

I. Paul's Second Vision. 17-21.

1. The place--in the temple.
Paul's reference to this episode in his experience was an indirect answer to the charge that he had profaned their Holy House. How could he desecrate the place whither he had gone to pray in the most solemn crisis of his life and testimony, where he had so agonized in supplication for his fellow-countrymen as to lose all consciousness of time and place and circumstances?
2. The season--while praying.
3. The form--in a trance.
He beheld again the same glorifying form which he had seen before Damascus' gate, and recognized it as that of his exalted Lord.
4. The subject--the commission.
 - (1) What he saw--Christ.
 - a. Who is always present in His own house.
 - b. Who is ever near to the praying soul.
 - (2) What he heard.
 - a. A voice warning him of danger. Verse 18.
 - b. A voice instructing him as to the reasons of his peril. Verse 18.
 - c. A voice pointing out to him the path of duty.
The Lord's choice of our field of labor may be wholly different from ours. Obedience, not questioning, is our duty.

Here Paul justifies his mission to the Gentiles, as in 6-16, he had justified his faith in Jesus Christ. It is a tragic thing when a soul or a city will not receive a preacher's testimony concerning Christ. Verse 18. What we want and what God wills do not always harmonize. 18-21. When that is so, our want must give way to His will.

II. Before The Chief Captain. 22:22-29.

1. The impotent rage of Paul's hearers.
 - (1) Their sudden interruption.
From the beginning of his speech they had kept on listening till he reached the point when he proceeded to talk of his mission to the Gentiles. Then their suppressed wrath could no longer be restrained; they stopped his defense by a simultaneous yell. The word "Gentiles" was like a match to gunpowder: the magazine exploded.
 - (2) Their fanatical outcry.
"Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." What let loose their passion was not so much the mention of the word "Gentiles" as the idea that he should claim to have been sent by divine authority on a mission to the Gentiles rather than to the Jews. Could the Messiah send one to these unconverted heathen to tell them that the Redeemer of Israel was equally their Messiah and Redeemer? Was not such an assertion of itself rank blasphemy? One who could say such things was surely unworthy to live.
 - (3) Their passionate demonstration.
Shouting with still more vehement cries, and stripping off their garments, they throw dust into the air as a means of giving vent, in oriental fashion, to their uncontrollable rage. They were simply beside themselves with indignation and fury.

2. The perilous mistake of the chief captain.

(1) In commanding Paul to be bound.

The captain, of course, was not aware that Paul was entitled to all the privileges of a Roman citizen, otherwise he would have hesitated to put bonds on him, and far less to order him to be tied up for scourging.

(2) In treating Paul like a prisoner before he had been condemned.

The chief captain had listened to Paul's story on the stairs, and apparently he had understood nothing, and the sudden and terrific outburst of hatred and violence must have been an enigma to him. He must get at the truth by examining the prisoner himself; and the only way known to either the civil or military jurisprudence of that day for getting at the truth was by scourging and torture. And so Paul, defenseless and alone, manacled and shackled still, is stripped of his outer garments, and bound with thongs to the leaning post, that on his naked back the lictors may lay, with cruel energy, their terrible rods, that the truth may be extracted from his unwilling lips. It was an outrageous indignity; and Paul was not willing to submit to it.

(3) The escape of Paul from the indignity of scourging.

- a. The captain's conversation with Paul. Astonished at the report brought by his subordinate, he at once went to Paul to investigate for himself as to the truth of Paul's claim to be a Roman citizen. He sought confirmation of his right to such immunity as Paul claimed. He did not have long to seek. He knew the privileges of Roman citizenship, and the penalties attached to any false claim. His doubts were soon dissolved, and he was satisfied when the prisoner in chains boldly and confidently asserted, "I am Roman born."
- b. The captain's order to the centurion and his guards. Unstrap the apostle from the whipping post--which they did. They abandoned the idea of examining him by torture.
- c. The power of a name. Henceforth, till his appeal is heard by Caesar, Paul is not a renegade Jew but a citizen of Rome. After that interview Paul was treated with marked courtesy and consideration by all the Roman officials with whom he had to do. It was the power of a great name. Throughout the world-wide empire it had been ordained that the person of a Roman citizen should be sacred. He could not be bound or scourged uncondemned; and his appeal, though he might be the most obscure citizen of the most distant province of the empire, must be carried at whatever cost to the palace of the Caesars. It was a great privilege.

Paul was the only man of the first century of our era who united in himself all the qualities which could give a man access to the whole world. He was a Hebrew by nationality, a Roman by birth, a Greek by training, and a Christian by choice and conviction. Here he stood upon his Roman rights. Paul was twice freborn. He had a Roman and a Heavenly citizenship. The latter cannot be acquired, as could the former, by wealth, merit, or effort, but only by regeneration

1. The parallel between Roman and Heavenly citizenship.

- (1) Both might be acquired by aliens.
- (2) Both might be obtained by inheritance.
- (3) Both conferred great privileges.
- (4) Both ensured great protection.

2. The contrast between Roman and Heavenly citizenship.

- (1) Roman citizenship is now a thing of the past; Heavenly citizenship is a thing of the present.
- (2) Roman citizenship at the best is temporal and earthly; Heavenly citizenship is celestial and eternal.
- (3) Roman citizenship might be obtained by money; Heavenly citizenship cannot be purchased at any price.
- (4) Roman citizenship protected the body; Heavenly citizenship protects the soul.

Let us who enjoy the heavenly citizenship walk worthily of it.