

**Saturday, June 24, 2023 • Read Acts 21:15–30**

*Questions from the Scripture text: What do they do in v15? Where do they go? Who go with them (v16)? Whom do they bring, for what purpose? Who receive them in Jerusalem, in what manner (v17)? When does who go to whom in v18? Who is present? What does Paul say first (v19). Then what does he tell? With what specificity? How do they respond (v20)? What do they point out in return? What have the Jews believed? But for what are they still zealous? And what have they heard about Paul (v21)? How do they present this as a problem (v22)? What do they tell Paul to do (v23–24)? Whom do they say should not do these things (v25)? What does Paul do, when, in v26? Where does he go? What is he going to do there on their behalf? What time has almost arrived in v27? But what providence occurs at this point? What do the Jews from Asia cry out in v28? On what basis do they say this (v29)? What result does their crying out have in v30? What do they do to Paul?*

**How do believers properly treasure one another and their fellowship in the Word?** Acts 21:15–30 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these sixteen verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **believers properly treasure one another and their fellowship in the Word by responding to it together in love, faith, and submission toward God.**

**God's grace through the fellowship of our service to one another.** Though they had tried to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, now that he is going, they go with him. Like Thomas with Jesus (cf. Jn 11:16), they are willing to share in his going and share in his suffering. The text even "slows down" to highlight the "packing" in v15. Because of the feast, lodging will be scarce. Mnason is mentioned as from Cyprus but evidently has a house in Jerusalem (v16). He is an eminent saint, and those who are part of this party will have the benefit of Paul's instruction, Mnason's godly maturity, Luke's faithfulness, and others. It is a happy fellowship when many saints of a variety of graces serve one another together. God's grace in each one becomes God's grace to each other. We should seek the fellowship of the saints, not only in the formal assemblies of the church, but in love and sympathy and action with each other.

**God's grace through the fellowship of our praise of Him.** The day they arrive in Jerusalem, there is a Session meeting (v18) that turns into a worship service. Or perhaps it was intended to be one all along. What better purpose is there for the elders of the church to gather than to tell in detail what God has done and glorify the Lord together? Paul, and Luke, and their company go, and they speak not of themselves although it was "through his ministry," but rather "those things which God had done" (v19). This must have taken quite a while, since God had done many things, and Paul was telling it in detail. He was pleased to see them (v19a), and pleased to praise God with them. They are eager to give cause for praise as well in v20, with the *many... tens of thousands* ("myriads") of Jews who have believed. This was something near and dear to Paul's own heart (cf. Rom 9:3; 11:13, 25). God's grace uses us not only to serve one another but to turn our hearts toward Him in praise!

**God's grace, despite and through those hindrances that come through our fellowship.** The cause for praise is muted, however, by the sad news that they are "all zealous for the law" (v20). Paul, who wrote Galatians and Hebrews, was the perfect candidate for teaching them to put away the shadows of Moses the servant in the house for the sake of the substance that had come in Jesus, the Son over the house (cf. Heb 3:1–6). Perhaps James and the Jerusalem elders aren't as troubled by this as we may be sure that Paul was; the Scripture gives no indication. However, we do know that they are troubled by the possible response of the murmurers in the church. v17 indicates the folly of this; generally speaking, the brethren received Paul and company gladly. But it is a perpetual temptation for the elders of the church to respond defensively to the murmurers and complainers, rather than proactively in accordance with God and with the work that He is actually doing. So, they speak those fateful words, "do what we tell you" (v23) and come with a plan that will conclude in Paul's offering a blood sacrifice (!) in the temple. They thought that this would avoid scandal, but the exact opposite was true. How could the apostle, from whose pen came the affirmation that the New Covenant is not in the blood of bulls and goats but the blood of Jesus (cf. 1Cor 11:25), and who warned against attaching ongoing significance to the ceremonial law in his letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians, now go and offer a blood sacrifice himself? Surely this would have been a cause of stumbling to many. And so God graciously intervenes to prevent His servant both from sinning against the finality of Christ's sacrifice and from becoming a stumbling block to many in the church. We are still sinners, and our sin and error always threatens to hinder and harm one another in our walk together. But we are free to walk together in fellowship and hope, because we know that God in His grace will ultimately rule and overrule all things for our good... often through our fellowship, but whenever needs be, even despite our fellowship. Praise be to God!

What saints' graces have been a blessing to you? How are you seeking to be a blessing to others? What opportunity do you have for the fellowship of praise? How are you improving those opportunities? What threats in your own inconsistencies threaten other believers' walks with the Lord, in their fellowship with you? What are you doing about that? What good hope do you have about what God is doing about that?

*Sample prayer: Lord, we praise You for Your marvelous grace in the fellowship of the church. Thank You for our own congregation, and the believers whom You have given us to serve and with whom You have given us to worship You. Forgive us our sins, and grow us in grace, we pray—so that we might not be a hindrance or harm to one another. And rule over all things for our growth in grace we pray, through Jesus Christ, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP16A "Keep Me, O God" or TPH354 "Not All the Blood of Beasts"**

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Acts 21 verses 15 through 30. These are God's words. And after those days, we packed up and went to Jerusalem. Also, some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us. And brought with them a certain nation of Cyprus. An early disciple with whom we were to launch. And we had come to, when we had come to Jerusalem on the brethren received us, gladly on the following day.

Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told him to tell. There's things which God had done among the gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, you see brother, how many millions of Jews there are, who have believed. And they are all zealous for the law.

But they had been informed about you, that, you teach all the Jews were among the gentiles. To forsake Moses saying that they ought not to circumcise their children. Nor to walk according to the customs. What then the assembly must certainly meet. For, they will hear that. You have come. Therefore do what we tell you.

We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and beat purified with them. And pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads. And that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing. But that you yourself also walk orderly and keep them all.

What concerning the Gentiles who believe? We have written and decided. That they should observe no such thing. Except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols. From blood. From things strangled and from sexual immorality. Then Paul took them in 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. Now, when the

seven days were almost ended the juice from asia, Seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd. And laid hands on him crying out.

Men of Israel help. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people. The law in this place. And furthermore he also brought greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. For the head previously, seen trophies, the ephesian with him in the city, Whom they supposed Paul had brought into the temple.

And all the city was disturbed. And the people ran together seized paul. Dragged him out of the temple. And immediately in the doors were shut. So far the reading of god's desired. Engineering twerk.

The lord is marvelously gracious. And patient with us. He is gracious to us even through one another You see in verse 15 after those days? We packed up and went to jerusalem, they had Done everything, they could. To dissuade paul from going to jerusalem had But having decided that He would go.

And knowing from the holy spirit himself, What would happen to him there? They did not. Therefore say well. The will of the lord be done. And paul will. Get according to his decision. Uh, but we are not going to go software with him. No, they went with him. Like when jesus was determined to go to jerusalem, And remember the disciples.

Uh, we're afraid of what would happen to him there and it was thomas. Who because of one incident at another point? Has. Received the name doubting Thomas but it was Thomas who said While then let us go and die with him. And the disciples have gone. Well, i think what we have in verse 15 is a similar expression of love.

And not only luke and we know trophamus. Uh, the effusion for instance, But others who had come with paul to caesarea and even brothers from caesarea. So, remember when they were in caesarea, Those who are there? And luke and paul's traveling companions had pleaded with him not to go.

But now, that paul was going, It was not just his traveling companions but even these Uh, these newly reacquainted brethren in Caesarea. From philips house and their connections, and the church there. They went with him. And what a blessing and encouragement, it is that god gives us That when we are called to suffer, he often gives us.

Brothers, who come along with us? And we go through the things in life together. Independence upon the god and his providence, we know these things are coming. The lord's stooping down to our faith. Not knowing that we are unable to see the lord jesus himself where he sits at the right hand of majesty.

Although, even then. He gave john to see the lord jesus himself. And to remind us that he is among the lampstands and he knows. What we are going through and he's overruling it and he carries us through it by his grace. But he also gives us to see one another trophies of his grace.

This will think about, Soon, when we get to jerusalem, And so, there's this. Fellowship that they have that they have had in the means of grace and in sympathy. And it shows forth in fellowship of action. And even this nation of cyprus. You know, they hadn't stopped at cyprus so he hasn't been traveling with them.

Uh, but perhaps he was already On his way. That the feast and he owns a house in jerusalem. This probably a man of no small means. Uh, and it's Let's say significant donation of his at the time of feast. The lodging in jerusalem, would have been scarce. And would have been costly and either could be used.

As a great favor. For some eminent person. What we'll rent it out at a high price. But instead, He is. Please to have paul. And now, considerable party, not just the traveling party. That had. That had. From. Okay. The Macedonia and asia. But now, Processaria. As well. And some nation also.

Having love. For them, the lord jesus. Participants fellowship in sympathy fellowship. In the means of grace and hearing the word together. That we have been seeing. Produces fellowship in action. And so, there's There's God's grace. Who fellowship of life? There's also God's grace, your fellowship of worship. He comes to jerusalem.

The brethren received him, gladly Receive all of them gladly, but all particular is going to be noteworthy. And we'll wait a moment. To think about that. The following day, there's a session meeting. Or a session worship service. Probably the latter. We don't have. Those very much in our In our days.

I think our friend of from making comment on Possibly why? It is good that the session. Has a little bit of worship. And a lot of prayer throughout its meetings that our congregation And i hope that it is solid in any congregations. But the following day, paul goes in.

And his traveling companions are with him. You see the with us and verse 18. And james, the brother of jesus is apparently. Excuse me.

James, the brother of jesus has apparently still. The, the moderator, the pastor none of the other apostles as mentioned. Possibly, they have gone into all the nations as they were commanded. That james himself, not officially. One of the 12. But use the moderator of the session and the All the other elders are.

Our present. And what they do is, they praise god. Together. Paul greets them. There is a fellowship here. Uh, it's not just a hello sort of greeting the word. Indicates. Pleasure and seeing them and being with them. And he tells in detail. Those things which god had done among the gentiles through his ministry.

This must have taken some time. For the lord had done many things. And, It says, specifies that he told it in detail. And you notice the way that he told him, He was telling them of the greatness of the god who has saved them and the god Who is still saving?

There is. Even a little bit of a difference. Between what he says. What god has done among the Gentiles through his ministry and what they say? You see brother how many myriads of jews there are, who have believed Certainly, it could not be doubted that If they are, genuinely believing that this was the work of god.

And yet, you do see The intentionality of the specificity on balls part. Uh, not Holding himself forth, although he is the apostle. To the gentiles. But giving praise to god. And they respond in kind verse 20 when they heard it. The glorified, the lord. It is. As we? Similar to what we have.

Reading and thinking and preaching and hearing preaching through the book of Acts. And we keep seeing God to, One. Glorious saving work after another. And we praise, we praise him for it. And, It stirs us up towards more faith in him more. Wonder at his goodness and his power.

And, This is basically a worship service. A great big worship service. So today when they hear it, they glorify the lord. Now, they say to him, you see, brother? How many myriads now a myriad is a 10 thousand. And now they're saying many tens of thousands of Jews. Have believed.

This is a fulfillment of Uh, what paul has written Um, In romans and romans chapter 11. Talking about. How he was hoping that. Even as he ministered. To the gentiles juice would be provoked. To faith by seeing gentiles also. Have been come to faith. So, if you juice had believed at the time that he That he wrote the letter to the Romans.

That there was question on the count of some But whether the Jews had been utterly rejected, And paul had said, Um, no, i would chew and i believe And he makes the distinction between those. Who are israelites by blood by descendants. And those who are israelites. By faith children of the promise.

But one of the things that he ends up saying by the time he gets to the end of chapter 11 of Romans is that he magnifies his ministry? Helping that the lord will use it to provoke and in gathering of israelites. And so all israel will be saved. But the israel of god that is from the nations that is from the greeks.

And the israel of god that is from the jews. Who are? Both descended from abraham according to the flesh and who are believers in the lord, jesus christ, descendant from abraham, according to the promise. And he says, in that place in this way, all israel will be saved. Well, here we have a fulfillment and how he must have rejoiced over this.

Because he had said in Romans chapter 9, That he wishes, he could be a cursed for the sake of his brethren, according to the flesh. And here he had agonized so much. Over the salvation of jews. That he literally said he was willing to go to hell for jews to be saved.

And now he hears how many tens of thousands of jews have believed. But, what the, what james and the elders? Present to him, as um, a fact, and it doesn't say here, whether they thought that this was a significant negative. Of many. Many faithful bible scholars. Think that surely james and these other elders?

Most of recognized that this was a great weakness. That doesn't appear in the passage, doesn't we know that paul would have considered a great weakness. After all, he wrote Galatians. And probably wrote the book of hebrews. He wrote first corinthians 11. In which he very clearly specifies, that the new covenant is not.

And the blood of bulls and goats. And so, it is inappropriate. To continue making blood offerings after the ones for all sacrifice of jesus. The new covenant is the new covenant in jesus's blood. Not those animals. And so, paul certainly that would have been happy over tens of thousands of jews.

Professing Christ as messiah. Jesus as the christ, jesus is the messiah. And yet, he would have been grieving. Over all those zealous wall. So, we come down to a place where we see, that is not just god's grace. Through our um, our living and serving. And fellowship with one another and two service, two, one, another and our fellowship, god's grace, through our fellowship in worshipping him for his work.

Uh, but also sometimes god's grace is, despite the hindrances that come out of our fellowship with one another, because we are still sinners. And sometimes we reinforce. One another sinfulness wrong ideas. And sadly. It is. Uh, it is at this point when he hears that they are all zealous for law.

That james and the other elders do not enlist paul. To help them, see the ones for all nature of christ's sacrifice. The. Necessity of putting off the shadows now that the substance has come. No, they're afraid that there's going to be a disturbance. And it's at this point that i think we really need to pay attention.

Diverse 17 where it says. When we had come to jerusalem. The brethren received us, gladly he already knew. From the response that those and whom the lord. Had been working. Which the? Which luke here by the spirit called some brethren. He already knew. He had the affection of believers but there is a temptation in the churches, even to this day.

Rather than uh, to be encouraged by that, which the brethren are saying and how the brethren are responding. There is a temptation to change policy, change our actions. Based upon how those who murmur and complain. And attack. And so even though he had already been received, gladly by the brethren in verse 17, they come and they report.

And it's this. Uh, dreadful someone has said, uh, but they have been informed about you. That you teach all the jews who are among the gentiles to forsake moises. Saying that they ought not to circumcise their children and to walk according to the customs. What then the assembly must certainly meet.

For, they will hear that. You have come. There's going to be a complaint. We're going to have to have a big session meeting and then congregational meaning to deal to deal with the complaint. Therefore do what we tell you. Cater to the complainers. To the murmurs. We have four men who have taken a vow.

And we know that paul. Had still kept this, to some extent, but he obviously had not gone to the temple and offered blood sacrifice. But you remember when he was back in syncretic and he had taken a vow and he had shaved his head. So, assuming that, that was that, that was.

Okay, even that though, that was somewhat of a shadow of something that has that has been. Superseded and fulfilled and the lord jesus christ. Uh, yet it's another level isn't it to offer a blood cell. To offer a blood sacrifice. So they say, take these four men and, go to go to the temple.

And you'd go through the cleansing ceremonies with them and pay. Uh, pay for their expenses.

And show everybody that you keep you walk orderly and keep the law and what they say. Invert the end of verse 24 implies the entire ceremonial law. Which, of course, paul has not been keeping. And even when peter, it came to antioch and and he was not keeping it and then some jews showed up from jerusalem and peter was suddenly like, whoa.

No. I definitely keep the the food laws on the holiness code, and you remember paul had rebuked him to his face. For his hypocrisy. Well. Paul is intimidated. And i don't know if it's an intimidated as the right word, but he permits, James and the other elders of the jerusalem church.

In their catering to the murmurs and the complainers rather than teaching them, an instructing them. And what an opportunity, who better to teach them. About how? Getting. Setting aside the shadows is a keeping of moises, an honoring of moises, who looked forward to the substance. So it was christ and that moises and all of the application of the moral law is still the great helper of the christian, but after all, moises was just a servant in the house.

And now jesus the son over the house has come This is one of the reasons why i believe both paul wrote the book of hebrews. Because it was exactly in response to a situation like this not to Gentiles. Who the assembly is back in chapter 15 and they refer, uh, to that decision here in verse 25.

Uh, not to gentiles. But hebrews is addressed as it sounds, whereas it has come to be named to hebrews. Saying, put aside the shadows. The substance has come. You don't need to follow, moises anymore. In this ceremonial law, he was just a servant in the house, follow christ. Now, who is the son over the house and have the glorious simple worship on earth.

That participates in the substance that is in heaven. And so, uh, they had the opportunity with paul there. To have him, teach. This entire tens, many tens of thousands. Of jewish believers who were so weak in their faith. That they needed that book of hebrews theology. To free them from their zeal for the law, so that they could be zealous for jesus.

And yet. Rather than take that opportunity. In all patients and instruction. They tell paul do what we tell you. Go, keep the ceremonial law. So that you don't make trouble. Because the people don't like you, they've heard about you. That you're the antimosas guy. And they are the very, very pro moises crowd.

And it's, it's very easy for us to be discouraged when people talk to us that way. Even though the lord had already given him in verse 17, Reason to see that this was not true. And even if it were true, shall he not love them, shall he not willing to be bound?

And even die for the name of the lord jesus at jerusalem. Like he had said. And so goddess is gracious and patient. Because paul does take them the very next day. And he goes through the purification ritual with them. And they go into the temple and they announce. Uh, the procedure because there's the seven day period between The purification and the offering of Of the sacrificing says that.

They announced the expiration of the days of purification, at, which time an offering should be made for each one of them. And then verse 27, the seven days were almost ended. And there's There are these jews from asia. And we know that. That there were, there were jews who opposed and In every city and where they lacked them in a city, dudes, from another city would come and depose him.

And yet. We need to remember to always see what god is doing. Not just what man is doing. And the lord intervenes paul gets. About as far, As he had with his own vow, when he had shaved his head, Although he hadn't done. Purification rituals. Uh, but just before He's going to come and offer up blood sacrifice.

An offense against the ones for all sacrifice of christ. What does god do? God raises up. These hateful juice. Even making false accusations. And next week, Lord willing, we're going to see a whole bunch of ways in which Pulls arrest and condemnation and the response of the crowd to end mirrors.

How the crowd responded to christ. With false accusations and one man saying one thing. And one man saying another And the crowd being infuriated and saying away with this man, and all of those things in parallel. And we too should not be. Surprised, if we are treated the way, the lord, jesus was treated, jesus warned that, this is what would come to those who follow him, they would be treated like their master They would not make their, Fancy facebook pages and bumper stickers and lawn signs and business cards.

And swagger and stuff, and everybody would love them. This is not how the scripture said it would go for christians. But, The way this is initiated. At first here at the end. Is god rather than let his apostle? Do that which would really make people stumble. It wasn't making people stumble that paul.

Was embracing the substance who is christ over against the shadows. It was making complainers complain. Or it was the occasion for complainers to complain. Complainers complain, because they're complainers. Murmurs murmur because they're murmurs. But what a great sin against the ones for all sacrifice of christ. Uh, what a great offense and stumbling block.

It would have been for many who had learned from paul himself. That the time of the shadows was over and the time of the substance had come. If he had then gone into the temple and made a blood sacrifice, After the blood of the new covenant had been shed on the cross.

And so god, intervenes graciously. So this message we see the grace of god. Uh, to one another through one another. In the mutual service and action together as they go up. Uh together. We see the grace of god and our fellowship, not just in serving one another but in worshiping gods together glorifying his name.

For what he has done. And In saving and the details. But also, we see the graciousness of god in our fellowship over ruling. Over ruling. The harm the hindrance. That can sometimes come. By our fellowship because of our remaining sin. Because of our continuing ignorance. We're all works in progress and sometimes Even meaning very well.

Since your intentions. We are a mixture. Of motivations and misunderstandings and yet god can be counted upon. For his grace to overrule. Any hindring that we might do to one another, praise god. And so there is fellowship here. Among believers, but there is especially The grace of god. Sometimes through it.

Sometimes despite it, but always there. Than the fellowship of believers. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this portion of your word. We pray. That you would help us to serve. Others of your people that you have given us to walk alongside That we would have sincere love willingness to. To pay. Willingness. For it to be costly to us. To do good to them.

We pray lord that you would give us fellowship. And praising your name together. Oh lord. Don't let us be a hindrance to others. And when they are, A hindrance to us as well. And we pray that you would give us. Faith to see you and your goodness respond. Well to you and hopefully be of use To them and for them.

To bring correction. But lord. When these things fail. And we can drink them or they hindering us. We're going to end up in sand or error together. We do pray that your grace would overrule and protect us, always. From sending against you. Or being a stumbling block to other believers.

Oh, help us lord and forgive us. And make us we pray to bring honor to the name of christ. Which we ask in his name. Amen.