

What Made the Crowd Angry?

Scripture Reading — Acts 21:37-22:29

“The Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” — Acts 22:21

Paul has been arrested—and thus saved from being killed by an angry mob. He is about to be taken to the barracks when he asks the Roman commander to let him speak to the crowd. Receiving permission, Paul speaks in Aramaic, and the people quiet down.

Why do they become quiet? Because Aramaic was the local language, and they realized that Paul was “one of their own.” Paul begins his defense along those lines. “I am a Jew . . . thoroughly trained under Gamaliel . . . zealous for God.”

It is amazing that the crowd remains quiet even through the account of Jesus appearing to Saul on the Damascus road. And then one line of that story pushes them from quiet to murderous rage.

What did Paul say? Paul said that Jesus sent him to bring the good news of salvation to the Gentiles. This is the point where the silence is broken by shouts of “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

Why was this so threatening? In some ways, the people thought God belonged to them. And Paul was saying that God sent him to reach out to the people of other nations. This truth was often mentioned in the Scriptures but ignored by the people (see Genesis 12:3; Psalm 67; Isaiah 2:1-4; 25:6-8). It showed they were being selfish about God and needed to welcome Gentiles into God’s family too.

Prayer

God of all peoples, keep us from ever thinking we could tuck you into a box for our own purposes. Keep us from the sin of trying to limit your grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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