

## Sermon, 5 December 2021

Paul has been staying for many days in Caesarea.

Sets out for Jerusalem. Why is Paul so insistent on going to Jerusalem?

Feast of Pentecost, obligation on Jewish men to attend the Feasts.

The collection Paul and his team had been making for the church in Jerusalem.

when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. <sup>1</sup>

**16** Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. <sup>3</sup> And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. <sup>2</sup>

Stays at house of Mnason. Early disciple – probably Diaspora Jew and quite wealthy. “The brothers received us gladly.” Does not include James. It seems that Paul might have got a rather cool reception from James and the “elders” – not apostles. No mention of the collection that Paul had been making.

Why?

Paul gives an account of his service among the Gentiles. James and the elders respond to this account – glorified God.

Then James releases a bombshell.

No mention of the collection that Paul had been making. Acts 24 indicates that Paul presented the collection at that time.

First outlines the mission amongst the Jews in Jerusalem. Many thousands. All zealous for the law.

James sees no conflict between the law and the gospel. Actually neither does Paul. Neither James nor Paul would see keeping the law as a means of salvation. Through faith in Jesus Christ. This matter had been resolved at the Council in Jerusalem some years before.

What happens when you become a Christian!

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ga 2:9–10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Co 16:1–4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Rumours – misinformation – about Paul being circulated.

“They [Jewish Christians] have been told” by whom?

“You teach all the Jews to forsake Moses.

Not to circumcise their children

Not to walk according to our customs

Always a grain of truth somewhere in misinformation. Paul had been mentioning circumcision. the gentiles who did not require circumcision not children of Jewish parents.

Not walking according to Jewish customs – more serious.

Jewish customs maintained a separation of Jews from Gentiles. To associate with Gentiles was to become unclean. They had their dietary laws that would keep them from sharing a meal with Gentiles. Kept the Sabbath – which Gentiles did not, including Gentile Christians.

Paul’s insistence that Jews and Gentiles do not separate into different gatherings could be seen as encouraging Jewish Christians to set aside Jewish customs.

Even at Antioch this became an issue

*<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” <sup>3</sup>*

It was this insistence by Paul that Jews needed to give up some of their religious scruples for the greater purpose of the gospel that formed the basis of the accusations made by Paul’s opponents that he was requiring Jewish Christians to set aside Jewish customs.

James is concerned that Paul’s presence in Jerusalem and the rumours that had been spread about him would hinder the growth of the church among Jews who were zealous for the law. So James hatched a plan to show that Paul was indeed a pious Jew himself.

Explain the rites

if Paul performed these acts, then these Jerusalem Christians would feel they could accept the collection from Paul in good faith.<sup>4</sup> Or so James hoped.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ga 2:11–14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998). [The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary](#) (p. 650). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Misinformation:

### **Do I know this person?**

Personally

Outside of this issue

Are they known to be reliable

### **Is this person competent in this matter?**

Are they qualified to speak on this issue

Do they have the skills required to make the statements they do – particularly if they are contradicting those with similar qualifications.

So in financial matters, I consult my accountant. In legal matters my lawyer. In medical matters, my doctor. In spiritual and theological matters, my Vicar. As to why my car's engine misfires, my mechanic. And if I don't know a person in this field, I'll ask around for someone who is reliable.

### **Is this person accountable for what they say?**

Are there consequences if they are wrong in what they state or advise? This would be true for most who belong to professional bodies, or are in situations in which there is oversight.

Conspiracy theories. They are told what to say? They don't have the freedom to say what they like? Partially true. But apply the same rules to the one who claims to know that this is a conspiracy.

### **Move on to politics**

This was a very volatile time politically

*On any showing, Paul had arrived in Jerusalem during very turbulent times (~~on the fifteen years leading up to the Jewish War, cf. Josephus, War 2.254–65; Ant. 20.160–72~~). There had been a string of mediocre to poor governors in Judea who had merely exacerbated the problems that were already festering. Felix was certainly no better than his predecessors, though he lasted longer than most in Judea, probably ruling from a.d. 52 to 59. There is no good reason to doubt Tacitus's judgment that Felix "wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave" (Hist. 5.9). Felix had often killed innocent citizens, but perhaps the most egregious [appalling] example of abuse of power was how he dealt with an Egyptian Jew (cf. below on Acts 21:38) who had prophesied a takeover of Jerusalem by his followers. In an attempt to nip the Egyptian's movement in the bud Felix massacred many, which appears to have galvanized the political and religious zealots in the land into joining forces and planning general rebellion, which among other things involved the looting and burning of the homes of Romans and Roman sympathizers.*

*Things became so chaotic that in the end Nero was forced to recall Felix sometime between a.d. 58 and 60 and send a much more able and honest man, Porcius Festus, who unfortunately after only two years in office died. His successors were of the ilk of Felix, not Festus*

*Paul is falsely accused of profaning the temple while he is in the process of a Jewish purification ritual(!), and in fact it is his character which is being desecrated and defamed. The temple is sacred, the crowd is profane, and Paul is purified and remains true to his character. This will be the last scene we have in Acts that is set in the temple in Jerusalem, and it is probably not accidental that this scene involves the final shutting out of Paul and his message from the temple precincts—the temple doors are closed against him.<sup>5</sup>*

Again there is misinformation. Even if the truth were known, that Paul had not brought the Gentile Christian into the temple, the Asiatic Jews who stirred up the crowd would take no notice because of their hatred for Paul.

That Paul could be executed for transgressing the purity of the inner temple courts is historically accurate. The Romans realized the sensitivity of the Jews regarding their temple and allowed them to execute anyone, possibly including Roman citizens, who defiled the temple by entering the parts of the temple reserved for Jews only.

*Josephus describes the wall which separated the Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts as a stone barricade about four and a half feet high reflecting excellent workmanship (War 5.193). He adds that at regular intervals there stood stone slabs giving warning, some in Greek, some in Latin, that no foreigner was permitted to enter the Holy Place<sup>6</sup>*

*The message read: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for what follows—death.”<sup>7</sup>*

The crowd is stirred up by the rumour that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple.

This disturbance comes to the notice of the tribune – Roman equivalent of a General – (Claudius Lysias) intervenes with a significant number of troops. The crowd beating Paul may well have included Jewish Christians.

There is confusion amongst the crowd, so Paul is taken to the barracks protected by the soldiers. Interestingly, the crowd is calling out the same words that were used by the crowd at the trial of Jesus, “Away with him.”

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<sup>5</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998). [\*The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary\*](#) (p. 652). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>6</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998). [\*The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary\*](#) (p. 654). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>7</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998). [\*The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary\*](#) (p. 654). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Now Paul speaks to the Tribune. By the way Paul speaks the tribune recognises that Paul is a person of high standing. “Do you know Greek?” The tribune then tells Paul of his misunderstanding – that Paul was the Egyptian who had led the revolt. (Mentioned earlier)

Paul replies that he is a Citizen of Tarsus. Why is this significant?

Tarsus was indeed widely recognized as an important city in various regards, not least as a center of Hellenistic culture, including the teaching of rhetoric and of Stoic philosophy (cf. Strabo, *Geog.* 14.5.13–15; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 33.48; 44.3). At the height of its importance Tarsus had approximately five hundred thousand residents, only a minority of whom were citizens. It had been proclaimed a free city (like Ephesus) by Antony in 42 b.c. It is important to note that Paul mentions his legal citizenship to the tribune, but not to the crowd (cf. 22:2), for the crowd, unlike the tribune, would not have responded well to a boast about being a citizen of one of the centers of Hellenization in the Empire.<sup>8</sup>

This information encourages the tribune to grant Paul’s request that he be allowed to speak to the crowd. Why was this granted. As a citizen of Tarsus and obviously belonging to a wealthy family, Paul was most likely the tribunes social superior, and social position mattered!

Paul goes on to address the crowd in Aramaic.

What do we learn.

The danger and harm that misinformation can cause. The wisdom of not sharing or repeating information that may be unreliable. Unfortunately, Christians can be involved in such behaviour.

We call passing on such information gossip or even worse slander. People’s ministries have been destroyed through rumour and misinformation.

As people who have come to know the truth in Jesus, we are called to be people of truth and of the truth. Even if the truth is uncomfortable, it is still the truth.

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”<sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998). [\*The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary\*](#) (pp. 662–663). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Jn 18:37–38). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.