

17 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have 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 customs. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. 25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled,^[a] and from sexual immorality." 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

(Pastor prays)

Strange and painful world events have visited our city, reminding us once again and up close our world is broken in a way that politics, rhetoric or riot can't fix. So we do what Gospel people do. We take our anger and fear and frustrations and prejudices and we take them to the cross. We cling to the cross. We put our pride and opinions and background and expertise and answers -- and all of us think we have answers-- we take our answers and put them in the bloody hands of a crucified Savior. We take on what has been called "The Cruciform Life," a life shaped by the cross, dying to self and clinging to Christ with a profound desire to see God glorified in your life, in your family and in your city. That's how we win -- through the cross.

That's how Paul won. That's how he was able to be a card-carrying Jew, give his life to the Gentiles and long for Jerusalem to change. That's where we find him, in Jerusalem. Let's join him there in v. 17. Let me read it with some comment as you follow along.

How did he do it?

The Cross Gives Us What We Need to Face the Times We Live In

The Power of the Cross Gives Us Strength for Difficulty

You find it right here in v. 17. Paul is now in Jerusalem. He had not been there for a long time but knew he had to go. This trip to Jerusalem puts an end to his ministry. Here is where he will be assaulted, arrested, beaten, bound and brought to trial. In fact, from this point forward in the Book of Acts, Paul is a prisoner. Everything changed in Jerusalem. It's here, in prison, Paul will write things like: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

He knew what he was walking into when he went to Jerusalem. He understood the difficulty awaiting him and he went anyway – gladly, and resolutely, facing whatever was waiting on him there, the same way you can face each day's trouble when you live in the power and under the shadow of the cross. We are cross-bought people, twice-born people, grace-covered people. And in Christ, God loves, forgives, restores and prepares you to face it, whatever it is. The power of the cross gives us strength for difficulty.

The Cross Gives Us Reason to Praise

Paul's conversation on the road to Damascus was also his call to ministry, and that involved crossing racial barriers and then demolishing those barriers with the sin-killing hammer of the cross. In v. 18-20, Paul meets with the church leaders at Jerusalem and gives a report. *On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law,*

Notice in v. 19-20 especially, one by one what God had done among the Gentiles. And v. 20 says they agreed this was the Lord's doing and they affirmed his ministry and praised God. And it's a good place for us to pause before we get to the issue in this passage. It's a good place to be reminded of how good God has been to you. I asked this question before about your prayer life: What if God only gave you those things you asked for or prayed about? What if God only did the things you thank and praise Him for? Paul recognized it was God working in him and he was quick to give glory to God, and this is where the tone of the conversation changed and this may very well be the whole point of the passage.

The Cross Kills Pride

This is your biggest problem and my biggest problem. When the praise dies down in the conversation, the Jewish elders tell Paul of a growing problem and it has to do with his reputation.

V. 20-21, *And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have 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 customs.* Basically here are the rumors: 1) you teach all the Jews who forsake Moses, 2) you are abolishing circumcision, and 3) you reject all our customs.

This was a kick in the gut. Paul had given his life to reach people for Christ. He was shipwrecked and starved. He was beaten and thrown out of cities. He was misunderstood, lonely and betrayed. And he comes home to Jerusalem, the place where Christianity began and all they can say in v. 21 is "There are rumors about you – People are saying..." And instead of defending Paul, instead of stomping out the rumors and legitimizing Paul's apostolic ministry, they concoct a plan to make him more acceptable to a Jewish crowd.

In v. 23-24, they want him to do the very things he had told the Gentiles they didn't have to do to be saved. All the religious Jewish practices – they wanted him to do this in

public to prove he was still a good Jew. How infuriatingly frustrating after all he'd been through. Paul could have made a theological argument about his freedom in Christ, he could've asserted his rights as an apostle. He could have taken the moral ground – Freedom is Christ.

He didn't do any of that. Instead v. 26 says he did what they asked him to do. For Paul, it wasn't a political statement or a need to be right. Here is a man who will go to untold lengths to reach people for Christ sacrificing his freedom in Christ for the sake of the Gospel. This is important for our day and the climate of our city.

Look at Paul. A willing sacrifice of your freedoms, your rights your opinions and prejudices. A sacrifice of these things for the Gospel. Isn't that what Paul said to the church at Corinth? 1 Corinthians 9:19, *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.*

Later in the chapter he will say - To the Jew, I have become a Jew, To the Gentile, a Gentile – I have become all things to all people that I might save some. That's what the cross does. Kills pride. It kills it. Make Christ your life and others, all of them, are more important than you. It's the cruciform life. And today, as providence would have it, is The Lord's Supper.

(Pastor shares what The Lord's Supper means and prays)