

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 23 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, Paul had been repeatedly warned not to go to Jerusalem because imprisonment and afflictions awaited him there. But Paul was clear about his conviction to go to Jerusalem whatever the cost. He was willing to die for Christ's sake. When he entered Jerusalem, he was warmly welcomed by the elders and James, the leader of the church. They praised and glorified God after Paul gave an account of his ministry among the Gentiles. Paul acceded to James' proposal to purify himself ceremonially, according to Mosaic Law, with four Jews, who had taken the Nazarite vow. He agreed to pay for their cost of the ritual.

In spite of these actions, Paul was verbally and physically attacked by over-zealous Jews who falsely charged him for desecrating the temple. These hostile Jews fully intended to beat the life out of him. If not for the intervention of the Roman chief captain, Paul could have been killed. The chief captain and his soldiers snatched Paul from the crazy mob and carried him safely to the Fortress of Antonia, which was the station and barracks of the Roman soldiers. On their way up the steps leading to the Fortress, Paul requested

the chief captain for permission to speak to the hostile and unruly crowd.

Our present study examines Paul's speech. He related his life and experience in a way that glorified the Lord Jesus Christ and honoured the Christian movement. Paul stood out as one who remained calm in the face of unjust and false criticisms by his fellow countrymen. It seems strange that he took the trouble to speak to them – it leads us to the conclusion that he loved his people, the Jews.

Our study has some precious practical lessons for us as we face similar situations in our Christian life. For the purpose of enriching our study, the chapter can be divided into the following sections: 1) Paul's pre-conversion years (21:1-5); 2) Paul's conversion day (21:6-11); 3) Paul chosen to witness to all men (21:12-16); 4) Paul specially called to witness to the Gentiles (vv.17-23); and 5) Paul's rescue by the Roman chief captain (vv.24-30).

COMMENTARY

Paul's Pre-Conversion Years

Paul was given permission to speak to the hostile crowd who were shouting and screaming. Standing on the stairs, which led to the Fortress of Antonia, he gestured with his hand to the unruly crowd and then started to speak in Hebrew (Aramaic) – there was complete silence! The crowd who were predominantly Jews evidently expected him to speak in Greek but he spoke to them in their own mother tongue. Paul began by courteously addressing his audience as "brethren and fathers". This is also significant for he was identifying himself as one of them. He

called them “brethren”, that is, his kinsmen; and “fathers”, acknowledging members of the Sanhedrin. He pleaded with them to hear his “defence” (Gk., *apologia*). He had been told “many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (21:20). He was also aware of the rumours that he had taught the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to forsake the Mosaic Law – that they ought not to circumcise their children nor observe Jewish customs (v.21). He understood that the unruly rioting was incited by a false charge that he had brought Gentiles into the Temple, thus desecrating it (v.28). He told them the facts and experiences of his complete Jewish upbringing. He was born a Jew in the city of Tarsus, Cilicia. In other words, like many of them in the crowd (Jews of Asia) who had come to the Holy City, he was a Jew of the Diaspora. He studied in Jerusalem and trained under Gamaliel, a well-known and highly esteemed teacher of the Law. He knew the Law of their forefathers well. Not only was he conversant with the Law and zealous towards God, he also persecuted men and women who followed “the way” by imprisoning them and even putting them to death (v.4). He told them that they could verify all that he had said with the high priest who could testify the truth of his words. The Sanhedrin had documents, which could verify the authorisation and approval for him to arrest Christian Jews in Damascus and to bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished (v.5). Paul presented an impressive set of credentials to his Jewish audience.

Paul’s Conversion Day

Paul moved on to speak about his conversion. Once again, he presented facts and his personal

experience. He was on his way to Damascus when suddenly a great light shone from heaven round about him. It was noon and the sun was bright, but this “great light” was even brighter than the noon-day sunlight! This was surely the light that intimated the presence of God. Paul told them that he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him (v.7): “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” He answered: “Who art thou Lord?” And the voice said that He was Jesus of Nazareth whom Paul had persecuted. This statement shows that although Paul was persecuting the followers and not the Lord Jesus personally¹, the Lord had identified Himself intimately with His disciples. Paul said that those who were with him saw the light and were afraid, but they “heard not the voice” (v.9). On this last detail, Luke’s account appears to contradict Paul’s personal account (9:7). Luke reported that the men who went with Paul “stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” There seems to be an apparent discrepancy. The Greek word, which is translated in both instances, is “pho-ne” (pronounce, *fo-nay*). It could mean “sound” or “voice” in the sense of a speech. If we understand Luke as stating that they heard the “sound” but they could not understand what was said, the apparent discrepancy is resolved. That is, those who were present with Paul did not know what was said to him although they heard the voice.

The Lord Jesus instructed Paul to continue his journey to Damascus where he would be told what to do. Paul was blinded by the light and had to be

¹ Matthew 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

led by the men who were with him. When they came to Damascus, Ananias “a devout man according to the law, having good report of all the Jews” came to him. Paul’s enumeration of Ananias’ qualities was pertinent to his immediate aim to conciliate with his hearers, and to rebut the false charges against him. A Jew like Ananias could be a Christian Jew and still keep the Law and be accepted and loved by other Jews.

Paul Chosen to Witness to All Men

Theologically, he stands righteous before God because the Lord Jesus Christ had paid the penalty of his sin. But a Christian still commits sins in his daily living. In this regard, he needs to confess and repent, and God is “faithful and just” to forgive his sins and to cleanse him. Ananias was sent by the Lord Jesus to go to Paul. First, he healed Paul’s blindness and then he told Paul that the “God of our fathers” (again, observe this conciliatory phrase) had “chosen” him (Paul) to know His will, and to see the “Just One”, and obey Him. In his speech, Paul used the same phrase “the Just One” as Stephen did (7:52).

Paul explained that he was chosen by God to be His witness to “all men” the things, which he had seen and heard concerning the Lord Jesus. He was baptized by Ananias and his sins were washed away (v.16). This washing away of sins was not the result of being baptised. Baptism was a step taken in obedience to the Lord and a sign that he belonged to the Lord Jesus. There is a distinction between “sin” (singular) and “sins” (plural). Anyone who believes and calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is forgiven of his “sin” once and for all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Paul made it clear that the washing of sins is obtained by calling on the name of the Lord and not by offering a sin-offering as was previously done which was a type of Christ (before the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ) (v.16).

Paul Specially Called to Witness to Gentiles

Paul then referred to the visit, which he mentioned in his letter to the Galatians.² He was praying in the Temple and was in a state of ecstasy (in a trance) when he saw a vision of the Lord instructing him to leave Jerusalem immediately because the Jews would not accept him. During that visit, Paul apparently had been preaching and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and had aroused antagonism against him among the Jews in the city. Hence, the Lord’s directive to him! Paul reasoned with the Lord to let him stay in Jerusalem so that he could preach to the Jews who had known him as a persecutor of those who believed in the Lord and who had in fact consented to the stoning of Stephen. Paul’s line of reasoning was that his testimony would have greater weight in Jerusalem where he was best known. But the Lord overruled this and declared that He would send him “far hence unto the Gentiles” (v.21). The meaning of the term “far” is twofold. Firstly, Paul would have to travel a great distance from Jerusalem to fulfil this commission. Secondly, the Gentiles were spiritually

² Galatians 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

far away from the ways of the living and true God.

Paul Rescued by the Roman Chief Captain

At this juncture of Paul's speech, the crowd that had listened to his account of his Jewish background and conversion would not accept that the Gentiles were to be received on an equal basis with them. In the eyes of the Jews, it was all right to make the Gentiles become Jews. Proselytism was fine. But to make Gentiles become Christians without making them Jews first was not right. Evangelism was an abomination. It was as good as saying that the Gentiles were equal to Jews, for they both come to God on equal terms. The mention of the word "Gentiles" therefore made their blood boil. The crowd responded in unison and shouted: "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live" (v.22). They threw their clothes off (giving them freer movement of their hands), clawed the dust from the ground and hurled it into the air – as a fierce expression of disgust and rejection.

Fearing that the crowd might become uncontrollable, the Roman chief captain ordered that Paul be brought into the Fortress of Antonia. He also ordered that Paul be tortured by scourging in order to get a confession from him. The chief captain thought that Paul must have been a criminal worthy of death since the crowd obviously hated him. The Roman chief captain could not understand Paul's speech for he did not speak Hebrew. In those days, torture was a common means of extracting a confession. The Roman scourging (Latin, *flagellum*) was done by lashing the bare back of a man (whose hands were tied to a pillar) using a

bundle of leather whips with pieces of metal or bone attached to the ends. It was a fearful means of torture for even if the prisoner should survive, he might be crippled for life. When the soldiers were tying Paul's hands, he told the centurion standing nearby: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman (or Roman citizen), and uncondemned?" (22:25). A Roman citizen enjoyed many privileges in those days. He could be bound in order to secure him for trial, but he was not to be punished without a proper trial. And to subject him to the indignity of being tied to a pillar for the flagellum was a very serious offence according to Roman law, which could incur the death penalty.

The centurion quickly went to tell the chief captain cautioning him to reconsider his actions. The chief captain came to Paul to ascertain whether he was truly a Roman citizen. Paul answered in the affirmative. The chief captain remarked that he must have paid a large sum of money to obtain his Roman citizenship. Paul replied that he was born a Roman citizen. How Paul got his Roman citizenship is not given in the text. He could have obtained his Roman citizenship because he was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, which was a Roman province. Or his father could have been a Roman citizen and therefore he was also accorded the same privilege. Anyway, those who were preparing Paul for the flagellum stopped and left. The chief captain was apprehensive for he had bound him. He was now duty bound to get to the bottom of the whole matter. He summoned that Paul be brought before the members of the Sanhedrin who would examine him.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Paul's zeal and keen commitment to the Lord Jesus and the church set a shining example not only for Christian pastors, elders and deacons, but also for the individual Christian. Every Christian should seek to increase his knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9-10). Without proper biblical knowledge, our zeal might not achieve the purpose God intended. Further, we are to impart our knowledge of God so that others might be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus.

In spite of the hostility of the Jews against him, Paul was courteous in his speech to them. He explained his own Jewish background and the reason why he taught and preached to both Jews and Gentiles. In confronting falsehoods against him, Paul presented facts and personal experiences, which could not be repudiated. He hoped to persuade the Jews to follow the way of the Lord. Sadly, however, they interrupted him, turned a deaf ear to what he was saying, and stopped him from continuing his defence. We should not be so quick to accuse and act on false assumption without first ascertaining the truth. Instead, we should emulate Paul who relied only on facts and never deviated from the truth.

Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship should not be viewed as cowardice. It was wrong of the chief captain to flog him before finding out whether the punishment was legally right. Paul had said that he was prepared to die for Christ's sake but the indignity and suffering that he was about to be subjected to was illegal. So when he spoke up, he was merely exercising his rights as a Roman citizen. A Christian ought to know the rights and

privileges accorded to him so that his witness can be achieved within the laws of the country.

When Paul encountered the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, he asked for direction. Asking God for instruction and guidance is a wise thing to do. God has given us His Word wherein we can discern His will and exercise wisdom. We also have the privileged means of communicating all our needs and concerns to Him through prayers.

Finally, there is much we can learn from the example of Ananias, a devout man who enjoyed a good report among the Jews. It is important that pastors, elders and deacons maintain their good reputation. Paul wrote to Timothy that he should excel in this (1 Timothy 3:7). Also, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to let their light shine for Him (Matthew 5:16). AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 22:1-5; Romans 9:1-5; Philippians 3: 5.6.

Tuesday: Acts 22:6-11; Matthew 10:30-42.

Wednesday: Acts 22:12-16; 2 Timothy 1:7-12.

Thursday: Acts 22:17-23; Galatians 1:17, 18; Proverbs 16:9.

Friday: Acts 22:24-30; 2 Corinthians 11:29-30.

Discussion Questions

1. In what way did Paul demonstrate sensitivity to the crowd as he boldly made his speech of defence?

2. What practical lessons may we learn from the fact that in spite of Paul's arguments in 22:19, 20, the Lord gave him the command in 22:21?

3. Why did 22:21 make the Jews interrupt with rage?

4. How did Paul treat mob hysteria, assumption and false evidence against him?

5. How did Roman law and justice come to Paul's aid?

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL FURTHER STUDY

1. Why do you think so many Christian Jews still cling to the Law of Moses?

2. In facing persecution, how much dependence should a Christian have on God?

3. How has your country helped or hindered your life as a Christian?