with him away with him and he's waving until they finally quiet down and when all were silent he said to them in Aramaic brothers and fathers listen now to my defense and it seems that the crowd was no better informed than the commander about who he was after all they were the ones who told the commander who he was but when they heard him speak to them in Aramaic their own dialect of the

Jewish Hebrew language they became even more quiet realizing he's one of us so now he not only had an audience a pulpit a message to preach but he has the attention of his audience he has their ears as he's about to speak to them so that's where we must leave Paul today standing on the top of the steps with a silence mob of thousands of Christ hating Jews now ready to hang on his every word aren't Christ's ways wonderful in building his church who could ever drawn up a plan for an evangelistic rally like this there he is in his pulpit there are the people eager to hear what he has to say and he's got a message the gospel of God's grace to proclaim sometimes in the most unexpected places with the most unpromising of people I mean after all here we are Gentiles of all people who have received the grace of

God and have been swept up then into this greatest thing happening the gathering of sinners to Christ and into his church have you stayed on course with your purpose this week our Lord is a gracious king he's full of mercy and grace to help us I want to lay down a challenge for you that I'm taking to myself that as Christmas approaches and people often wish you a merry Christmas tell them you know I can be merry this Christmas because when I a sinner deserving to go to hell was lost Jesus God's son came from heaven and took the punishment I deserve and I'm forgiven it will be a merry Christmas for me can you tell them why believers are merry at Christmas just in a sentence or two and as you walk away they will be scratching their heads they haven't heard that I'll bet for a while but they will have heard just the essence of the gospel who Jesus is

God's son why he came to die for sinners and you can say that's my hope that's why I'm happy that's why I'm merry just thinking about Jesus birth well let's pray thank you Lord for your grace and thank you for the good news of your grace thank you that it reached us here we are long way from Jerusalem and you brought someone to tell us it was your grace that pursued us and your grace that saved us now would you fill our hearts and warm them and fire them with the same passion that we see in our brother Paul to cause us to see that we too are no less deserving of hell no more on the way to hell than he and that you broke into our lives in grace and by your blood have purchased us for God send us into the world with this good news we ask in Jesus name amen amen amen