The Third Journey July 31

On to Jerusalem

 From Tyre they sailed to Ptolemais for a day then onto Caesarea. While there, Agabus the prophet arrived – He came to us, took Paul’s belt, tied up his own feet and hands with it, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: The owner of this belt will be tied up in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles.” Acts 21:11.

 No amount of talk would stop Paul from going to Jerusalem so they went with him to Mnason’s house where Paul was going to stay.

 Paul arrived to a warm welcome form the believers. The next day Paul went to see James and the Church elders – Paul greeted them and gave a report of everything that God had done among the Gentiles through his work. Acts 21:19. What a report that must have bee, three journeys packed with experiences both good and bad. We would do well to learn to turn our bad situations into good witnessing for the Lord like Paul, we probably won’t land in jail like Paul, but we can turn accidents and disease into praise for the Lord as he heals us. Even death in the family can bring us to the realization that we don’t live forever in this life at least.

VERSE FOR TODAY: We could not convince him, so we gave up and sad, “May the Lord’s will be done.” Acts 21:14.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you, O Lord, for experiences both good and bad, help me to turn a bad experience into something good.

In Jerusalem August 1

Arrested

 Paul had been around almost a week when he went to the Temple just to be recognized by the Jews from Asia – They stirred up the whole crowd and seized Paul. “Men of Israel!” they shouted. “Help! This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone against people of Israel, the Law of Moses, and this Temple…” Acts 21:27b, 28a. After the seizing of Paul, they drug him from the Temple, the doors were immediately closed. The mob attacked Paul but soon the Roman soldiers arrived, breaking up the riot and they hauled Paul off to a fort. Paul spoke to them in Greek this surprised the officer because he thought he had an Egyptian renegade – Paul answered, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city. Please let me speak to the people.” Acts 21:39. Permission was granted! Speaking to the crowd in Hebrew settled them down.

 We see Paul again in a very difficult position, a mad crowd on one hand and soldiers on the other, but this time he has settled the crowd and is given the opportunity to tell his side. We should be ready to tell our side for the Lord, too, that takes study, prayer and meditation.

VERSE FOR TODAY: The commander gave him permission, so Paul stood on the steps and motioned with his hand for the people to be silent. When they were quiet, Paul spoke to them in Hebrew. Acts 21:40.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, never to be caught off guard when an opportunity to witness for you, O Lord, comes up fill me with the Holy Spirit to be able to speak.

Paul’s Speech August 2

In Self-defense

 The fact that Paul spoke in Hebrew quieted the crowd because that was their language.

 Paul began – “My fellow-Jews, listen to me as I make my defense before you!” Acts 22:1. Paul went on to tell of his birth in Tarsus, his strict Jewish up-bringing, and the severe persecution he inflicted on the Christians. Paul also told of how he was blinded on the road to Damascus, how his sight was restored by Ananias, who told Paul of God’s choosing – He said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see his righteous Servant, and to hear him speaking with his own voice. For you will be a witness for him to tell everyone what you have seen and heard…’ Acts 22:14, 15.

 When Paul told the crowd, that were largely Jews, that upon his return to Jerusalem he had a vision form the Lord telling him to leave Jerusalem because no one would listen and in the vision – ‘Go’ the Lord said to me, ‘for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ” Acts 22:21. Then the crowd became violent, the soldiers took Paul away, tied him for whipping and questioning, but finding out that Paul was a Roman citizen he was neither whipped nor questioned.

 We too are members of a larger kingdom of the Lord, which is protection for us, just for the asking.

VERSE FOR TODAY: And now, why wait any longer? Get up and be baptized and your sins washed away by praying to him.’ Acts 22:16.

PRAYER THOUGHT: O Lord, Praise be to you for the forgiveness of sins and especially for your Son that made it all possible.

Paul August 3

Before the Council

 In search of what the Jews were accusing Paul of, the commander took Paul before the entire council. The council consisted of both Pharisees and Sadducees, when Paul realized this – he called out in the Council, “Fellow-Israelites! I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. I am on trial here because of the hope I have that the dead will rise to life!” Acts 23:6b. Now the Pharisees believed in life after death, angels, spirits etc. but the Sadducees did not; a big quarrel broke out between the two factions, above the shouting a Pharisee declared – “We cannot find anything wrong with this man! Perhaps a spirit or angel did speak to him!” Acts 23:9b. That was not the thing to say, the argument became violent, the soldiers took Paul back to the fort.

 Arguments never settle anything, when an argument of theology breaks out, one should gracefully retreat and hope for more favorable attitudes at another meeting.

 In the fort – That night the Lord stood by Paul and said, “Don’t be afraid! You have given your witness for me here in Jerusalem, and you must also do the same in Rome.” Acts 23:11.

 Paul knew by this visit from the Lord that he would get out of Jerusalem alive and get to Rome like he had hoped.

 We should be at peace as well; we know that we will also get our hope of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

VERSE FOR TODAY: Paul looked straight at the council and said, “My fellow-Israelites! My conscience is perfectly clear about the way in which I have lived before God to this very day.” Acts 23:1

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you, O Lord, for the peace of mind and heart only you can give and that my conscience can be clear in the life that I am living for you.

Paul August 4

Plot Against Paul

 A group of over forty Jews planned to trick the commander into bringing Paul down for more questions and they would be waiting to kill him, after they made their plans – Then they went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn vow together not to eat a thing until we have killed Paul….” Acts 23:14. They were serious in their intent to eliminate Paul!

 God was with Paul, Paul’s nephew overheard the Jew’s plans and told Paul, Paul sent him, with a guard, to the commander, who heard and believed the plot! The commander arranged for soldiers, horses and guards to take Paul, after dark, safely to Caesarea, this plan worked and Paul was safely stowed away in the Governor’s headquarters until those who were accusing him arrived.

 Paul once again was rescued form a dangerous situation, the Lord was on his side. He will be on our side too if we allow him into our hearts and then let him guide us in our daily lives, not just in the big stuff but our every day troubles and needs.

VERSE FOR TODAY: We put our hope in the Lord; he is our protector and our help. Psalm 33:20.

VERSE FOR TODAY: Thank-you, O Lord, for all the safety you have given me and those I love. Help me always to depend on you for safety and health.

Paul August 5

Just Waiting Around

 Five days passed before the High Priest Ananias, some elders and Terullus, a lawyer arrived to accuse Paul – “We found this man to be a dangerous nuisance; he starts riots among the Jews all over the world and is a leader of the party of the Nazarenes. He also tried to defile the Temple, and we arrested him…” Acts 24:5, 6.

 Paul then, before Felix had his chance to defend himself, he denied arguing or in sighting riots among the Jews – “…I do admit this to you: I worship the God of our ancestors by following the Way which they say is false. I have the same hope in God that these themselves have, namely, that all people, both the good and the bad, will rise from death. And so I do my best always to have a clear conscience before God all human beings. Acts 24:14a, 15, 16.

 Paul also told Felix that it was the Jews from Asia that caused the trouble and that he should hear them as well if they had any charges against him.

 Now Felix was aware of the Good News Paul preached but still became afraid when Paul spoke of goodness, self-control and the judgment. He would dismiss Paul, then call him back days later and discuss the Way with him again. This went on for two years; Paul was under guard but yet had enough freedom that his friends could bring him his needs.

 Paul had limited freedom, we have total freedom to accept or reject the Ways of the Lord, and the choice is ours.

VERSE FOR TODAY: He sent for Paul and listened to him as he talked about faith in Christ Jesus. Acts 24:24b.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me never to become afraid of your second coming, O Lord, but view it with joy and an ultimate beginning with you.

Paul August 6

A New Governor

 Felix was replaced by Festus as governor, and on a trip to Jerusalem, Festus was begged by the Jews to have Paul brought to Jerusalem for trial, because they had plans to kill Paul. But Festus told them to come to Caesarea to accuse him.

 When Festus returned to Caesarea, he had Paul brought before him and asked Paul – “Would you be willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried on these charges before me there?”

 Paul said, “I am standing before the Emperor’s own court of judgment, where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you yourself well know…” Acts 25:9b-10. Paul knew he must not go back to Jerusalem and a hearing in the emperor’s court would get him to Rome which was in God’s future plans. Festus granted Paul’s request.

 While Paul was waiting to go to Rome, King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea, Festus told Agrippa about Paul and his story of Jesus dying and yet living. Agrippa asked for a hearing with Paul and his request was granted.

VERSE FOR TODAY: All they had were some argument with him about their own religion and about a man name Jesus, who has died; but Paul claims he is alive. Acts 25:19.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Praise you, O Lord, for coming and giving yourself to die that I can have eternal life through your resurrection.

Paul August 7

Defending and Witnessing

 Paul went before Agrippa, defending himself, saying that he was on trial because of his hope of life after death – “Why do you who are here find it impossible to believe that God raised the dead?” Acts 26:8. Paul wondered why these people who knew about God and the Laws of Moses found it so hard to believe in Jesus’ resurrection.

 Paul told of his life as a persecutor, the experience on the road to Damascus and how he obeyed the vision that said – “…First in Damascus and in Jerusalem and then in all Judea and among the Gentiles, I preached that they must repent of their sins and turn to God and do the things that would show they had repented. …That the Messiah must suffer and be the first one to rise from death, to announce the light of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:20, 23.

 Festus couldn’t take it any longer, he called out that Paul was mad but Paul answered he was telling the truth.

 Paul was using this opportunity to witness to King Agrippa and he knew it for – Agrippa said to Paul, “In this short time do you think you will make me a Christian?” Acts 26:28. Paul answered that it was his prayer that everyone listening would become Christian.

 Paul didn’t let Agrippa’s position stop him from witnessing to him, we must not let rank or position keep us from witnessing to others either.

VERSE FOR TODAY: “This man has not done anything for which he should die or be put in prison.” And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been released if he had not appealed to the Emperor.” Acts 26:31b, 32.

PRAYER THOUGHT: My prayer is that anyone that hears about Jesus will come to a saving knowledge of Him.