Acts 21:26-23:10 | Dave Stough

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Preacher: Dave Stough

[0:00] Well, top of the day to you all. Today is, everybody's talking about Super Bowl Sunday, right? We're going to be in Acts chapter 20 to start with. I'm going to have a passage in 21 and 22, but we're going to start in Acts 20.

We don't have slides or videos or anything today, but we do have several Bible passages to read, so if you want to get your Bibles ready there in Acts 20, that would be good.
It's estimated that close to 50% of Americans today will watch that Super Bowl, and they can track it pretty good today with technology.
Of course, the big talk this week about that event seems to be more about the halftime show than the game. Have you guys been hearing that? You have the NFL-approved LGBTQ-supporting Bad Bunny show.
And then the alternative, Turning Point USA, I guess more moral halftime show, a little more, I don't know, kid rock and country music.
[1:14] It's almost like comparing the city of Ephesus, which Dave talked about last week, with Jerusalem in the Apostle Paul's time.

Both want to reflect their morality in their commerce, in their politics, and in their religion. Last week, Dave shared with us what it looked like when the gospel collided with pagan culture.
Today, we are going to see what it looks like when the gospel collides with Jewish ritual and tradition at the temple in Jerusalem. If you remember, Paul had a custom when he entered a city that he went to the synagogues first.
That's what he did in Ephesus, and after reasoning with them about the kingdom of God, they kicked him out after a while. No problem for Paul, he went right next door to the Gentile school and set up shop there.
And he preached the gospel to both Jew and Gentile from that school, which was quite an event. Pardon me.
[2:33] Because it says that he stayed there for quite a while. I think it said two years or a year and a half or something. Quite a while. I can't remember exactly. But the end result was that the word of the Lord grew mightily, not only in Ephesus, but throughout the whole region of Asia.

Unlike Ephesus, Jerusalem does not have the Greek school next door. But of course, Jerusalem is the central hub for Jewish worship at the temple.
I've been given this passage in Acts 21 and 22, where the Apostle Paul takes a beating and is arrested for sharing the gospel with a Jewish mob.
And we don't see converts. But nonetheless, we see God's word going out, accomplishing his sovereign will. We'll talk a little bit about sovereignty and suffering at the end of the message.
Before we look at it, though, I think it's important for us to see the events that happened between Ephesus and Jerusalem in Acts 20 and 21 leading up to this.
[3:42] They give us insight into what was going on in the heart and mind of Paul there. Why he wanted to go back to Jerusalem. So when he was ending his third missionary journey, he spent time at the end of it encouraging the elders of the Ephesians.

If you've got your Bible there, Acts 20 through verse 21 through 24. He said to them, I'd like to read that last part again.
I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God. After Paul left Ephesus, he sailed to the port of Tyre and stayed there seven days.
And he stayed with local believers. It says in Acts 21 verse 4 that those believers, it says that they urged Paul through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem.

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Kind of interesting. The next stop on the way to Jerusalem was in the port city of Caesarea. Paul stopped in and he stayed at Philip.
[5:44] Philip the evangelist, it says in this text. The same Philip that was appointed a deacon in Acts 6 and went to preach to the Samaritans in Acts 8. It's now about 20 years later.

Let's read the interaction Paul had with the believers at Philip's house. We're in 21 verses 10 through 15. 21, 10 through 15.
While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.
When he heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, So was it God's will that Paul go to Jerusalem or not?
When he was at Tyre, the Holy Spirit warned him not to go. And here Agabus warns him of being in prison. These were people who loved Paul, warning him not to go.
[7:20] And they were doing it through the Spirit. I think these were actually warnings, or I don't know if that's the right word, a heads up maybe to Paul of what awaits him, not direction from the Holy Spirit to not go to Jerusalem.

The disciples thought that Paul should not go, but we would be wrong to conclude Paul was acting in pride and disregarding the will of the Lord.
I think we can see this in the text. I believe that simply because of everything else you see in Acts. I just think God was showing Paul ahead of time what he would suffer in the places that he was leading him to preach.
You remember what, in Acts 9, what God said to Agabus, not Agabus, Ananias, about Paul?
He told him to go, hey, there's this guy Paul. The guy was on his way to take him to prison. He said, hey, go visit him, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.
[8:38] For I will show him, I will show him how many things he must suffer for my namesake. So we can rightly conclude that suffering was a part of the process God had for Paul to preach the gospel.

So God was faithful to warn Paul this way, and also, he was faithful to tell Paul not to worry about it. You remember in Acts 18? He said, don't fear, I'm here, don't fear.
He says that all the time, even when we're, even suffering, but he's saying, I'm here, and there's many people in this city preach, and they stayed there for quite a while.
So could Paul have chosen not to go to Jerusalem? Thought about that for a little bit. I think the answer's kind of simple. Have you ever done something that God was leading, have you ever not done something God was leading you to do?
I think these warnings, with these warnings, Paul could have ducked out if he wanted to. Where does God's sovereignty and man's choices meet?
[9:54] Don't try to figure it out. But, we know we have choices to make as believers. Paul was not worried about being in prison or beaten.

He'd already gone through this, right? He's even stoned and left for dead. One thing you can say about Paul with no doubt, he did not concern himself too much, it will say, about what other people were going to do when they mistreated him.
It says in that verse we read earlier, he actually did not count his own life dear to himself. He was motivated by the gospel of the grace of God.
I think the guiding truth for Paul was the assurance of the presence of Christ in the midst of whatever he was going through. The love of God shed abroad in his heart even when he was suffering was evident.
So, we're moving up to the place where I was actually appointed to speak and we're getting there to Acts 21. You can turn in your Bibles to verse 20.
[11:11] Paul arrives in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The first place he goes is to see James and the elders. Paul tells him in detail the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And they rejoice with Paul, but James and company there, they had a concern. I have read this passage years ago and I never really caught this and I was reading it I don't know a month or two

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ago I was even talking to Dave or Vineyard about this I'd never seen this before and it's been interesting we'll just say that I'm going to read these four verses.
And when they heard it that is when they heard about what God did among Gentiles they glorified God and they said to Paul you see brother how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed they are zealous for the law 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 what then is to be done they will certainly hear you have come here do therefore what we tell you we have four men who are under a vow 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 to the law kind of interesting huh now we know that James already declared in Acts 15 that the Mosaic law was not for the Gentiles but here he instructs
Paul to keep the ritual of purification at the temple with four other Jewish Christian men so that everybody will know that you yourself are living in observance to the law I think we have a testimony here of just how much the Old Testament law still influenced the early Jewish Christians it's about AD 55 somewhere close in there apparently most of the Jewish Christians at least in Jerusalem thought that the Jewish believers were still subject to keep the law it seems that the peer pressure here was to guard the customs of the Old Testament and try to incorporate them into their newfound faith in the Messiah and we know from Acts 15 also that James did not hold the view of the Judaizers that you had to keep the law to be saved and you can tell from his New Testament book which I'm pretty sure he wrote before this event that he understood the difference between the law and the law of liberty that we have in Christ but nonetheless
Paul and James had different views on the role of the law in the life of a Jewish believer did Paul think that a born again Jewish person needed to go to the temple and offer sacrifices in obedience to the law we know from Galatians and Romans the answer to that is no both of those letters were written prior to this Galatians he wrote in about 48 AD in Romans he wrote just months before he came here when he was in Corinth he wrote the book of Romans from Corinth so he writes in detail both these letters distinguishing between the righteousness that comes by faith alone in Christ apart from the works of the law and even emphasizes the temporary nature of the law in those books read Romans 7 and Galatians 3 and 4 so Paul did not think that you had to go to the temple and offer sacrifices he did it though he didn't necessarily think it was a sin for a believer in Christ to go to the temple and offer a sacrifice he did it in Acts 18
[15:56] I think Tom mentioned that but we can say he didn't put himself back under the law to obey it but probably in his heart he was doing it out of thanksgiving and remembrance of what Christ had done this is why Paul wrote in Romans 14 telling us not to judge a brother for what he's doing in his heart for the Lord while emphasizing we are not under the law to keep its rituals it can't be said enough we need to keep in mind that Acts is recording the events of the people of God during a time of transition from law to grace we've got to take ourselves out of our I've said this before but say it again sometimes we've got to take ourselves out of our shoes and put ourselves in the shoes of the people that are living these events or they're writing to and what would have been like to be Jewish and like think of the disciples out of faith and obedience to God when they were under the law before the cross they kept the law and now all this happens and out of faith and obedience to God they don't keep the law

I think it's going to happen overnight that's a part of who they were it was their identity so it's a time of transition and remember the temple is still standing which is the place that you worship God under the law it's still standing God was showing his people a new way to approach him in worship this book you know is this recording what happened and it took decades for the Jewish believers to learn this Paul was on the cutting edge of what God was changing so how did Paul respond to James I think it's a good lesson here verse 26 of our text then Paul took the men and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple Paul did not enter into a debate with James he was not important now he was willing to comply for the sake of the church
Paul's goal was to preach the gospel this is a demonstration of what he wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 for though I am free from all I have made myself a servant of all that I might win more of them 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 and it says though not being myself under the law that I might win those under the law I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings I think Paul knew

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that when he had a chance to testify of the grace of God in the face of hostility that everyone would see that he had something more in him than the law could provide Paul knew that God had called him back to Jerusalem to testify of his grace he was not there to win a debate he was there to show the love of Christ and to preach the gospel the thing that concerned
James it looks like Paul saw as an opportunity so Paul at the temple ritually purifies himself along with the other Jewish born again believers and pays the priests for all their vows so far so good Paul has identified with his fellow Jews and about a week goes by no problems so far right but no gospel being preached either let's pick it up in verse 27 of chapter 21 when the seven days were almost over the Jews from Asia upon seeing Paul in the temple began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him crying out men of Israel help this is the man who instructs everyone everywhere against our people and the law and this place and besides he has even brought
Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place both of those things were false by the way many Jews from Asia which when I say Asia when I heard this long I used to think of Asia like you know the Orient we're talking about modern day Turkey here so many of the people many of the Jews from there came to Jerusalem from Pentecost after all the synagogues Paul preached Christ when he was there in Turkey or Asia he had a reputation among them because he went into the synagogues and they heard that Paul was there at the temple and just as they lied about him in those towns and acted violently towards him there doing the same thing here at the temple the unbelieving crowd of Jews heard a false rumor that Paul was telling Jews throughout the world not to keep the law and that he defiled the temple by bringing a Gentile into the temple area set aside for Jews only those are serious charges if you're living back then upon hearing this the crowd turned into an angry mob they seized
[21:50] Paul dragged him out of the temple and started beating him let's read again in verse 31 while they were intent on killing him a report came up to the commander of the Roman garrison that all Jerusalem was in confusion he immediately took along soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd and when they saw the commander and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul then the commander came up and took hold of him and ordered that he be bound with two chains and began asking who he was and what he had done but among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar he ordered that Paul be brought back into the barracks when Paul got to the stairs he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob so he hasn't yet been able to share

Christ you wonder what he was thinking about during all that time what would I be thinking I couldn't do it maybe God will do something special this is the way God led Paul though so as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks he asked the commander if he could speak with the people because now he's got their protection after a short conversation with that commander Paul spoke to the crowd so here we go the moment Paul has been waiting for the mob that wanted him dead just as Paul wanted Stephen dead if you remember you're going to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ Paul's fellow Jews whom he loved will hear the testimony of how Paul got saved which will point him to Jesus so Paul standing on the stairs motioned to the people with his hand we're going to be picking up here in verse 20 verse 3
I'm sorry I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city educated under Gamaliel strictly according to the law of our fathers being zealous for God just as you are all today I persecuted this way to the death binding and putting both men and women into prisons and also the high priests and the council of the elders can testify from them I received letters to the brothers and started off for Damascus in order to bring those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished so Paul is reminding the crowd of who he was what he used to be he was like they are now but probably even more so he was the ringleader of those who wanted to get rid of the people that they called of the way so he got their attention with these remarks now he's going to let them know how the Lord
Jesus changed his mind verses 6-8 but it happened that I was on my way approaching Damascus about noon and a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me Saul Saul why are you persecuting me so I answered who are you Lord and he said to me I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you are persecuting Paul was saved when he was knocked off his horse when he seen the glory of God and heard the voice of Jesus Christ I think it's worth repeating Paul Paul was saved when he was knocked off his horse seeing the glory of God and heard the voice of Jesus Christ Paul came to know the one who died

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for him after he was humbled the very one he was zealous to get rid of is in fact the Lord surprisingly the crowd does not erupt in opposition right now while Paul is speaking they listen as Paul continues on with his testimony verse 10 and I said well what shall I do Lord and the Lord said to me get up and go into Damascus and there you will be told about everything that has been appointed for you to do but since I could not see because of the brightness of the light I came into Damascus being led by the hand by those who were with me Paul is emphasizing that Jesus is the one who has the authority Paul had the authority to arrest people remember not anymore he can't even see so he goes on to tell them of meeting Ananias receiving his sight and being baptized in the name of

[27:33] Jesus for the forgiveness of sins it is Jesus who has the power to forgive sins it wasn't the law it wasn't trying to keep the law it was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that has the power now I'm thinking what's going on in Paul's mind as he speaks I bet right now he's elated this is what he came to do this is why he took the insults and the beatings not holding it against the people he's giving words of life to those he most closely identified with his Jewish brethren Paul said in 2nd Corinthians 5 therefore knowing the terror or the fear of the Lord we persuade men for it is the love of Christ that compels us

I looked up that word compel some versions say constrain it literally means to be pressed in upon and moved along by so it's this motivation if you think about it what did the crowd do they pressed in on Paul and they sure moved him along didn't they but someone else was in charge Paul was motivated moved along by the grace of God and he wanted to share it with them this is why he was willing to suffer so his fellow Jews are still listening verse 17 Paul speaks of the time shortly after he was saved and he says it happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple that I fell into a trance and I saw him saying to me hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about me and I said Lord they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you and when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed I also was standing nearby and approving and watching over the cloaks of those who were killing him and he said to me go for I will send you far away to the Gentiles uh oh Paul said a bad word verse 22 they listened to him up to this statement and then they raised their voices and said away with such a man from the earth for he should not be allowed to live these people let their heritage and their religion blind them to the truth that's what religion can do they were too proud of their past to hear what God was saying to them in the present

God didn't change but they had an idolatrous view of what the law was a view that exalted themselves over the truth they had an outward appearance that impressed men but had no real spiritual truth in it this is what religion based on man's word does and these people they weren't going to let go of it we read of no one being converted here when Paul faced hostility in Gentile cities we read of people getting saved not here in Jerusalem at least in this occurrence I think the more religious crowd was harder more of a hard heart towards the gospel it doesn't mean Paul wasted his time and took a beating for nothing though as was mentioned in recent sermons here I think Casey had mentioned it in his and this one Paul knew that he was exactly where God wanted him to be even when being beaten and arrested the Holy Spirit led Paul to Jerusalem Paul had confidence in the presence of God and there's something I think God's been speaking to me about I'm learning through this that Paul rested in God's goodness and his authority he he had them both firm in his heart and then he just let God have the outcome Paul knew God was sovereign and he was willing to suffer for the sake of

[32:48] Christ sovereignty and suffering that could be a sermon but we're going to wrap up here in a minute what do these words really mean yeah you can come up that's fine how do they apply to us sovereignty and suffering these two concepts have been shared and I mean you can't when you go through acts you have to talk about God's work advancing in his sovereign will as the spirit does things and and you also have to see how people what they went through so you can't share messages and acts and not talk about these sovereignty and suffering when I was a new believer I heard the word sovereignty in the context of somebody talking about election and I think that was the first time I heard it that word sounded so cold and distant and so disconnected from me personally but

I've grown to learn that God's sovereignty is his ability to be intimately acquainted with everything and also to be in charge of what is going on in the entire universe including me even the bad things

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around me and sometimes through me he has the authority over every event that happens a verse showing this was recently shared I will share it again because it's so appropriate Isaiah 45 7 I am the Lord and there is no other I form the light and I create darkness I make peace and I create calamity I the Lord do all these things God is not
I'm sorry God is the master of and in control of both good and evil he is not the creator or the cause of evil but he does have authority over evil I am the Lord and there is no other I form the light and I create the darkness I make peace and I create calamity I the Lord do all these things I think the enemy of our souls Satan wants us to doubt this he also wants us to doubt God's goodness that's what he did with Eve in the garden got her to question God's word because basically God's holding out on you you can do something better for yourself I believe he and his minions work overtime towards this a verse that reassures us of the goodness and love of
God is Romans 2 4 this has been a verse I have held on to in my times of doubt and here it is it says do you despise the riches!
of his goodness patience and long suffering not knowing that it's the goodness of God that leads you to repentance our hope in the midst of suffering is that there is a good loving and all powerful God that has all authority behind everything you go through let's pray father we thank you so much for your word that gives us life thank you lord that you make all the difference thank you that you show us our need for the lord jesus and it is to his honor that we sing now and give you praise in jesus name amen

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