

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

LV. Accepting The Limit Of Our Witnessing Effectiveness

(Acts 21:37-22:23)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 21:37-22:23 records how Paul was granted an opportunity to address the riotous crowd that had attacked him in the temple, and how though he gave them a considerate testimony, the spiritual hardness of his hearers was so great that they unanimously rejected it. This event illustrates the limit of our witnessing effectiveness, that hardened hearers will not respond positively to us, what we need to understand for our edification:

II. Accepting The Limit Of Our Witnessing Effectiveness, Acts 21:37-22:23.

- A. As he stated in Romans 10:1, Paul had a deep desire that his fellow Hebrew countrymen might be saved and have eternal life, and this desire surfaced even as he was being led to safety from his riotous countrymen in the temple: as he was about to be led into the barracks of the Roman fortress at the top of the stairs that stood above the temple court, Paul asked the commander in Greek if he could address the crowd below, Acts 21:37.
- B. The commander was surprised that Paul knew Greek, for he had presumed that he was the Egyptian who had earlier created an uproar and led four thousand murderers into the wilderness before disappearing in A. D. 54, Acts 21:38; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 21:38.
- C. Paul assured the commander that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a formidable city, and he again begged the commander to allow him to speak to the Hebrew people below him in the temple courtyard, Acts 21:39.
- D. The commander gave him permission, so Paul stood at the top of the stairs, surrounded by protective Roman soldiers, and motioned with his hand to the people, and when they became very silent, he spoke to them in the Aramaic language that was then used in Israel, what made the people all the more attentive, Acts 21:40-22:2.
- E. In his address to his countrymen, Paul gave a sensible, winsome presentation of his testimony, Acts 22:3-21:
 1. As Paul began to give his testimony, he carefully tried to placate his Hebrew audience when he told them of his initial great dedication to the law of the fathers, Acts 22:3.
 2. Paul also told how he had persecuted Christians, going so far as to obtain letters from Jerusalem leaders to go to Damascus and capture its Christians and return them to Jerusalem to be punished, Acts 22:4-5.
 3. The Apostle then detailed his encounter with the glorified Jesus on the road to Damascus, and of his subsequent conversion and introduction to the Christian community in Damascus by a Hebrew named Ananias who was held in high regard by the Hebrews in that city, Acts 22:6-16.
 4. Paul continued to state that when he returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, he was put into a trance where the Lord told him to hurry out of Jerusalem since his countrymen would not receive Paul's testimony about Jesus, Acts 22:17-18.
 5. Paul had replied to the Lord, claiming that since the people of Jerusalem knew that he had once persecuted Christians and had been an active participant in the martyrdom of the Christian deacon Stephen, they would doubtless accept his testimony, Acts 22:19-20.
 6. Jesus had answered Paul, telling him to leave Jerusalem, that He would send him to the Gentiles, v. 21.
- F. When Paul mentioned his being sent to the Gentiles, the Hebrew crowd cried out for Paul's execution, and cast off their outer garments and threw dust into the air, Acts 22:22-23. The people were not upset that Paul would be trying to convert Gentiles, for "the religious authorities of Israel had preached to Gentiles" to convert them to Judaism, cf. Matthew 23:15. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 418) Rather, Paul's reference to going to the Gentiles *by divine commission* infuriated the Hebrews, for that statement implied that "Jews and Gentiles were equal without the Law of Moses (cf. Eph. 2:11-22; 3:2-6; Gal. 3:28)." (Ibid.)
- G. This response of the crowd "indicates that the Jews in Jerusalem had irrevocably refused the gospel of Jesus Christ and had sealed their fate. Less than 20 years later in A. D. 70 the city of Jerusalem became rubble and ruin (cf. Matt. 24:1-2; 21:41; 22:7)" under divine discipline.

Lesson: *Though Paul did his best to present a winsome testimony of his Christian faith, his hearers were beyond the point of conversion to Christ, spiritually hardened against the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Application: *May we realize that not all will accept our witness, for some irrevocably harden themselves against it.*