

# The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 21:26-40

Topic

While being carried to safety up the stairs the apostle Paul asks permission to share the Gospel with the mob that nearly beat him to death

Title

*Stair Pastor*

*He Takes A Licking And Keeps On Talking  
In Case Of Fight, Use Stairs*

**Acts 21:26** Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

**Acts 21:27** Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,

**Acts 21:28** crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

**Acts 21:29** (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

**Acts 21:30** And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

**Acts 21:31** Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

**Acts 21:32** He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

**Acts 21:33** Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.

**Acts 21:34** And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

**Acts 21:35** When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

**Acts 21:36** For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

**Acts 21:37** Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek?"

**Acts 21:38** Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

**Acts 21:39** But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."

**Acts 21:40** So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,

## Introduction

Obi-Wan warned Anakin.

It was in Episode III during the climactic light-saber fight. He said, "It's over, Anakin. I have the **higher ground!**"

Anakin nevertheless jumped over and up to continue the fight and promptly got his legs cut off.

While Obi-Wan literally had the higher ground as a vantage point in the fight, I think the dialogue had a double meaning. 'Higher ground' or 'high ground' or 'high road' are phrases we use when a person takes a morally superior position. Obi-Wan was reminding Anakin that he was standing on the *moral* high ground.

There is some 'moral geography' in our text. After being nearly beaten to death by a hostile mob Paul asked permission to address them. When we read his remarks in subsequent studies we'll see he reached out in love to them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

His physical vantage point was the higher ground of the stairs that led up to the Fortress of Antonia. But the spiritual 'higher ground' was

Paul's decision to minister God's grace to people who hated him enough to almost kill him.

Something that the angry mob said may have cleared the cobwebs from his beating and focused Paul back on the Gospel. As he was being carried by the soldiers up the stairs the crowd was crying out, "Away with him!"

It was eerily reminiscent of a previous crowd almost thirty years earlier. As Pontius Pilate struggled to release Jesus that crowd cried, "Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!"

Jesus went to the Cross. He took the ultimate spiritual high ground that assured Him victory over sin and death as our Savior.

The Cross incited nonbelievers to hate. It invited one believer, Paul, to love. It ought to invite all believers to love even those who hate them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Taking The High Ground Of The Cross Incites Nonbelievers To Hate You, and #2 Taking The High Ground Of The Cross Invites You To Love Nonbelievers.

#1 Taking The High Ground Of The Cross  
Incites Nonbelievers To Hate You  
(v26-36)

The leaders at the church in Jerusalem had asked Paul to participate in a Temple ritual in order to show the Jews that he was not teaching against the Law of Moses. He complied. Paul's philosophy was to become all things to all men that he might be in a better position to share with them about Jesus.

We pick up the story in verse twenty-six.

**Acts 21:26** Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

**Acts 21:27** Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,

**Acts 21:28** crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

**Acts 21:29** (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

It was during the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost. Jews from all over the Roman Empire would be in Jerusalem swelling its population. Some were there from Ephesus. They recognized **Trophimus**, a traveling companion of Paul's. Whether they assumed Paul had brought him in to the area of the Temple forbidden to Gentiles or just fabricated the accusation it was the perfect opportunity to attack Paul.

Paul was attempting to dispel the rumors that he was teaching **all men everywhere against the people, the law, and [the Temple]**. **Yet he was accused of doing just that.**

If you are a Christian you should count on being misunderstood at best and mistreated at worst. Like it or not there is a spiritual battle going on all around you for the souls of men and women. Your very presence is a potential problem for the devil and his demons. Nonbelievers may see Jesus in you. You may share Christ with them. So all the while there are strategies being developed against you.

- being changed to bring change -

It's our reaction to these misunderstandings and mistreatments that is highlighted in these verses. Our natural reaction is fight or flight. We either want to defend ourselves; or we want to remove ourselves from the situation. The Holy Spirit who indwells us will suggest a third reaction: Faith that takes its stand by sharing the love of Jesus with our attackers.

In Paul's case the attack was physical.

**Acts 21:30** And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

They drug Paul out of the area around the inner Temple where only Jews were allowed into what was called the Court of the Gentiles.

Then they closed the doors that led out of the Court of the Gentiles probably to prevent any outside help from getting to Paul.

The crowd intended to kill him but didn't want to do it on holy ground! If it sounds hypocritical that's because it was. Religion leads people into hypocrisy. In many cases the nonbelievers who you are around have some religious beliefs. But far from making them more sympathetic to you it incites them all the more against you. At some point they realize or you have to tell them that God wants a personal relationship with them and not a religious one. They start to understand you are saying they are sinners in need of salvation and that all their good works are a pile of rubbish.

**Acts 21:31** Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

**Acts 21:32** He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Rome kept soldiers adjacent to the Temple in a structure called the Fortress of Antonia. The **commander of the garrison** responded with at least two **centurions** which meant about two hundred armed soldiers.

**Acts 21:33** Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.

**Acts 21:34** And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

It was a tense, violent, volatile situation. Paul was taken into custody. This was just good police work. True, Paul was innocent, but being handcuffed was for his own good, for the crowd's good, and for what cops call 'officer safety.'

**Acts 21:35** When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

**Acts 21:36** For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

The **stairs** presented a strategic problem for the soldiers. They afforded the mob a place to crush in against them to mount a last effort to get at Paul. They literally **carried** Paul to safety.

“Away with him!” They didn’t realize it but they were really shouting at Jesus. It was the influence of Jesus in Paul, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that incited their hatred.

Merely being a Christian will incite others to hate you. It’s a spiritual thing; it happens in a spiritual realm. Thus you ought to expect to be misunderstood and mistreated. Jesus said,

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated you.*

It is really critical we understand that there is *always* something going on around us in the spiritual realm. Whether we’ve said anything or not our presence represents the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross is offensive to nonbelievers. It exposes them as sinners in desperate need of salvation. If they could, some of them would drag you out of your office, or your classroom, or your home, and beat you to death.

What ought your reaction be? Love.

## #2 Taking The High Ground Of The Cross Invites You To Love Nonbelievers (v37-40)

If I’m Paul I am thankful for the Roman authorities and I just want to get out of there as quickly as possible. **But I’m not Paul!** He had other thoughts.

Acts 21:37 Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek?"

Unbelievable! His body bruised and bleeding, Paul was thinking about how he could turn this into an evangelistic crusade. To him the multitude, the mob, was the mass of lost humanity needing to hear the good news about Jesus. The beating he sustained was more proof of their need for salvation.

The commander is later identified as Claudius Lycius (Acts 22:28). He was surprised his prisoner could speak Greek. He was surprised because he assumed Paul was a notorious Egyptian criminal.

**Acts 21:38** Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

The Jewish historian Josephus describes in his writings a group of insurrectionist Jewish **assassins** called the Sicarii. They would get next to their targets in a crowd and knife them. One of their leaders, an **Egyptian**, led an open rebellion. When the Roman soldiers overcame them, the Egyptian and **four thousand** of his **assassins** escaped **out into the wilderness**.

**Acts 21:39** But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."

**Tarsus** was considered a free Roman city. A Jew from Tarsus had certain rights under Roman law. Later on, in chapter twenty-two, we'll see Claudius Lycius about to interrogate Paul by scourging him. Paul then reveals his full Roman citizenship.

Paul only used his rights in order to further the Gospel. He never demanded them in his own defense. It's a good principle for us to adopt.

**Permit me to speak to the people.** Physically weakened and perhaps even in a state of shock Paul nevertheless wanted to address the mob. - being changed to bring change -

**Acts 21:40** So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language...

There was an authority – a spiritual authority – about this apostle. Two hundred armed Roman soldiers could control the crowd with the threat of force. But one beaten Christian, with the wave of his hand, quieted them.

The Spirit filled man when led by the Spirit has Heaven's authority. There will be moments in your life when you can command the attention of an audience. It may be an audience of one; it may be many. Be sensitive to those times.

As they shouted, “**Away with him!**,” Paul was gripped with their great need to hear about the Cross upon which their Savior had died for them. So what they had beaten him? So what they had attempted murder? **It was all to be expected from lost sinners on the brink of Hell. They needed help from the very person they hated.**

Your co-workers or fellow students or neighbors are probably not going to physically attack you as a mob. But since you are a Christian you are the target of spiritual warfare. The nonbelievers you encounter can and will be used against you.

First, be certain you don't bring persecution on yourself. If you are blowing it at work or in school or at home then it isn't persecution. *It's your own fault!*

But if you are walking with the Lord, seeking to serve Him, then you are a target. If you could see yourself from a spiritual vantage point you'd have a big bull's eye painted on you.

Being a Christian incites hatred from nonbelievers. The Cross speaks to them of their sin. But it also preaches to them of God's free gift of salvation.

The Cross preaches most effectively to nonbelievers when you take its high ground and are invited to love even those who hate you.

Take the high ground. It's yours by virtue of Jesus and the Cross.