**The Apostle Paul Argues With the Lord Jesus Christ**

(Acts 22:17-30)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One day a man said to his friend, “Yesterday morning I had an argument with my wife about how to rearrange the furniture. I thought I’d won the article, but when I got home from work, *the tables were turned.”*

His friend replied, “Funny you should say that! I too got into an argument yesterday with a woman, but mine was over the way I drive. I told her, ‘Lady, if you don’t like the way I drive, *then stay off the sidewalk!’”*

Speaking of arguments, here in our text in Acts 22, the Apostle Paul is defending himself before a murderous mob of unsaved Jews who *hated* him, and wanted to kill him. And he’s about to tell them that—*they* might hate *him,* but he *loved* them. He loved them so much, he once got into an argument with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on their behalf. The story begins in verse 17, where we read,

**“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance” (Acts 22:17).**

Now as we saw in our last lesson, Paul has just finished telling this violent crowd how he had *left* Jerusalem 25 years earlier to go to Damascus to persecute followers of that Jesus guy. But on the road *to* Damascus, Jesus had appeared to him, and told him that he’d been fighting on the wrong side, and he got saved. Now here he’s telling them what happened when he went *back* to Jerusalem.

Now, he doesn’t say *why* he went back, but in a moment we’re going to see proof that he went back to tell Jerusalem’s Jews how *they* could be saved. We’ll also see proof that he was *praying* they’d be saved.

But first, I should point out that Paul made sure to mention that he was praying for them *in the temple,* because they had accused him of being *against* the temple a short time earlier, when they said to one another,

**“This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, *and this place:* and...brought Greeks...into the temple, and...*polluted* this holy place” (Acts 21:28).**

In our last study, we saw Paul answer the charge that he was against the people of Israel, and the law of Moses. Here he’s addressing the charge that he disrespected the temple. That charge wasn’t true, of course, but it’s hard to prove a negative. That is, it’s difficult to prove you didn’t do something. So Paul answered that charge by arguing that, he might be preaching grace now, but he still had enough respect for the law and the temple to go there to pray.

And as Paul was praying for them, he fell into a trance. The dictionary says a trance is an altered state of consciousness. In the Bible, God *put men* in trances to give them answers to their prayers in *visions,* as we see when Peter said,

**“I was in the city of Joppa *praying:* and in a *trance* I saw a *vision...”* (Acts 11:5).**

The Lord then went on to answer Peter’s prayer in that sheet vision in Acts 10.

And as Paul says here in our text, as he was praying in Jerusalem *he too* fell into a trance, and the Lord answered *his* prayer in a vision as well—a vision he went on to describe, saying that he saw the Lord,

**“And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” (Acts 22:18).**

Here we have the proof that Paul went back to Jerusalem to testify to the Jews in Jerusalem, and tell them how to be saved, *and* proof that he’d been *praying* they’d be saved. I mean, think it through. Why else would the Lord *answer* his prayer by telling him to *leave* Jerusalem because they *wouldn’t* get saved?

But if the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to *you* and told *you* to get out of town, would you stand there and argue with him about it? You probably wouldn’t, but Paul did! And he made sure he told them about that too, describing that argument in the next two verses of our text:

**“And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:**

**“And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:19,2).**

Now if you’re not sure of the point of Paul’s argument here, let me ask you a question. If I told you that Hillary Clinton used to be a Republican who was *so* into Republican ideology that she campaigned for Barry Goldwater, the archbishop of Republican politics—if I told you that, wouldn’t you be curious as to why she switched parties? Well, that’s what Paul’s arguing here!

He’s saying, as it were,

“Lord, they know I was the archbishop of the campaign against Jesus of Nazareth, so they’re going to want to know why I switched parties. So they *will* listen to me, Lord! They’ll know something powerful changed my mind, and they’ll be curious as to what it is.”

Now remember, the reason Paul’s telling these Jews he argued with the Lord for them was to prove how much he loved them. And now that they know what the Lord said to him, they had even *more* proof that he loved them, and was not against them. They now knew that the Lord had told him to get *out* of Jerusalem, and here he was back *in* Jerusalem, in *defiance* of his Lord’s orders! If that didn’t prove he loved them, I don’t know what would.

I think it is even possible that they’d heard through the Jewish grapevine what happened when he was on his way *to* Jerusalem in Acts 21:4, where Luke says,

**“...finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul *through the Spirit,* that he should *not* go up to Jerusalem.”**

After the Lord Jesus Christ told Paul to *leave* Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit told him *not to go back.* Two members of the Trinity were telling him to get out of Jerusalem and *stay* out! And there’s a good chance these Jews had heard about this, because the Spirit had warned Paul about going to Jerusalem repeatedly during his journey there (Acts 20:23). And yet, there he was, back in town, eager to tell them how they too could be saved by God’s grace.

Well, you know who wins when you argue with the Lord! He always gets the last word, and He did here with Paul as well, as we see when Paul went on to tell them that the Lord *answered* his argument in verse 21:

**“And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).**

Now up until this point in this lengthy address that began back in verse 1, Paul has been avoiding any talk about the Gentiles, until he proved how much he loved the Jews. He knew just the mention of the word Gentile would set them off, as indeed it did in the very next verse. But eventually he had to be honest, and tell them that the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles.

Now here I should point out that he wasn’t *trying* to set them off. He was trying to do what he described when he talked to the Romans about Israel and said,

**“...through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, *for to provoke them to jealousy...*I speak to you Gentiles...if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, *and might save some of them”* (Romans 11:11,13,14).**

Paul hoped that when unsaved Jews heard that the Lord sent him to the Gentiles with the message of salvation by grace without the law that they knew he’d been preaching that they’d be jealous and want to be saved that way as well. But when he explains here that the Lord sent him to the *Gentiles* with that message, all hell broke loose in verse 22:

**“And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:22).**

Now we’re not told *why* they got so furiously angry. It could be that they just *hated* Gentiles so much that they didn’t want to hear about *anyone* being sent to testify to them about how to be saved.

But I think the thing that *really* lit their fuse was hearing Paul say he was sent to testify to the Gentiles right *after* saying that the Jews in Jerusalem wouldn’t *receive* his testimony. You see, they knew that Gentiles *by the thousands* had been receiving Paul’s testimony all over the known world, and it made them look bad when they *didn’t* receive it. I think it would have reminded them of what God told Ezekiel in Ezekiel 3:4-7, where He told His prophet to

***“...get thee unto the house of Israel,* and speak with My words unto them. *For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech*...but to the house of Israel; *Not to many people of a strange speech*...Surely, had I sent thee to them, *they* would have hearkened unto thee.But the house of Israelwill *not* hearken unto thee...for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.”**

God had told the people of Israel centuries earlier that if He sent a man to the speak His words to the Gentiles that they would hear it, while His own people wouldn’t. And now these Jews were seeing that what they always suspected was true, that that prophecy was *right,* and that the Gentiles *would* receive God’s words, while they themselves *wouldn’t.*

So at this point, they’d heard all they wanted to hear from Paul, and started screaming for his blood. That means Paul didn’t get to *finish* his address. He got *interrupted* by the unbelief of those Jews. And that’s symbolic of what was *happening* in the Book of Acts. You see, the Book of Acts is all about how God had to interrupt His kingdom program for the Jews *because of their unbelief.*

It all started back in Mark 16:19, where we read that

**“...after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, *and sat on the right hand of God.”***

After they crucified the Lord, He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where He sat at the place of honor at God the Father’s right hand. But God had no intention of letting the Lord’s killers get away with it forever! David prophetically records what He said to His Son that day when he wrote,

**“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, *until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”* (Psalm 110:1).**

God told His Son, as it were, “You can sit here for now, but the day is coming when I’m going to send you *back* to earth to make Your enemies Your footstool, and set up the kingdom they rejected.” And we know that was about to happen in Acts 7 because, as the Jews were about to stone Stephen,

***“...they gnashed on him with their teeth.* But he...said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man *standing* on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:54-56).**

When the Jews were about to kill Stephen, God told His Son it was time to quit sitting at His right hand, and time to go back and judge His enemies and establish the kingdom.

But the kingdom was *interrupted* by the unbelief those Jews showed in stoning Stephen. Instead of sending the Lord back to judge His enemies, God saved Paul, the *leader* of His enemies, and began the dispensation of grace. And the dispensation of grace is an interruption of the kingdom program. And we’re seeing that interruption *illustrated* here with the interruption of Paul’s message to them.

The Book of Acts is actually *filled* with interruptions that illustrate it, starting on the very day God interrupted the kingdom program in Acts 7. On that day, the Jews interrupted *Stephen’s* message! Look what happened right after he *told them* he’d seen the Lord standing at God’s right hand:

***“They cried out with a loud voice,* and stopped their ears...*and stoned him”* (Acts 7:56,58).**

They knew that Stephen was hinting that the Lord was standing to come back and judge them, for they’d know that Isaiah wrote,

**“The LORD standeth up...*to judge the people”* (Isaiah 3:13).**

So once they heard Stephen say that the Lord had arisen to judge them, they interrupted his message by *silencing* him. He would have gone on to tell them how to get saved under the kingdom program, as Peter did at Pentecost, but God was interrupting the kingdom program here, and Stephen’s interrupted message illustrates that.

The next thing you know, *Paul* was making his way to Damascus to kill Christians when *he* was interrupted by the Lord who saved him in Acts 9. That symbolized what God is *doing* during this interruption of the kingdom program. He’s saving sinners like Paul and you and me by grace!

Then later, *Peter* was interrupted as he tried to give the gospel of the kingdom to Cornelius, saying,

**“...whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. *While Peter yet spake these words,* the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:43,44).**

We know that Peter was interrupted here, because that’s not what was supposed to happen under the kingdom program. Men were supposed to get *baptized,* and *then* receive the Holy Ghost, as Peter had explained earlier in Acts when he told the Jews at Pentecost,

***“Repent, and be baptized...*and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).**

But before Peter could tell *Cornelius* to be baptized, God interrupted his message by giving that Gentile the Spirit. He did that to symbolize how the kingdom program had been interrupted.

Then in Acts 12, Herod was about to kill Peter when God interrupted *him* by breaking Peter out of jail. That pictured how the persecution that would have come to Peter in the Tribulation had been interrupted. Later, when Paul tried to offer a sacrifice (like the Jews did under the kingdom program), God interrupted him *with a riot,* to symbolize that the kingdom program had been interrupted, and He no longer *wanted* animal sacrifices.

And now here, Paul was interrupted as he tried to save Jerusalem. Someday Jerusalem *will* be saved under the kingdom program, as God swore in Isaiah 62:1 when He said,

**“...*for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,* until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, *and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”***

Someday Jerusalem will get saved in the kingdom, and her salvation will “go forth” from Jerusalem to the rest of the world. But the kingdom program that would have brought that about has just been interrupted, and we’re seeing that interruption symbolized as Paul is interrupted when he tried to save Jerusalem with the gospel of grace.

We see yet another interruption in Acts when Paul tried to save a Roman king named Agrippa, saying,

**“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* And Paul said, I would to God, that...thou...were both almost, and altogether...*And when he had thus spoken,* the king rose up, and the governor...and...were gone aside...” (Acts 26:27-31).**

Paul told the king that he wished he wasn’t just “almost” saved, he wished he was *altogether* saved. But before he could tell him how to *get* saved, the king interrupted him to symbolize the interruption of God’s plan to save the kings of the earth under the kingdom program, a plan that David described when he prayed,

**“Yea, *all kings shall fall down before Him:* all nations shall serve Him” (Psalm 72:11).**

But that part of the kingdom program was interrupted too, and we see that illustrated when King Agrippa interrupted Paul by walking out on him before he could finish his message.

Now remember, none of those interruptions came *before* Acts 7. *Peter* didn’t get interrupted at Pentecost in any of *his* messages. That symbolized how the kingdom program was going forth *without* interruption in early Acts. The interruptions in Acts only began after God interrupted the kingdom program in Acts 7.

You can even see all of this symbolized in where God *put* the Book of Acts in the New Testament. Acts *interrupts* the New Testament! The New Testament starts with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and what message did the Lord preach in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? In Matthew 4:17 we read,

**“Jesus began to preach...Repent: *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”***

And what message did Peter preach toward the *end* of the New Testament? He told his Jewish readers,

***“If ye do these things...*an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly *into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord...”* (II Peter 1:10,11).**

Those kingdom messages for the Jews in the New Testament are interrupted by the Book of Acts, and the Pauline epistles that describe God’s message of grace for us Gentiles. *We* don’t have to do the things Peter talked about to be saved, but he told his Jewish readers that *they* had to do them if they wanted to enter the kingdom.

And that’s the message that will be preached after the rapture, just as it was before the kingdom program was interrupted. And God put Acts and Paul’s epistles in between His kingdom books to illustrate that interruption.

Well here in our text, the Jews were about to kill Paul when *they* were interrupted! How do I know they were about to kill him? It’s because verse 23 says,

**“And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air” (Acts 22:23).**

Now first I should mention that chucking dust in the air sounds like an odd thing to do to us Gentiles, but it was a sign of *frustration* in Israel. When God allowed Babylon to conquer Israel, Jeremiah wrote,

**“The elders...*have cast up dust upon their heads”* (Lamentations 2:10).**

There, the Jews were frustrated that God had judged them by allowing Babylon to conquer them. Here in our text, the Jews were frustrated that God was judging *them* by telling Paul to leave Jerusalem and give up on testifying to them.

And we know that casting their clothes off was a sign they were about to *kill* Paul, because that’s what they did as they were about to stone Stephen. When verse 20 says Paul kept their raiment that day, it clearly shows they had cast their raiment off. And now that they’d cast their raiment off again, it’s clear that they now intended to kill Paul.

By the way, we know they didn’t get *naked.* We know the Jews wore underwear, because God told Jeremiah to wear some *moldy* underwear back in Jeremiah 13 to illustrate one of his prophecies. You know, any time I think I’ve got it rough as a pastor, I think of how rough the prophets had it sometimes, especially Jeremiah and his moldy undies. Hey, that would make a good name for a Christian rock band. “And now, the band you’ve all been waiting for, *Jeremiah and the Moldy Undies!”*

If you’re wondering *why* they cast off their raiment, it helps to remember that the raiment they wore in those days consisted of long, flowing robes, and it’s hard to stone someone wearing long flowing robes. It would be much easier to fire a fastball without encumbering clothing like that.

But as these unsaved Jews cast off their clothing to stone Paul, *they* were interrupted by the chief captain of the Roman guard:

**“And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,**

**“The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him” (Acts 22:23,24).**

Now don’t forget, the chief captain hasn’t understood a word Paul said, because Paul’s been speaking to them in Hebrew, and Hebrew was Greek to him! So he has no clue as to why this mob is suddenly erupting against Paul like a volcano blowing it’s top. All he knows is that this little man just said something that *infuriated* these good citizens, and now they want to rock him to sleep, if you catch my drift. So he brought Paul into the castle, and bade that he be examined by scourging. In other words: he didn’t know what Paul had done wrong, so he intended to beat a confession out of him to *find out* what he’d done wrong.

But Paul was not out of aces here. In verse 25 we read,

**“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned” (Acts 22:25).**

Now first of all, the dictionary says that the word “thong” means *a leather strap.* We know the Romans *had* handcuffs, because some of them have survived from that era to this day. But sometimes they bound prisoners with thongs instead, just as policemen todayhave handcuffs, but sometimes bind a suspect using zip ties. But Roman citizenship gave a man the right to *not* be bound with either one of those things before you had your day in court, and Paul is hinting to the centurion that he was a citizen.

But notice how Paul *handled* being bound. He didn’t start screaming that the centurion was violating his rights as a citizen. Instead, he respectfully asked a question that he already knew the answer to—that it *wasn’t* lawful to bind him. And since Paul’s our example in all things, the respect he showed for authority is the same respect *we* should show them.

Well, now that Paul has the centurion’s undivided attention, he knew he’d better get his superior officer involved so Paul could have *his* undivided attention.

**“When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.**

**“Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea” (Acts 22:26,27).**

Now the tables are turned, and the chief captain is being respectful to *Paul.*

**“And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born” (Acts 22:28).**

Now as you can see here, there were different ways of *obtaining* Roman citizenship. You could buy it, as the chief captain had done, or history says you could also *earn it* by doing something meritorious for Rome, like fight in one of their wars. But if both of your parents were Romans when you were born, they you were a *born* citizen. History also says that there were different *levels* of citizenship, and you can tell by what Paul says that freeborn citizens were the *highest* level of citizenship.

Well, respectfully insisting on his rights as a citizen worked, as we see in the final two verses of our text in Acts 22:

**“Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.**

**“On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them” (Acts 22:29,30).**

Paul had done nothing illegal, so the government saved him from his enemies. And what we’re seeing symbolized *here* is a dispensational difference from how God saved the Jews from *their* enemies in the Old Testament. God saved His people in those days in miraculous, supernatural ways, as we see when He told them,

***“...ye shall chase your enemies,* and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you *shall chase an hundred,* and an hundred of you *shall put ten thousand to flight:* and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword” (Leviticus 26:7,8).**

I don’t know much about warfare, but I know it would take a *miracle* for five men to chase a hundred, or for a hundred to put 10,000 to flight. So God saved them from their enemies in miraculous ways if their enemies tried to mess with them.

And if anyone *harmed* God’s people, He vowed to take *vengeance* on them, as He told Moses in Deuteronomy 32:41:

**“I will render *vengeance* to Mine enemies...He will *avenge* the blood of His servants...” (Deuteronomy 32:41,43).**

But the way God saves His people from their enemies *today—*and the way He *avenges* them when their enemies harm *them* today—is by using the government that He ordained, as we are seeing here with Paul.

That’s also what Paul teaches in his epistles as well. In his epistle to the Romans, he quotes God as saying,

**“...*avenge not yourselves...*for it is written, *Vengeance is Mine;* I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).**

Here the apostle quotes Deuteronomy 32 to remind us not to avenge ourselves when we’re wronged, because He says *God* will avenge us. He does it by using the government. Three verses after telling us He will avenge us, Paul starts *talking* about the government and police officers in Romans 13, saying of the policeman,

**“...he is the minister of God *to thee* for good...he is the minister of God, *a revenger* to execute wrath *upon him that doeth evil”* (Romans 13:4).**

If someone does evil to you, God says, as it were, “Avenge not yourself. Vengeance is Mine, I will repayit. My ministers in the government will give Me My vengeance, and they will avenge you by arresting the one who does you evil, and prosecuting him in a court of law.” And we’re seeing that typified here when Paul was saved by the military police in Rome, who took him to court before the Jews in verse 30, and before Roman judges later in Acts.

Now I know that sometimes police and governments do the *opposite* of what they are supposed to do, and *harm us* instead of keeping us from harm. But you know what? *Husbands* sometimes do the opposite of what *they’re* supposed to do too. They’re supposed to keep their wives and children from harm. And as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, they sometimes *harm* their wives, and *beat* their children instead.

But none of that is God’s fault. God has set up ways of keeping wives, children, and citizens safe from harm, ways we’re seeing pictured here with Paul, who is our pattern in all things.

But since Paul was also a citizen of the nation of Israel by birth, that gave him what today we call “dual citizenship.” The actress Natalie Portman has it. She’s a citizen of the United States, but she was born in Israel, so she’s a citizen of Israel too. So she’s two citizens in one, just like Paul.

But *Paul’s* dual citizenship made him a symbol of the Body of Christ. What did Paul say about the Body in I Corinthians 12:13?

**“...by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, *whether we be Jews or Gentiles...”***

The Body of Christ is made of up Jews and Gentiles in one Body, and Paul was a Jew and a Gentile in one body. So in the Book of Acts—in this book of symbols—Paul was symbolic of the message he preached, in the same way the *twelve* apostles were symbolic of the message *they* preached. The Lord told them that

**“...in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon *twelve thrones,* judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).**

In the kingdom of heaven on earth, when God regenerates the dead and they rise to enter the kingdom, the 12 are going to rule over the 12 divisions of the earth that Moses talked about when he wrote:

**“When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance...He set the bounds of the people *according to the number of the children of Israel”* (Deuteronomy 32:8).**

And the number of the children of Israel was *twelve.* Jacob had 12 sons, who were the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel. So the 12 represented the kingdom message they preached in the same way Paul represented the message *he* preached.

In closing, Paul is *also* a picture of you and me as *individual* members of the Body, because *we too* have a dual citizenship. You’re probably a citizen of the United States, but if you’re saved, you’re also a citizen of heaven! And as a person of dual citizenship, you’ll want to be sure to do what Paul told the Corinthians to do in I Corinthians 10:32:

***“Give none offence,* neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.”**

In writing to people who were both citizens of heaven and citizens of Rome, Paul told them not to offend the citizens of the Jewish nation, or the citizens of heaven in the church. And as dual citizens ourselves, we should do the same, if we want to

***“be blameless and harmless,* the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, *among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15).**

If you want to shine as God’s light in the world, you too have to be blameless and harmless, and not go around offending people! Amen?