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HOW ROMAN SOLDIERS SAVED PAUL'S LIFE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 105
ACTS 21:30-37

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ACTS 21:30-37 "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. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?"

In connection with the sin of legalism committed by Paul, we have been studying the doctrine of human freedom. There are two main ways God has for protecting human freedom. The four divine institutions were designed to guarantee human freedom and the grace of God working in human life also assures us of freedom. When anyone surrenders his volition to a mob, he is actually giving up one of his most treasured possessions, and that is his human freedom. Here we see the attack of religion on human freedom. Religion seeks to destroy human freedom through legalism. This riot was the result.

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." In addition to the attack of legalism, crime is a second attack on human freedom. We will see this in verse 38 where we have the story of an Egyptian who was the head of a crime syndicate of those days. Think for a moment on this question--How did the Roman Empire survive so long? One of the main reasons for their stability was their emphasis on law and order. They also had separation of church and state. They would not tolerate mobs and riots. Rome stood for human freedom and they protected human freedom. In our study today we will see how Roman soldiers broke up a mob and a riot and thereby saved Paul's life.

The Doctrine Of Human Freedom

1. Human freedom is an extension of the angelic conflict. It is no accident that human freedom is divine institution no. 1--VOLITION. Human free will is the basic element of the human race. When God created man he created him with the characteristic of human free will. Therefore God is responsible for the protection of human freedom, both for the believer and for the unbeliever. God protects the whole human race through the four divine institutions--Volition, marriage, the family, and the nation. Then God protects the believer with Bible doctrine.
2. Human volition and human freedom is the dignity of man but it is distorted by the old sin nature. Man was created with freedom and dignity, but this has been distorted by the old sin nature. It was the accumulation of Jewish old sin natures that caused this riot in our study today. They were jealous of Paul and they were antagonistic toward him and this brought on the riot and mob.

3. The four divine institutions were designed to protect human freedom. Every man has a right to his own freedom whether he is rich or poor, whether he is white or black, whether he had a good personality or a bad personality. Volition, marriage, the family and the nation were all designed to protect human freedom.
4. The plan of God gives human freedom a relationship with God, and a purpose in life related to God. Volition properly used always leads a man to faith in Christ, but a man is free to make the choice. You use your free will positively when you believe in Christ for salvation, and you use your free will negatively when you fail to believe in Christ.
5. Volition and human freedom form the basis for true love. Volition and human freedom go together in true love and you can't have one without the other.
6. Maturity must be defined on the basis of human volition and human freedom. A person becomes an adult when he becomes willing to take the results of his own actions.
7. Human freedom is the basis for salvation in the grace pattern.
EPHESIANS 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."
 This takes us back to the angelic conflict and shows us how the angelic conflict will be resolved.

We are at the place in our study in Acts where we see that Paul had committed a great sin in his volition which is a compromise of his grace teaching and the whole grace principle.

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." Please note that this riot touched the entire city of Jerusalem. The people of the city were emotionally stirred up. They ran together and dragged Paul out of the temple.

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." As the mob was in the process of trying to kill Paul, the chief captain at the Roman garrison got the message that the whole city was in an uproar. The chief captain was a "Chiliarchos" and it means the one who is captain over 1,000. Probably comparable to a Brigadier General in our army setup. He was alerted about the mob. Rioting is an enemy of human freedom and is not good for anybody.

ACTS 21:32 "Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul." Please notice that this chief captain didn't loose any time. He moved immediately. If a riot resulted in the death of someone it would have been a blot on the record of this officer and on the Roman nation as a whole. This is why he moved with such rapidity. He had no thought of catering to these religious Jews. He grabbed up the soldiers that were available and he ran down into the midst of the mob. He moved quickly out of the Mark Antony barracks and took over quickly. The mob stopped beating Paul. The "ceased" here is in the aorist tense and means in the point of time when they saw the Roman soldiers they left off beating Paul. They had to see force before they would stop beating Paul.

Three things should be obvious at this point--

1. Paul is under divine discipline but he is not under the sin unto death. He might have been killed, but the mob was packed in so tight no one could take a real good swing at Paul. God still had a plan for Paul's life and though he will be under discipline for almost five years because of this disobedience God used the Roman army to save his life. The Jews had failed to preserve law and order so the Roman army had to do it for them.
2. There are three times when Paul might have died--Here in this mob, later on in the shipwreck, and still later when the poisonous snake bit him. But Paul survived them all and we know that God had a plan for Paul's life. Now some-time in your life you may have a close call, so if you do be sure to rebound quickly so you can be sure you are in the plan of God. Rebound, don't cry over spilt milk, pick yourself up and move on. Don't allow conditions to develop so the sin unto death might apply unto you. As long as you are alive God has a plan for your life.
3. God still had a plan for Paul's life and all the mobs in the world and shipwrecks and snake bites could not kill Paul. There are people yet to be won by Paul. There are letters yet to be written by Paul. God knew we would need Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and 1st and 2nd Timothy. So he is not going to let Paul die. As always grace finds a way to turn cursing into blessing. Paul had ignored grace but grace had not deserted Paul.

Meet the nobility of this Roman chief captain. It was nobility like this which brought stability to the world through the Roman Empire for almost a thousand years. Thereby, evangelism was facilitated in the whole earth. So here is an illustration how God, even uses unbelievers, to get his work done.

ACTS 21:33 "Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done." Please notice the problem this chief captain had to face. He moved into the mob personally and took Paul from them with his own hands. We know this from the word "Epi lambano". It means to grasp someone with your own hands. This officer was out ahead of his troops showing them what they should do. He didn't stand back and wait for someone else to lead the way. The mob moved back and the chief captain put a chain on Paul and then he asked for two things--

He wanted to know who Paul was.

He wanted to know what Paul had done to cause the mob.

Please notice this important point--This officer wanted to know the facts. The emotion of the mob didn't divert him from finding out the facts. Another lesson here is this--If you don't know the facts, keep your mouth shut. This chief captain was cool and a brave man. He had personal stability and was well trained for his job. He did not jump at conclusions but waited until he got the facts. It says that he demanded to know the facts. The word for demand is "pun thanomai" and it means to investigate. It means to make an inquiry. He is seeking to ascertain the facts. The mob didn't upset the chief captain, he played his hand perfectly. He stopped the mob and then immediately he set about the task of getting all the facts. The point for you and me is this--Get all the facts, don't run off on a tangent and make up your mind before you have all the facts. Keep an open mind until you get all the facts.

Let us for a moment contrast Rome as a government and the religious Jews in Jerusalem at this time. Religion started a riot and Rome had to stop it.

Some Points On The Contrast Of Rome And The Jerusalem Jews

1. While the church in Jerusalem gave no help to Paul when he fell into the hands of the mob, the Roman Government stepped in and in their hands he was perfectly safe. Their emphasis on human freedom and law and order protected Paul. The Jerusalem Church should have known enough doctrine to protect Paul, but they didn't. The Jerusalem Church at that time was carnal. So please look at this principle--It is better to fall into the hands of unbelievers than it is to fall into the hands of carnal Christians. There is nothing worse in the earth than a carnal Christian. Here in our scripture the carnal Christian caused a riot and the Roman Government had to step in and save his life.
2. The Roman Government gave Paul a fair shake in contrast to the Jerusalem Church.
3. Paul would have been beaten to death had he not been rescued by Roman soldiers. The nation, divine institution no. 4, saved Paul. It is called the S.P.Q.R. and means "The Senate And The People of Rome".
4. It became quite obvious that the apostate and legalistic church in Jerusalem had no influence. A church that has no regard for Bible doctrine loses its place of respect in the community.
5. The greatest believer in the earth, who was at that time the Apostle Paul, should have been welcomed with open arms by the Jerusalem Church but instead they greeted him with a mob. Paul should have been given a wide hearing by all the Christians of Jerusalem, but instead they tried to kill him.
6. The church in Jerusalem encouraged Paul to abandon grace. They rather forced him into a trap and caused him to commit an act of legalism instead.
7. Paul was alone in the temple at the mercy of the crowd and the crowd would have killed Paul except for the overruling will of God and God used the pagan government of Rome as his instrument to save Paul.
8. The Jerusalem Church offered no prayer for Paul as they did for Simon Peter on another occasion.
9. The Jerusalem Church had neither power nor protest with man. They had neither power nor prayer with God.
10. Ignorance of doctrine and compromise had ruined the Jerusalem Church and they had become paupers. Many of those Jerusalem Christians were at that very moment being fed with the money Paul had brought to Jerusalem in the great offering for the poor. At the very moment they were trying to kill him, they were at the same time eating off the money he had brought them.
11. It is going to be quite difficult for Paul to explain to the chief captain why he is in the midst of this mob. Paul will be hard put to it to get the Roman officials to understand the details in the case. But Rome is fair and they will get to the bottom of this incident before it is over.

ACTS 21:34 "And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle."

The confused and inconsistent action of the mob is explained in this verse. Some shouted one thing and some shouted another. This is always true of a mob. The Roman officer soon realized that he would not be able to get any facts from the mob. Since he couldn't get any facts from them he had Paul brought into the Mark Antony barracks.

ACTS 21:35 "And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people." Here we get another reaction from the mob. As Paul was being taken up the stairs they charged him again and tried to kill him.

ACTS 21:36 "For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him." Please notice that they used the same words with Paul they had used with Christ. When they said, "Away with him", they meant they wanted his death.

ACTS 21:37 "And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?" Let us get a little picture of the Mark Antony barracks. It had been constructed by Herod the Great. It was a square, 375 feet each way. It had towers at each corner that were 75 feet tall, but the tower over against the temple was 100 feet tall. Inside was the parade ground for the troops and this was called "gabbatha". When Paul said, "May I speak unto thee?", the Roman officer heard Paul's voice for the first time. He was shocked that Paul could speak such aristocratic Greek. The Tribune knew Latin but he also could speak Greek. Next time we will study the outcome of this conversation.