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WHEN THE RELIGIOUS MOB TRIED TO KILL PAUL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 104
ACTS 21:30-31

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ACTS 21:30-31 "And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

Quite often people have been promised no more poverty and world peace by certain political candidates. But let us remember that no political candidate can give these things to the people. These things are based on divine laws and these things will never be the possession of the people until Christ rules and reigns in the earth. Bible doctrine can do for a people what nothing else can do. It can provide prosperity for a nation and it can give the people a basis for world peace. When Bible doctrine is put into practice, then, and only then, are people emancipated.

Rioting and mob violence have never brought a conclusive answer to any of our problems. In our study tonight we are going to see an illustration of mob violence and the cruel activity of a mob.

A good definition of the principle involved here can be seen in 2 PETER 2:19 "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." This verse says that "While they promised them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption". The word for promise is "epangello" and it means to make a promise on the basis of a policy that goes with that promise. The word for liberty is "eleuthereo" and only God can provide that. The principle is this--how can someone provide something for you that he does not possess himself? If a man is going to give you freedom, then he must possess that freedom himself. The only one who can provide freedom for man is God, for God possesses freedom. This is the meaning of grace. Grace as a principle is seen at the cross. Grace means that God provides for man what he cannot provide for himself. God is the provider of freedom and true freedom always begins at the cross. GALATIANS 5:1 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." This verse tells us to stand fast in the liberty which Christ has provided for us. So the whole concept of freedom is built on grace. All true freedom comes from grace, and the enemy of freedom is legalism.

Look again for a moment at the facets of the soul--They are self-consciousness, mentality, volition, emotion, conscience, and the old sin nature. Satan is all the time attacking volition. This is where Satan always centers his attack. All the four divine institutions are dependent on volition. At the point of physical birth, God has provided freedom in the soul for all men. Both in the believer and unbeliever there is freedom in the volition, and as a man chooses that is the way he goes. Once a man has chosen Christ, then Bible doctrine is provided for him so he can decide which way his life will go.

The makeup of the soul and the four divine institutions are all designed to provide individual freedom that a man needs. One of the enemies of this freedom is socialism. Socialism says that man by man's effort can solve man's problems. But this is not true. Only by the grace of God can man solve his problems. Socialism drives God out of the picture and says, "Leave me alone God, and I'll do it by myself".

In 2 Peter 2:19 we are reminded to beware of the people who promise freedom but do not have that freedom themselves. The word translated "are" here is not "eimi", the verb of adequate inner resources, but the verb is "uparcho" and should be translated "exist".

These words say, "They exist to grab power". When the one who promises freedom is a slave then he cannot deliver that which he does not have. So a correct translation of this verse reads something like this--"They themselves keep on existing as the slaves of corruption, for by whom any man has been defeated, by the same he is enslaved".

Let us apply this principle to Paul's case here in Jerusalem. Paul is the victim of legalism and Paul has been defeated, in this instance, by legalism. He has committed the sin of legalism and has been caught in the trap. In this instance he is the victim of false teaching. He has been promised freedom in Jerusalem, but the promise is from corrupt men who cannot deliver that which they have promised. The only thing that can deliver Paul is divine institution no. 4, which is the nation. In this instance it happened to be the government and the army of Rome. Religion had about destroyed Israel and all these corrupt men who were the victims of religion could give Paul was a riot and mob violence. Paul would have been killed had God not used the divine institution no. 4, which is the nation, to step in and protect him. The Roman garrison will step in and save Paul's life. This was the only law and order left in Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:30 "And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut." Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims who had come up for the feast. They had been aroused against Paul and they wanted to kill him. Paul had preached the grace of God all over the Gentile world and this gauled them beyond anything you can imagine. The word here "Was moved" is from "Kineo" and means to stir into violent emotion. This is emotional outbreak of the most cruel type of violence. With their volition they settled on violence. Their decision was anti-law, anti-freedom, anti-law and order. Here is a picture of people who were emotionally aroused, and they stopped thinking and violence filled their acts. "People ran together" means that they formed a mob. They seized Paul violently and dragged him out of the temple. The word for dragged here means to drag one by his heels. They were too religious to try to kill him in the temple. They will wait until they get outside. (I am sure if they killed him he would have been just as dead in the temple as he would have been outside, but religion makes people do peculiar things.) They were so religious they didn't want any human blood shed in the temple. So the doors of the temple were shut and while the mob and violence raged outside, the priests went on with their pious religious acts inside. "As they went about" comes from "Teteo" and means they kept on having a strong desire to kill him. The word for kill is "Apo kteino" and it means to kill from the ultimate source of yourself. Look at this--The very thing these Jews are doing to Paul in 58 A.D. will be done to them in 70 A.D. They are causing a riot and in violence and riots and slaughter they will perish twelve years later. Here they are trying to kill one man and twelve years later over a million of them will be killed in the same way. Nothing is ever gained by killing and rioting. When you resort to violence you undermine your own freedom. When you become the part of a mob, you have surrendered your own volition and you no longer are a free man. You no longer are a thinking individual. No man should ever surrender his volition to a mob. Every nation that has been destroyed internally started toward destruction by individuals surrendering their freedom to violence and mob action. When the divine institutions of volition, marriage, the family and the nation begin to be violated, then mob violence takes over and soon freedom slips away. No one ever becomes a part of a mob without surrendering volition. A mob is emotional and is built on mental attitude sins. It is too late after you become a part of mob action, for you have already passed the point of no return. Volition has been surrendered and this means freedom is gone. Some say you surrender your freedom when you join the military. This is not true. Just the reverse is true. The military system is built on the idea of preserving law and order for the nation and this is the very foundation of peace and freedom in a national unit. So remember,

never surrender your volition to a mob. Jerusalem destroyed herself from within in this fashion, and her nation went down in 70 A.D. because of this principle. You cannot defy divine institutions and survive. You cannot go in for Socialism and survive. You cannot defy law and order and survive. God has set up a great system built on nationalism to protect human freedom and when you defy God's order you are inviting disaster and breakdown. Now those who have power must be very careful not to abuse their power. Those who have power must use their power in keeping with the plain teaching of the Word of God. A pastor must use his power in a church in this way. Deacons must use their administrative power in this same way. The whole structure of the local church is built on the proper use of power, the use of power is directed in the Word of God. The freedom of the individual member must never be violated. When these freedoms are violated, trouble always comes. When power is abused, freedom is always lost. Unless these are a proper use of power, freedom is endangered. The proper function of a church or a nation depends on the proper use of power and the proper regard for individual freedom. Here in our study Paul has surrendered his own freedom by taking a vow. Now the multitude surrenders their freedom by causing a mob. Paul's own act of legalism became the spark that set off the misuse of power by the mob which almost cost Paul his life. So Paul's act of legalism caused him to lose his freedom and brought on the mob. Paul will regain his freedom but the Jerusalem Jews will not. Paul was damaged temporarily, but they were damaged permanently.

It was quite alright for these Jews to disagree with Paul, but it was wrong for them to try to solve their problems with violence. You may disagree with me, and I may disagree with you, but you can't solve anything by beating me up or by trying to kill me. The simple principle is this. I have to respect your freedom and you have to respect my freedom. But here in verse 30 we have a picture of a crowd gone berserk. All thinking had stopped. Freedom was violated, both by Paul and by his legalistic friends. God is not going to take Paul out of the world by the sin unto death, but God is going to discipline him for two years in prison in Caesarea and two years in prison in Rome. So the mob here is fighting against personal freedom and against plain Bible doctrine. But you don't wipe out grace by killing a grace preacher. Socialism advocates something that will destroy a nation. Our real problem today is not poverty. Our real problem is not hatred between the races. Our problem today doesn't have to do with minorities. Our problem is that we have lost sight of personal freedom and we are trying to force people to become equal and live together in love and peace. We are walking all over personal freedom in this country. The most precious possession of any man is his free will, and this is being violated in this country today on every hand.

So what is important? I'll tell you. The propagation of truth which always leads to personal freedom. "You shall know the truth (Bible doctrine) and the truth shall make you free". People must be free to choose. Freedom is the thing that makes everything else go. Positive volition expresses itself freely when you have faith in Jesus Christ and are saved. So in reality salvation is simply an expression of human freedom. Men cannot be forced to be Christians, if they become Christians, they do it through a free choice.

JOHN 3:36 "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." This verse reminds us that we must freely go one way or the other, and the choice of our volition determines our future.

ACTS 21:31 "And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

The "Chief captain" is the chief tribunal and in the Greek he is called "Chiliarch". It means the commander of 1,000. He was the garrison commander. So here we see that the divine institution no. 4, the nation, the Roman Government, the Roman garrison was used by God to preserve human freedom. This Roman garrison kept these people from destroying themselves. The band of Roman soldiers will break up the riot and will save Paul's life. Down in verse 38 "The Egyptian" is mentioned and this shows us that a criminal element was operating in the country and these representatives of law and order had to be there in order to guarantee life and stability in the nation. This is very much like the national guard and the F.B.I. of today. Freedom must be preserved at any price.

So we close our study of these verses as we see crime and religion holding hands, and both are guilty as they try to destroy human freedom. Religion is just as dangerous in destroying freedom as is crime.

In our next study we will see how law and order won the day.