

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

THREE DEADLY SINS

Acts 22:21-24 – 22:30-23:22

October 24, 2021

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There are three points to today's message:

- The Jews Reacted to Paul's Testimony
- The Pharisees and Sadducees Disagreed
- The Religious Authorities Plotted to Kill Paul

INTRODUCTION: As we discussed in last week's sermon, Paul's trip to Jerusalem quickly went south. The Jews falsely accused Paul of bringing a Gentile into an area of the temple where Gentiles were not allowed. Violence erupted, and a mob would have beaten Paul to death had Roman soldiers not intervened. At the end of Acts 21, Paul spoke to the Roman commander and asked that he be allowed to address the crowd. The commander agreed, and at the beginning of Chapter 22, Paul gives the crowd his testimony. Today's sermon picks up at the end of Paul's speech after he has told the crowd about his Damascus Road conversion and his call to evangelism.

THE JEWS REACTED TO PAUL'S TESTIMONY

SCRIPTURE: Acts 22:21-24

Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.

EXPLANATION: We have seen this same theme repeated throughout the book of Acts. The Jews had little tolerance for the Gentiles, especially when it came to matters of faith. If a Gentile wanted to join the Jewish faith, there were rules to be

followed. Even then, the religious elite still viewed them as second-class. Where did this attitude develop and why?

God told Abraham that from him would come a great nation. He revealed to Moses that this nation would be a priestly, holy kingdom. In the Promised Land, God instructed them not to defile themselves with the idolatrous practices of their neighboring nations. From the nation of Israel would come the Savior and eternal king of the world.

Jewish boys and girls were raised with a deep understanding of their heritage. They recognized that they had a special place in the heart of God. God called the Israelites to be a holy example so that they could point the world to Him. Instead, the Jewish people used their unique identity to develop prejudices against all other people.

So, when Paul gave his testimony, their ears were open until he talked about Gentiles. Wrapped up in their hatred and grandiose view of themselves, they could not believe that God would ask Paul to take a message of faith to those they considered so unworthy. They could not believe that God loved the Gentiles too.

ILLUSTRATION: A female teenager returned home from work one evening. As she neared her neighborhood, a police officer pulled her over. She had not been speeding and did not know why she was being detained. Before long, several other police cars joined the original officer. She was frightened and embarrassed and confused. After several minutes, the police released her. Her only crime? She was the same sex and color as a perpetrator they were trying to find.

It's a story that is all too familiar today, but it's not a problem that is relegated to our police force. Prejudice is defined as, "The act or state of holding unreasonable preconceived judgments or convictions. An adverse judgment or opinion formed unfairly or without knowledge of the facts, or an irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular social group." We've heard a lot about prejudice in the news recently, but it isn't something new. Prejudice has existed in every culture, in every time in history. It is an ancient sin that haunts us still today.

- When the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites
- When the Romans conquered their neighboring nations

- When the Crusaders killed people who did not conform to their religious beliefs
- When Americans murdered and displaced Native Americans
- When men, women, and children of color were sold into slavery
- When Hitler killed the Jews
- Whenever any person, nation, religion, or group of people set themselves above another, it is the result of prejudice and discrimination.

APPLICATION: God created the nation of Israel and called them out to be an example to the world of his love, mercy, and grace, and to demonstrate how to live differently. Through Jesus, we too now share in that calling. Instead of using their unique identity to be a blessing to the world, the Jews used it to lord over their neighbors. How often do we make the same mistake?

- If we think we are better than someone else because of how we look, think, or act...
- If we fail to show love to people who are different from us...
- If we are quick to judge and slow to develop relationships...
- If we treat others as if they are unworthy to receive the gospel, then we too are guilty of prejudice.

THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES DISAGREED

SCRIPTURE: Acts 22:30-23:6-10

The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them...^{23:6} Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)⁹ There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to

pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

EXPLANATION: There were three primary groups among the Jewish elite. The scribes were those who copied the laws and what we now refer to as the Old Testament. The Pharisees were primarily interested in the application and upkeep of the law. The Sadducees believed in a literal interpretation of the law and competed with the Pharisees for influence in the courts and for control of the temple. The Sadducees also did not believe in the resurrection, rewards or punishments after death, angels or spirits. One pastor helped his congregation remember the difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees in this way. He said that the Pharisees, who loved rules, were always trying to be *fair-you-see*. Because the Sadducees didn't believe in Heaven or Hell, they were *sad-you-see*.

The Sanhedrin was a supreme council of Jews including priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees. They functioned in a way that was similar to our Supreme Court and had the final authority on decisions that affected the religious and political life of all Jews. When the Roman commander took Paul before this group, he did so in order to learn the truth about Paul and what crime he must have committed. However, Paul, as a Pharisee himself, understood these groups well. He knew their disdain for one another. Most of those present had probably heard Paul's testimony the day before. So, instead of invoking the name of Jesus—which would have brought about the fury of both groups—he focused his statement on one of the beliefs to which they could not agree. He told them his hope was in the resurrection of the dead. At this, the assembly began to fight among themselves.

APPLICATION: Prejudice is dangerous, in part, because it both results from and leads to arrogance. The Jewish religious leaders held the same opinion about Gentiles, but their arrogance resulted in a stubborn inability to listen to and learn from one another and caused division among themselves.

As Christians, we have the truth of God's word to guide us in our daily lives. God's word tells us that no one is perfect, that all have sinned. Sometimes we become so wrapped up in our opinions that we fail to keep a teachable spirit. Make no mistake. God's word is truth. We cannot argue with truth; however, we often grow arrogant

in the truth we know and unbending in opinions that have no basis in truth. Prejudice leads to arrogance, and arrogance breeds hate.

- The Jews Reacted to Paul's Testimony
- The Pharisees and Sadducees Disagreed

THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES PLOTTED TO KILL PAUL

SCRIPTURE: Acts 23:12-22

The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here." ¹⁶ But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." ¹⁸ So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." ¹⁹ The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?" ²⁰ He said: "Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request." ²² The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

EXPLANATION: This group of religious rulers had become so entrenched in their hatred that they were willing to disregard God's laws and their own laws. The sixth commandment forbids murder. Other Jewish and Roman laws specifically laid out how disputes should be handled. Yet, these men who were specifically supposed to uphold the law, were intent upon breaking it. They so badly wanted to silence Paul that they were willing to starve themselves until he was killed.

ILLUSTRATION: In the 1970s, a man named Horry Watts initiated a campaign of terror on Rev. Robert Nichols and his two young children. Over the course of about

six years, he was responsible for weekly disruptions during services, threatening letters and phone calls, and multiple bombs that were set off near the Reverend's house or church. His actions eventually led to the mental breakdown of Rev. Nichols and directly contributed to a home invasion during which Rev. Nichols was shot twice and his wife, Ramona, was killed. While no one can know the true motives behind such hatred, it seems that it all began because Mr. Watts was jealous. Although he wasn't even a member of the church, Mr. Watts enjoyed being in power. As a wealthy and influential man in the community, he expected to get his way—even in church matters. He believed that his opinion was the only opinion that mattered, and when circumstances indicated otherwise, Mr. Watts took it out on the pastor and his family.

APPLICATION: Prejudice results from and contributes to arrogance. Arrogance leads to more division, and division leads to hatred and even murder. I doubt that any of us in this room have ever plotted to kill someone, but there are more types of murder than taking a life. Our hatred can kill another person's dreams. It can wound a person's self-esteem. It can contribute to a sense of lostness and aloneness and, therefore, be a roadblock in a person's path to Christ.

CONCLUSION: Prejudice, arrogance, and hatred are what many of us would call common sins, but make no mistake, they are deadly sins as well. They should have no part in the life of a Christian. Do they have a part in yours?

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