

Misinformation and Mission

Introduction

If you have your Bibles...

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem - mission to unite Jewish and Gentile believers.

Story of someone who grossly misunderstands christianity. (grown up in a household where religion was mocked as a crutch for the weak. His views were shaped by sensationalized news stories and a handful of encounters with abrasive street preachers. To Marcus, Christianity was a force of oppression, obsessed with control and exclusion.)

As we face division, misinformation, and cultural tensions in sharing our faith. How can we remain faithful to God's mission when misunderstood or opposed?

Acts 21:17-36

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. 25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

Context/Story

Tensions between Jews and Romans were escalating, culminating in the Jewish Revolt (66–70 AD), which led to the destruction of the Second Temple.

The Roman Empire maintained control over Judea, but Jewish resistance to Roman rule was growing due to heavy taxation, cultural insensitivity, and perceived violations of Jewish religious practices. Roman authorities, like the tribune in Acts 21:31-33, intervened to maintain order, often viewing religious disputes as potential threats to stability.

The presence of Roman troops in Jerusalem, especially during major festivals, underscores the volatile atmosphere, as crowds could quickly turn into riots, as seen in our passage this morning.

Confronting Misinformation

- Paul shows up in Jerusalem and meets with the church there. He sees the brothers and they welcome him. But then something interesting happens, apparently someone has been bad mouthing Paul to all the Christians in Jerusalem. They were claiming that Paul was telling Jews to forsake the teachings of Moses and abandon the Old Testament. Basically, Jews need to stop being Jews.
 - This is not true. Paul never commanded anyone to give up their heritage to be a Christian. Paul's mission was to share Jesus with the Gentiles, at the command of the last Jerusalem Council. He had been faithful to that command to the point of placing his life on the line. But gossip travels even faster than Paul could. And the fastest gossip is the kind that is not true.
- The leaders of the church tell Paul to take a Nazirite vow and purify himself alongside 4 other men.
 - a Nazirite vow, required that they spend thirty days without touching strong drink or wine and let their hair grow out. At the end of that thirty days, they would cut their hair and burn it along with the sacrifices, a purification ritual that lasted seven days in accordance with the feast of Pentecost.
- Much like the conflict happening between Jews and Gentiles in our text, politics, religion, or cultural identity, will often lead to division and hostility. People cling to group identities, and misunderstandings fuel conflict
 - How to help others to hear the truth? (seek dialogue over division)
 - Proverbs 15:1 - A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - Somehow we have to get past the 30 attention spans, and the radicalization, and the fear, and the preconceived assumptions and speak to one another again.
 - This will only really happen through relationships. Gone are the days where most people are willing to have an open conversation with a stranger. If you want to get through to them, you have to have a relational approach.
 - Prioritize Unity
 - Paul's approach offers a model for navigating disunity today. He makes sacrifices for the sake of unity.

- Did Paul need to do this Nazarite Vow to be cleansed? Did Paul need to go into the temple at all?
 - No. Paul was clean through the blood of the cross. Jesus had washed his sins away, he was pure from head to toe. Why did Paul make this vow? For the sake of unity. His goal was to make peace, and if shaving his head was going to accomplish it, So be it.
- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 - For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.
- What preferences, what freedoms should we be giving up for the sake of unity? Maybe you don't like children running around after service. Maybe you don't like the worship. Maybe you don't like the style of the Lord's supper. Maybe you don't like the way certain people dress at church?
 - Our preferences about how we should "Do Church" run the whole spectrum. I have people who tell me we should have more Liturgy in our service, I have others that say we have too much liturgy. I have had people tell me we need the American flag on the stage. Others want the christian flag. Some want an organ, others want a drum cage. Some want communion every week, some want their pastor to be clean shaven. Everyone wants their way.
 - But our text reminds us that we should give up our desires for the sake of unity and outreach. We become all things to all people that we might save some. We give up our freedoms for the sake of the gospel.

Standing Firm in Opposition

- Jews from Asia come to Jerusalem for pentecost, and they spot Paul immediately. These Jews were likely the same jews who were trying to kill Paul in Ephesus. They see Paul, and are furious that he is in the temple. So they claim that that Paul is teaching Jews to reject the old testament law, and they also say that he is bringing gentiles into the Temple.
 - Both of these charges brought against Paul are not true. But they are able to incite a mob to seize him, throw him out of the temple and start beating him. The

Roman authorities see that the city is rioting, so they step in and arrest Paul to try to keep the peace.

- The temple was the focal point of Jewish worship, and its sanctity was fiercely guarded. Accusations of defiling the temple were grave, as Gentiles were forbidden from entering sacred areas under penalty of death. If you were caught knowingly bringing in a gentile to the temple, you would face the same fate. Make no mistake, this is an intentional attempt on Paul's life.
- From place to place, Paul faced one crisis after another. He was beaten with rods in one town and stoned in another. In still another he was cast into prison. He always managed somehow to escape at the last possible second.
 - Paul had just been warned by the prophet Agabus not to go to Jerusalem because chains and imprisonment awaited him there. But he decided to go anyway because there was important work for him to do.
 - Sometimes the trial, the difficulty, or the suffering you are going through is bringing you to where God wants you to be.
 - Perhaps it is a stronger Character.
 - Romans 5:3-5a - Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame
 - Perhaps it is a stronger marriage
 - There is a richness to marriage that only suffering can bring. A maturity, a depth, that only comes about through many tears. The ability to look over at your spouse and know, "we have been through hell together." "we have gone through the Lord's refining fire, and come out the other side stronger."
 - Perhaps it is a stronger faith.
 - God does not waste suffering, he uses it to refine us. To make us more like Jesus. How are we to be like Christ if we never suffer? How are we to model the suffering servant if we are allergic to any difficulty? Suffering makes us like Jesus!
 - Matthew 5:11-12 - Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
 - John 15:18-20a - "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

- Stand firm through your suffering. It is not an accident. God didn't call Paul to Jerusalem to suffer for no reason, and God didn't call you into your trial for no reason either.
- Sometimes the hard way is the best way. (not always, but sometimes)
 - In Philippi - Imprisonment, in Ephesus - Run, In Jerusalem - He faces it head on.
 - It was the great Kenny Rogers who gave us some wonderful theology here. "You gotta know when to hold'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run."
- They were opposing Paul, but really they were opposing God, each may have had their own reason. (loss of status, Loss of income, Loss of the familiar) But I believe that one of the primary driving factor's behind the rejection of the Jews was fear. They feared change, they feared rejection of their friends or family, they feared the implications of truly and fully following Jesus. They would rather do what they are familiar with than follow the Lord. We need to remember how similar we are! And our desire to maintain the status quo can be (and often is) absolutely sinful.
 - Fear can cause us to do all sorts of things. The Jews in our text let fear drive them to sinful rage. Do not let fear, or anxiety make your decisions for you.

How To Know What Is True

- But it is so hard in our world, sometimes it seems like everyone is talking past each other! Everyone wants to be heard but nobody wants to listen. Everyone jumps to conclusions about christianity. Just like people jumped to conclusions about Paul in the Temple. It doesn't even have to be true. Perception is reality to the person who misunderstands.
- In the court of public opinion, we often don't even get a chance to defend ourselves. Ideological differences, misinformation and false accusations, rumors, social media outrage, or polarized narratives are all working against us.
 - How to know what is true?
 - How do we discern truth from misinformation in today's information-saturated world, and how do we respond when falsely accused?
 - Example - COVID-19 - I am a pastor in Montrose.
 - Scientists can't even consistently tell us whether red meat, whole milk or eggs are good for us or not. The older I get the more I struggle to believe that we have reliable sources of truth, in medicine, in history, or in science. Thousands of years of study and research, and refinement, and humanity knows almost nothing about our universe.
 - But there is one source that will never change. One source that will always ring true, because it is from the author of Truth.
 - This book has never wavered, God's word is the only rock we can stand on. If it says it, we can trust it.
- Prove
 - Philippians 1:12-14 - I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard[f] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is

for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

- Paul's suffering serves a greater purpose in spreading the Gospel.

A New Temple (Conclusion)

- 12 years from this moment, the Jews would revolt and the Romans would march on Jerusalem. At that time, the temple is totally destroyed. The Jews no longer have a place to offer sacrifice. No place to worship their God. No place to meet with the Lord.
 - But while the Jews lost everything in 70ad. The Christians know that the temple was obsolete.
 - (Gospel) when Jesus died, it says that the curtain of the temple that separated the Jewish people from the concentrated presence of God tore from top to bottom. Christ took away the need for the temple, the need for a high priest, the need for sacrifices. And He fulfilled them in himself. Even as Paul was standing in the temple, the presence of God had already left that place. Now He has a new home. In the hearts of every Christian to welcome Him in.
 - Do you know Him?

Pray/Invitation