

You know a lot about that.

But it can't be much fun that Rome, a superpower, is over Israel at that time. And understandably, many of the Jews resented Rome, just as you and I would resent it if some conquering country came in here and took us over and made us fly their flag and told us we had to follow their rules, we would resent that.

And the Israelites are resentful of the presence of Rome, the political and the religious scene. Then is one of unease that is percolating discontentment, suspicion and nationalism, riots and uprisings are common, so common that in not too far from this time, Rome is going to come in and devastate Jerusalem. But that's a story for another day. Just know this, that this is not really a safe, happy city to be in.

Jerusalem is laden with angry people who are looking for an excuse to be violent, who are very sensitive to foreign imposition of any sort, whether that be the occupying forces that rule them, or as we see in our passage this morning from Max 21, a Gentile loving apostle who they perceive as a threat both to their religion and to their way of life.

So as Paul comes to the holy city, Luke relates to us a tale of two receptions. Father, as we come before your word, we seek to do so humbly. We ask that you would help us to learn from it, to hear your voice in it, to take away from it what what we ought to be taking away from it.

We pray for your Holy Spirit to illuminate us as we seek your wisdom in Christ. Name Amen. So to receptions and the first reception obviously is a friendly reception. Paul and his companions are received gladly, Luke tells us, by the brothers in Jerusalem. He goes to meet with James.

James, a half brother of Jesus, a pillar of the church there, and he goes to meet with the elders of the church as well.

And he shares with them all that God has been doing through his ministry amongst the Gentiles. And his testimony is met. The Scripture tells us with rejoicing, the Bible commands us. You're probably familiar with this Romans 12, verse 15 The Bible commands us to rejoice with those who rejoice. It also tells us to weep with those who weep in that same verse.

And sometimes it's easier to weep with those who wish to to identify with brokenhearted than it is to actually be happy for those people who are rejoicing. Why is that, do you suppose? Sometimes we struggle to rejoice with those who are rejoicing because we look upon them in their good fortune and we look upon them in their prosperity and it's not we're not going to be proud of this, but a little bit of envy creeps in there.

A little bit of jealousy makes its way in there. And we look at them and we should be happy for them. But there's something inside of us. This is how come it's not me? How come this good things not happening to me? How come I don't get blessed This way? We can go there, can we? You would admit that's why the Scripture gives us the command.

Rejoice with those that rejoice, which is basically saying Get over yourself and be happy for people who are experiencing good things. That's what the elders do here in Jerusalem. They are rejoicing over what God is doing in a ministry, even though it's not a ministry that they have or a ministry that they necessarily share. It's just Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

Sometimes even news of another ministry success can spark jealousy or bitterness or criticism or questioning of means and motives. Even in a Christian circles, when one another ministry, another church in another place is doing well, that can be just a natural tendency for us to go. How come that's not happening in my church? How come this is prospering over here?

We're working hard, we're faithful, we're devoted to God. These are places, guys. These are places we're not supposed to go. Okay, I would encourage you. Don't be that kind of person. And let's not be that kind of church. Because if the word of God is being preached, if the gospel is being preached, and these churches and ministries are faithful to that and sinners are getting saved and people's lives are being changed, that is just plain and simple.

A cause of rejoicing. We should be happy about that. Amen. We have been and will be a church that prays for other churches and other ministries in our area, in our region, because we value the kingdom of God, not just the part of the kingdom that happens in these four walls, but the whole of it. And so when God is glorified, when God is glorified through other people, we rejoice.

That's just what these elders do. For Paul, it is a beautiful, glad reception of Paul and his ministry. And while they're talking about all of these good things, after Paul has offered his report, they offer their report as well. Since Paul has left. And it's been a long time now, and especially since the day of Pentecost, the Jerusalem Christians in this city have continued to increase and there are many thousands of them.

And being Jewish, they still want to follow the law not as a means of salvation. I'm going to clear that up as we get a little deeper into the passage, not as a means of salvation, which was the old way of understanding it, but what the traditions are. The customs. Salvation is by faith alone, grace alone through faith, alone in Christ alone, we all know that that that hasn't changed.

Paul's not backing off of that. Neither is the Jerusalem Church. But there are customs that are being lived out there are practiced as that are happening, and they want to continue to do that. So James brings us up kind of as an alert to Paul about a rumor that has been circulating about him, rumor being a nice way of saying a lie.

People are lying about the apostle Paul. Now, don't be shocked that a servant of God would be lied about. That's that should not stretch your imagination at all. Not at all. That you in your efforts to be faithful and true, to bear witness to the gospel, that you would be maligned and lied about should not be a stretch to your imagination.

It should not come as a surprise. Why is it that we should expect to be lied about or miscarriage arise? Well, first of all, we have an enemy known as the devil who's also called World the Father of Lies. The author of Lies. He This enemy Lives and breathes to inspire untruth. When Jesus was talking with the religious elites who find this in John's gospel, Chapter eight, verse 44, he said to them, You are of your father, the devil and your will is to do your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning, has nothing to do with the truth because there's no truth in him. You get it and no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar. And the father of lies. Our enemy is a liar. The enemy of our souls is a liar.

And therefore everyone who is of him, whether they are consciously of him or not. Because Jesus said that if you're not for me, what? You're against me. So everyone who is not for Jesus is of their father, the devil in an unsafe state, everybody who's not of him is going to be spreading lies. We are not of the devil.

And so we are the targets of those lies, not by anything that we have done, but by Christ in us. We are saved and we are now a target for the enemy who likes to lie about us. We shouldn't be surprised either because our Lord himself was lied about. Jesus lived a sinless life, a perfect life. He never failed once.

He never sinned. So the only way that he could be crucified was for charges to be brought against him, false charges brought against him. And he tells us that as the world hated him, the world is going to hate his people and that as the world persecuted him, the world is going to persecute his people. In his commentary on Tony Merida, Notes says, he says many Christians have been and will continue to be victims of hostility and lies.

Early Christians were accused of incest, cannibalism and atheism simply because they greeted one another with a holy kiss, took the Lord's Supper and refused to worship the Emperor. Today we are accused of immorality and bigotry because of our views on marriage and life. Brothers and sisters, if you intend to stand firm for your faith, and I hope you do, if you intend to defend your beliefs and I hope you do, then you may very well be lied about.

You may be mischaracterized. You may be falsely accused, you may even be unjustly. And it's easy to do this now to be unjustly tried in the court of public opinion. Let's just what happened to the apostle Paul. And that's his second reception postop, the first reception friendly, the second reception hostile. So what is everyone all up in arms about?

We find it in verse 21 of chapter 21. The accusation against Paul is found here. They've 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 custom. So like any good fib, there's going to be an element of truth to what is being said.

Every good lie has to have some little, some little element, a nugget of truth in order to hook you, to make you even think that it could possibly be true. And that's what's happening here. An element of truth to what is being said, though, is not truthful enough, at least to require a conversation. Like if Paul could meet with these people and talk with these people, he could say, I understand why you think what you think.

I understand where you get what you what you got going on. But let me explain to you what really I am saying and what I am teaching and what I'm trying to get across. There's an element of truth here. Paul has certainly preached that salvation does not come from following the Mosaic Law, and that could be interpreted as some sort of blasphemy.

But Paul was not opposed to tradition. Paul was not opposed to rituals. He himself was willing. We read it in first Corinthians Chapter nine. He himself is willing, for the sake of the gospel, to be all things to all people. Do you remember that passage, First Corinthians nine versus 20 or 23? He says this 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, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law to those outside the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law

of Christ that I might win those outside the law. You see why this require a conversation and some explanation to the weak. He says, I become weak that I might win the way I've become all things to all people. That by all means, I might win some and I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I might share with them its blessings.

So the conflict in our Texas Morning is not over. The means of salvation or what salvation entails is no question that salvation is through Christ alone. But it's really about cultural practices. It's about the observance of customs and Christian Liberty gives us a lot of latitude when it comes to customs and practices and rituals. As long as it's not sin, as long as it doesn't compromise the gospel, there's a lot of latitude here.

Paul did not object to the Jewish converts following Jewish customs. Again, as long as it didn't lead them into sin, as long as it didn't compromise the message that salvation is in Christ alone. The good news of the Gospel. And Paul didn't really want anybody. And we know this from Galatians and other passages. We know that Paul didn't want the law imposed on the Gentiles and that issue was already squared away back in chapter 15 with the Jerusalem Council. So we've covered all of this. Paul's not opposed to this tradition or the customs. That's not what's being, but that is not what is being said about him. It's the opposite. They're saying that he is his teaching is being misrepresented. And so to clear that up, James suggests that Paul should undergo publicly engage in a Jewish ritual of purification, along with several others who were going through something similar to that.

And the specifics of that, I'm not going to get into mostly because while the intention here was a good one to show that Paul's not against or even willing to participate in Jewish rites, the outcome had the opposite effect. So I'm not going to explain to you the different rituals and whatnot happening in the Book of Numbers or Leviticus or any place like that.

All he's saying, by the way, it didn't work. Okay? The reason that what James wanted to happen didn't happen, as you've heard me say before, is that some people are just not going to be confused by the facts. Let that sink in. Some people are not going to allow themselves to be confused by the facts. Okay, You're not getting it.

You have done this. You have I'm sure you have encountered this. And I'm going to guess that no doubt you have probably been guilty of it yourselves. And this is what I'm talking about. When your mind is made up, when you want to believe something and you're going to believe it, no matter who says what, no matter what evidence is raised to the contrary, you are steadfast and you will not be moved.

This is the way it is. Don't confuse me with any information that would make me think different than what I'm thinking right now. That's what's happening. These Jewish Christians have to believe for some reason that the Apostle Paul is trying to tear them apart. They they are living, as we noted earlier, with a great mix of bitterness in their hearts.

They they love their country and they're sad about what's happening to it. They resent the foreigners that are there. And with all this stuff pumping through their veins, they're not about to put up with some gentile loving former Jew who they think is making a mockery of their religion and posing a threat to their treasured way of life versus 27 and 29.

When the seven days were almost accomplished. The Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out men of Israel. Hell, this is a man who's teaching everyone everywhere against the people in the law in this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and is defiled. Those this holy place, for they had seen him with Trofimov see a vision in the city.

They suppose that Paul had brought him into the supposed, you know, a telltale sign that someone is not speaking. The truth is often the use of exclusive language. All always never. Do you ever catch yourself doing that in an argument? It's not helpful, is it? When you look at your spouse and say you never are you always? Because the reality is none of us humans are ever consistent enough to say that we always are, never do anything.

It's just not how we are. So there's the exclusive language here that he's Paul is teaching all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses. That's not true, for crying out loud. You read back a

little while, I say in chapter 16, Paul was willing, for the sake of ministry, Chapter 16, to compel Timothy, a Gentile follower of Jesus, to follow the law of Moses and be circumcised.

You remember that doesn't say anything in there about how Timothy felt about it at all. But Paul was willing to say so, so that we don't have a stumbling block in ministry. Timothy, I want you to take this Major Paul himself in Chapter 18 is under a veil. He's certainly not teaching all the Jews to forsake Moses. And in today's passage he's not been teaching everyone everywhere against the people in the law and this place.

Why would he submit to what the elders in Jerusalem are telling him to do if he didn't have regard for those things? He did. So he was willing to submit. But the powder keg of religious and political volatility is primed and false. Accusers provide the spark and the thing blows up and the scene immediately turns violent. Paul is seized by the mob.

He is dragged out of the temple. The doors of it are shut shut behind him. There will be no gospel in this temple. And they proceed to beat him. They proceed to beat him. But word of it spread quickly. As I said before, this was already a city, an uneasy city, where these things started frequently and happened often.

And so this the Tribune and the centurion and the soldiers are on top of it. And they rushed to the scene. And as soon as they show up, because they show up with the great show of power, the people sort of back off. The Roman soldiers in Centurion saved Paul's life here. And then the evidence of the ignorance of the crowd becomes obvious that they are in fact bloodthirsty because they're bloodthirsty, they're bloodthirsty because they're bloodthirsty.

They're not bloodthirsty because of some righteous reason, because people are bloodthirsty, because humans can be incredibly cruel, because people still believe that the way to get rid of those who oppose you is to cancel them, to harm them, or to kill them because that is in the heart of man. That's what's happening here. Their ignorance of what's going on is exposed.

Because when the Tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound, he asked he asked about it. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing and some another. It reminds us of that scene in emphasis. That was crazy. And people didn't even know why they had gathered or some of the riots that we see on the news where people just see all kinds of bad stuff going on, just join in.

They don't even know why they celebrate celebrating a Super Bowl victory. Are they celebrating a shooting? Nobody knows what's going on. And if you poll half of them there, they wouldn't be able to tell you because that's how people are. They're just ginned up. People act 21, 33, 34.

Then the Tribune came up and arrested Paul, ordered him to be bound with two chains.

You would remember from last week that Agnes prophesied that Paul would be bound. Here he is chained and some would say hand and foot, and others will say between two soldiers. We cannot know for sure. But what we can know is this Paul is in chains. And that may not sound too profound to you, but what that means is that exactly what the Holy Spirit told him was going to happen.

Happen? The Holy Spirit doesn't lie. God cannot lie. Paul knew this was going to happen and he went anyway. We'll get to that in just a second. Paul is bound and the Tribune inquired about him, who he was, what he had done because the mob was so great and so violent, they had to take him back to the barracks.

So enraged was the mob against Paul. The soldiers for his safety had to carry him up the stairs. As they did, the crowd shouted away with him. Ben Witherington, in his commentary on AG,

says this. He says the cry means more than send him away. It means do away with him. Away with him doesn't mean just send him away.

It means do away with him. That sound familiar? Because that's just what the crowd said of Jesus. John. Chapter 19, verse 15. They cried out Away with them, away with him, Crucify him. They've said it a few times already. Paul is indeed following the footsteps of his Lord, isn't he? And he is all the more being made in Christ's image.

He is following the footsteps of His Lord. And as we noted last week, sometimes following Jesus leads you into some difficult places, hard places, places you wouldn't choose, places you'd rather not go or be sometimes follow Jesus. That is that is what it means. I almost started the sermon by saying I'm so grateful that if you do everything right, nothing bad's ever going to happen to you, because that's kind of one of the principles that we live on.

And if you do all the right things, then nothing bad is going to happen to us. Bad at least from our own perspective as in bad. And that is not the witness of Scripture, is it? God is faithful and God is good. He doesn't say he's not going to let you go through the valleys. He says he's going to go there with you.

He doesn't say he's going to preserve you from all harm. He's going to preserve you in it and through it. And ultimately he's going to preserve you eternally. That's what the scripture teaches. From now to the end of this book of acts, Paul will be a prisoner. He's going to be he's a prisoner. That's really what this whole story is about.

When you deal with historical narrative, you've got to be asking, what's the author want us to know? You know what, Luke wants us to know? This is how Paul got in the pokey. This is how he became a prisoner. And he's going to be a prisoner now for a good long time. And he's going to face more and more accusations and he's going to give more and more defenses.

And really, that's what this passage is about, helping us understand how Paul got to where Paul is, is we continue to read the story, which makes it sort of think, well, okay, it's historical narrative, then it probably isn't relevant, relevant, relevant, or there's nothing in here for me. And I want to I want to end on this note and say, I do think there is a bit of a takeaway in here for us from this bit of history that Luke has written.

And it is it is somewhat of a simple one and it has already been stated. I want to state it again and that's this Christians should expect opposition, Christians should expect opposition. Some of you have been around so long that I'm not sure I can convince you that this is going to happen. But I will say this When that teaching was first shared with me, I, I wasn't.

I was maybe 13 years old. You're looking 45 years ago growing up in church and reading some of this stuff about the end times and what we could expect. And I'll tell you what that was shared with me when I was younger. I couldn't envision it. I could not get my head around it. I had no category whatsoever in which to picture a day or an age where the majority of people would be hostile to Christianity, would would oppose faith and faith initiatives.

I could not think about any of you been there. Have any of you struggled with that? That was the way it was then. And I'm not advocating that we stand here and mope or scream at the darkness or anything like that, but I just think we need to be wise enough to take a look around and say things have changed and things are changing.

They continue to change. Christians can expect opposition. When I used to read Jesus words about the end of the age and the great persecution of believers, again, really, children are going to deliver their parents, parents, their children. And really, I can't imagine that a society turning

its children against its parents, why couldn't they? But I can now. But I mean, I've got to be careful because I really want to go on a little tirade here.

But we just did a baby dedication. We are supposed to raise our children. We are supposed to raise them. We are supposed to nurture them. We are supposed to teach them in the in the faith and the admonition, the instruction of the Lord. We're supposed to do that. And we've got a culture now who wants us just as parents to take one more spot for people who look after them?

We're not babysitters of our own children. See, I want to go. I'm not going. I, I couldn't imagine that back then, but I can see it now. That's that's just my point is don't let's not be unwise to this. Let's understand than what is happening. Let's not be in denial of what's happening.

There's a panic about it. Don't have to worry about it.

Even God is in control. But see what is going on, Paul said. And he promised it in the last days. Treacherous times will come. Difficult times will come. And then he gives us a whole long list of of qualifiers. People will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, lovers of self. Children will be will will hate their parents.

He goes on and on to describe all this stuff. I think it's second Timothy three treacherous times will come. I was so naive when I first heard about this stuff that I couldn't even fathom that it could be true. How could it be true that whole churches, whole churches will change their doctrine and heap unto themselves teachers who will only tickle their ears, who won't preach the truth of the word, who won't stand firm for God's word.

I couldn't. How could that happen? And yet, in just a short period, relatively short period of time, are we not watching the demise of the greatest denominations we've ever known? Aren't we seeing it? We are living in this age. Jonathan Edwards would roll in his grave if he was in it, you know, to see what has happened to the Congregationalist or the Methodists or the Anglicans or the Presbyterians or the Episcopalians, and now you're out this in.

Is he going to say Baptists and the Baptists? Of course I am, because it's all of us. This is what we're up against. This is a spirit of delusion. This is the spirit of the age in which we live. I thought when I read all that stuff and heard all that stuff when I was younger, this must be for another generation.

And to be honest with you, I was quite content with that. Oh, thank you, Lord. I don't have to go through that. And now I'm looking at it. I'm going, I'm not sure that's for another generation not to inspire fear. Please don't get me wrong. Not at all. God is in control, but to know what's going on, I don't think it is for another generation.

I think it is for this generation and definitely for generations to come. However, the Lord Terry's my thing is, is are you ready for any of this? Because they can just toss it out there to theologian included in some lofty, theoretical way. Yes, you should expect opposition, but really, what's going to happen when it comes to your doorstep?

What's going to happen when it comes into your life? What is going to happen when you pay a price for being a Christian in your workplace, in your school? How will you respond to that? And so that to me is a bit of the takeaway here. How did Paul respond? Well, he knew what he was going into and he went in anyway.

Why? Because the Holy Spirit told him, be obedient, be faithful and go here. And I think we have similar marching orders, don't we? I mean, he was kind enough to write those marching orders to us in the book of Ephesians. We say stand firm, stand firm when temptation comes,

when trials come, when opposition comes in, persecution comes. We are called by God to stand firm.

We've been told what to expect. It's not for somebody else, it's for us. How will we react? How will we react when it becomes truly costly to follow Jesus? So let me posit this and then we'll be done to a degree. I think the answer of how we will live in those tumultuous times, in those treacherous times which appear to be coming on how we will live in those times depends on how we're living now.

So let me put it this way. Are we faithful in worshiping now? Are we offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God now? Are we speaking up for the Christian faith now? Are we raising our children to live for the glory of God? Now? Are we unashamed of being called Christian now? How we refusing to compromise the truth now, if we're not doing these things when the cost is still relatively low, what are the odds that we will do them when the cost is high?

Or in the case of the Apostle Paul, imprisonment and even death? I am so impressed by Luke's account of Paul's faithfulness, of Paul's consistency, of Paul's perseverance, of Paul's determination that he stayed true to his beliefs and to his Lord. He stood firm in the face of hostility and lies. And like Jesus, he loved He loved him down to the very end.

Beloved, we should prepare now to do the same. I'll leave you with a word of encouragement from Tony Merida when we say, How on earth are we ever going to do this? Listen to this. When falsely accused and persecuted, remember that a suffering servant is with you. Remember that the suffering servant is with you. He has been tried in every respect, tempted in every way. Yet without sin, he understands what it's like to be you. He knows what he what you are going through. And he is with you. Rita says, Jesus stands ready to grant you grace in time of need, and he will have the last word. Amen. Let's stand and sing them 100.