

11-7-21

Acts 21:15-39

I have some rhetorical questions, meant to be thought provoking.

Have you ever had a bad day, week, month, or year? It seems like no matter what you do or how much good you do everything goes sideways?

Ever seem like everything is going wrong? Been overwhelmed by all the incoming fire?

Ever been misrepresented or misunderstood and no matter what you say or do the situation gets worse.

Well then today's scripture will hit home. If anyone knew what it felt like to have everything go bad quick, it's the apostle Paul.

Paul comes into Jerusalem to give a missions update and to give the church in Jerusalem the offerings that he collected from the Gentile churches. This offering was given by the Gentiles as a love gift to help the mostly Jewish church.

Paul was aware that he would be facing some trials and tribulations. The Holy Spirit had revealed this to him in **Acts 20:22-24**. Believers in Tyre warned him, and Agabus in Caesarea gave Paul a object lesson about what the Holy Spirit revealed to him. But I am not sure if Paul saw the blindside by fellow believers or at best their unwillingness to interject.

Paul having a bad day, week, month, year and how he handled it when everything went sideways.

Read Acts 21:15-19.

Paul recited all that the Lord had accomplished through his ministry to the Gentiles, detailing his experiences one-by-one. That must have been a stirring, inspiring missionary report to anyone with an ounce of love for seeing people come to faith in Christ.

Can you picture it in your mind as Paul shared about the 2,515 miles (1,190 miles by sea and 1,325 by land) and the 4 years it had taken?

From **Acts 18:23-21:15**. How he spent over 2 years in Ephesus, and how he gave the rest of the story, regarding the gospel to many. That his fellowship, because of his obedience and faithful with God was so close that his handkerchiefs or aprons were used to cast out demons. How some knuckle heads tried to simulate it and got a demon smack down that left him streaking naked. Can you imagine the laughter when Paul tells James that he bored a kid to death, literally and had to bring him back to life to finish boring him?

I can see Paul saying, no matter what I faced God got the glory and honor. God was saving people by the thousands. God's Spirit was testifying in the hearts of Gentile (dogs) and they were gobbling up the crumbs that fell from the table. Plus, Jimmy boy, wait till I show you the offering these Gentile churches gave!

What kind of reception did Paul receive for this stirring missionary report?

Read verses 20-22.

Verse 20 says that when they heard it, they glorified the Lord...but notice the next word— “AND”. That one word, “and,” spoils it all!

I am sure this was not what Paul was expecting. To have Christian brothers state, “see, how many myriads (countless, or a unit of 10 thousands) of Jews there are who have believed, and they are zealous for the law;” To add insult to injury, then they lay false accusations against him. **(Verse 21)**

Do you think the wind was taken out of Paul’s sails? I wonder if he was in shock. Maybe thinking back to when he and Barnabas stood before the church in **Acts 15**. They didn’t even mention the Gentile churches’ sacrificial gift, thus exhibiting not the least bit of gratefulness for their sacrifices, nor Paul’s part in it.

So, if things weren’t already going badly, they hatch an even worse plan.

Read verses 23-25.

The purpose of this scheme was to show that Paul was a pro-Judaistic Christian. Though Paul knew this was silly, he was trying to be conciliatory. So, in hopes of bridging the gap of misunderstanding, he went through with it. Unfortunately, that led to a cascading series of mishaps that sounds strangely like one of those bad weeks we have from time to time.

Read verses 27-29.

Did this clear everything up like James and the elders thought it would? “Do what we tell you:” “that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing...”

Here Paul is living out **1 Corinthians 9:20** and doing what those in authority tell him to do and what happens?

1 Corinthians 9:20, “and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;”

The believing Jews misunderstood what he was doing. They “**supposed**” (v.29) assumed, assigned intent, that one or more of the four were a Greek, since they seen him with Greeks before.

I wonder what Paul was thinking and feeling. Where were the leaders of the church now? They ghosted Paul. Where the scripture doesn’t ever mention James and the elders again, we know that they heard about what happens next. Remember the 4 guys they introduced Paul to, I am sure they said something.

Unfortunately, it’s going to get worse for Paul.

Read verses 30-32.

So now Paul’s bad week just got worse. The mob is beating him to a pulp and a local Roman captain, hearing about the disturbance, immediately sends a detachment of soldiers to see what’s going on. As the soldiers arrive, those beating Paul make a run for it.

“Thank goodness!” thinks Paul. “NOW maybe my week will improve!” Nope! Instead of arresting the perpetrators of the beating, THEY ARREST THE VICTIM!

Read verse 33-36

I wonder if at this point Paul remembered Agabus' object lesson.

Could it possibly get any worse? It could and it did, for not only was Paul arrested for a crime he didn't commit, but he suddenly discovered that he was the victim of a mistaken identity!

Read verses 37-39.

Anyone had it as bad as Paul? Ok, what can we learn from Paul's first week in Jerusalem?

1. Don't let the behaviors or failure of others hinder your spiritual growth.

- I think I would've been devastated, disheartened, and disillusioned if I had done all these things to accommodate and help the Jerusalem believers, only to be rebuffed and insulted the way Paul was by them.
- You will never read a hint of bitterness, anger, resentment, or hatred on the part of Paul in any of his writings in God's Word.
- Later, when Paul was sent to Rome a prisoner, instead of being gladly received by the brethren there, for the most part he was shunned, according to the book of Philippians, and some spread lies about him to undermine his authority. Yet as you read the book of Philippians, you find that he writes with joy and rejoicing literally dripping from his pen.
- How was Paul able to be unaffected by the failure of other Christians? What was his secret?
 - a. Paul was not preoccupied with people but with the promotion of the gospel.

Philippians 1:18, "What then [does it matter]? So long as in every way, whether in pretense [for self-promotion] or in all honesty [to spread the truth], Christ is being preached; and in this I rejoice." Amp

- He didn't care if Christian preachers lied about him or told the truth about him... as long as the Gospel went forth.
- We have seen it time and again that when a person or a church becomes focused on self and their personal feelings instead of evangelism, then strife, disagreements and relationship problems ensue.
- The best weapon against discord is an emphasis on evangelism. Paul was so absorbed with reaching people with the Gospel that he simply didn't have time to be trivialized with hurt feelings or disappointments with Christians' petty, unkind or unchristlike actions.
- b. Paul focused not on CHRISTIANS, but on CHRIST.

Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

- If we focus on people and their faults and failures, JESUS will get out of focus in your life. But if we focus in on Jesus, and really live just to please Him, and let Him become the source of our joy and peace and fulfillment in life, then people and their knuckleheadness, sins and inconsistencies just fade into the background.

Don't let the failure of others hinder your spiritual growth.

2. God has a larger purpose in things that go wrong in our lives.

- As Paul sat in a Jerusalem prison reviewing his bad week, he didn't know what God was up to. Up to that time Paul's ministry had been in the Greek provinces. But the center of power was Rome! What an opportunity if a great soul-winning station could be organized in the CENTER of

the civilized world—ROME ITSELF! From there the Gospel could go out to the far reaches of the Roman empire.

- Also, as Paul sat in prison, he didn't know that God would move him to Caesarea, have an opportunity to give the gospel to Roman soldiers, and rulers like Felix, Festus and even the King of the Jews Agrippa.
- Paul didn't know it, but God was working things out for Him to receive a free, all-expense paid trip to Rome, compliments of the Roman government! But he wouldn't get there the way HE would have planned it. God had a bigger idea.
- According to **Romans 1:13-15** Paul desired to come and preach at a church that was already established in Rome, but he was going as a prisoner.
- Where we might think that wasn't a good thing according to **Philippians 1:12-14** it was the best thing for the gospel.

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

- Paul said that his bondage was well-known in all the PALACE. Scholars believe that Paul's case was so special, and his position so important, that he was imprisoned in the Caesar's own palace.
- From this vantage point Paul began to witness and pretty soon he had a band of believers right there IN CAESAR'S PALACE! And they were becoming bold...speaking the Word without fear.. right in the palace itself.
- If we only knew what God is trying to do through troubles and trials in our lives, we wouldn't complain when we go through them!

3. God often uses bad people to accomplish His larger purposes.

- Here God used judgmental Jewish Christians, rabble-rousing lost Jews, and pagan Roman soldiers to carry out His plans. Later in Acts we'll see how God used wicked governors and kings and various other rulers to get Paul to Rome. All of God's purposes were accomplished by bad Christians, lost Jews, or outright pagans!
- Even bad advice or plans are used for God's purposes.
- Is there someone who has done or is doing bad things to you? That person may indeed be evil and ungodly, or just plain stupid. But be assured that God will use their bad to accomplish good for you, for Paul says in **Romans 8:28** that **“All things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”**

CONCLUSION

When you have a bad week, or a bad experience, or a bad relationship—don't give up! Hold your head up and don't get discouraged! All you see is one little piece of a very big puzzle, but God sees the BIG picture!

Paul could've been discouraged in his cell that day in Jerusalem. I don't know if he was, but you could hardly blame him if he was. But two years later he was in a different cell in a different city doing more from that little cell in Rome than he ever did traveling through all the Greek cities.

So, when you have a bad week or a bad experience, remember these three things:

1. Don't get your eyes on PEOPLE.

Keep your eyes on the LORD. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us, **"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:2)**

2. Remember that God has a larger purpose in your trials and troubles.

Cooperate with Him; remain steadfast and faithful; don't quit or give up. Paul says, **"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9)**

3. Remember that God's instruments to accomplish His purposes are often people—sometimes even evil people.

Don't resist God's tools in your life. Submit to God's working and let God finish the final picture