

July 30

Scriptures: Read Acts 21

Key Verse: "... Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (Acts 21:28)

Overview

Have you been feeling sorry for yourself lately? Are your friends (the one who should know better) misunderstanding you? Your enemies misrepresenting you? People taking you totally the wrong way—some even wanting to harm you? Are you fed up with the mixed signals, the lies, and the anger of everybody around you? Do you need someone out there who will at least empathize with your victimization? Well, read on...

If anyone had legitimate cause to feel victimized, it was the apostle Paul. First, there was the misunderstanding of his friends. He had just returned from years of missionary journeys and the least you'd expect would be that his friends and superiors in Jerusalem would commend him on his work and maybe hold an appreciation dinner or something. But what did they do? They told him to join four men in a Nazarite vow and pay their expenses to boot, just so the "friends" in Jerusalem would not believe the rumors that he had turned his back on the Law of Moses. In a sense, they were demanding that Paul do something wise politically—and Paul, for whatever reason, went along with the plan (maybe it fit his "all things to all men" philosophy). But I'm sure he felt miffed.

Then, to add insult to injury, his enemies capitalized on Paul's perceived "tainted ness: in the eyes of his friends by telling all Jerusalem that he had not only turned his back on the Law of Moses, but was teaching all men everywhere to do so. "He's teaching against our Law, against our nation, and even, God forbid, against the Temple!" This blatant lie really got the people stirred up—in fact they stirred up the city, literally, "throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air" (22:23).

Nevertheless, Paul might have had some sense of satisfaction in knowing that at least he was being persecuted for Christ. "At least they know who I am. I'm a victim for the Gospel." Well, if he was thinking this way, you can be sure that bubble burst when the Roman commander, who was trying to save Paul from the mob, looked him full in the face and said, "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?" (21:38 NIV). That had to be the final straw! Even his identity was besmirched. So much for a sense of recognition!

"Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. And they don't even know who I am! I'm going out to eat worms." That's what you or I might say. Not Paul. He takes his lamps, stands before the mob, and preaches Jesus. So much for self-pity!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You gave Yourself and didn't pity Yourself. Help us to do likewise. Grant more grace so that we may desire Your approval so much that the approval or disdain of the crowd will seem relatively unimportant.