

“This is My Story” (1st Telling)

Do you have any Jewish friends? If not, how do you feel about Jews? 3 years ago, the National Archives released another batch of tapes that were made at the White House during the Nixon presidency. In one the Rev. Billy Graham was heard complaining that Jews had a stranglehold on the media. “A lot of Jews are great friends of mine [because] ... they know I am friendly to Israel and so forth. But [Jews] don't know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country.” Dr. Graham has said he doesn't remember the conversation but apologized for the remarks anyway. Doubtless, there are few of us if any who could stand up to the scrutiny of hidden recordings of all our conversations. But if anti-Semitism was once found in this icon of Christianity, what might a survey of *my* heart, of *yours* reveal about attitudes towards the Jewish people?

READ Acts 21:27-22:21. PRAY.

Story

This is a long section but we're going to zero in on vv.3-21 of chapter 22. If you remember from 2 weeks ago, Paul arrived in Jerusalem for Passover. Church leaders knew many local Jewish Christians disapproved of Paul and asked him to adopt a “Jewish look” to pacify critics. He was accused of failing to live like a Jew, and of failing to teach Jewish converts to keep living like Jews.

The plan was that he publicly take a Jewish vow along with 4 other Jewish Christians and pay all the men's related costs.

Paul agreed to do it but if it placated Jewish *Christians*, it did nothing to win over Jews who weren't. The streets of Jerusalem were clogged with Jews from all over the world who'd come to celebrate Passover. Some of the pilgrims were from Asia—perhaps some of the very people who had opposed Paul in cities like Iconium or Lystra. Having seen him earlier walking Jerusalem's streets with a Gentile friend, once they spotted him at the temple they assumed he had taken his Gentile friend in there as well. Which was a big no-no.

Trophimus and any other Gentile could worship and pray in the Court of the Gentiles, a large outer court for those not Jewish. But they could go no further. In fact, a 4 ½' high wall barring them court from the next level—the Court of the women—the next level, bore this ominous warning in Greek: *No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.* READ Eph.2:14.

Although Israel was a conquered people living under Rome's rule, the sanctity of the temple was of such a volatile matter that Rome actually permitted Israel to execute any violator—including Roman citizens.

Paul hadn't done it but angry men grabbed him and the mob that quickly gathered began to beat him. But Roman troops stationed in the Antonio Fortress at the temple's corner heard the commotion and came to his rescue. Unable to figure out what was going on or put down the riot, their commanding officer ordered Paul taken to the fortress for questioning. As they were carrying him in chains, Paul spoke to the commander. Who

was surprised to understand him. He had wrongly assumed Paul was an Egyptian revolutionary.

“You speak Greek?” Paul explained who he was and asked permission to address the crowd. Realizing this was not a common criminal but an educated man, the tribune permitted it in the hopes that he could calm the rioters. And Paul began to tell his story. Which included not only his testimony of how he came to faith, but a clear insistence that he was Jewish, and that his faith was Jewish.

1. I am a Jew from birth (22:3)
2. I am a highly educated Jew. (22:3)
3. I was a zealous Jew devoted to God (22:3)
 - a. I persecuted Christians (22:4-5, 19-20)
4. Jesus met me (22:6-16)
 - a. Asked why I was against him
 - b. Blinded me
 - c. Healed me (using a highly respected Jew who was a devout observer of the Law; 12)
 - d. Saved me
 - e. Commissioned me to go to the Gentiles

As Saul was on his way to arrest more Christians, Jesus intercepted him and asked “Why are you persecuting me?” He seemed surprised that this orthodox and devout Jew would oppose him and his people.” Jews today insist it’s unnatural for a Jewish person to become a Christian. In fact, most stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that such a convert is even still Jewish.

But rather than come to earth to create a new faith, Jesus came to fulfill an *existing* one. READ Matt.5:17. God did not design a new faith called Christianity to replace Judaism—or worse, compete with Judaism; Jesus came to *fulfill* Judaism not replace it. In fact, it was to the Jews *exclusively* that Jesus came as the promised Messiah. READ Matt.15:24. The ritual ceremonies and structures would fade away because they were temporary, serving as educational tools that would naturally lead Jews to Christ. READ Gal.3:24.

Now I often refer to this passage, but today we’re going to turn to Hebrews, and discover what God meant Jewish people to get from various aspects of Jewish life and rituals; how did God use them to point Jews to Jesus? READ Heb.10:1.

1. God spoke to Israel through prophets so they’d be prepared to hear from Him through Jesus. Heb.1:1-2
2. God gave the people a weekly Sabbath rest, to prepare them for the rest from self-effort that Jesus provided: Heb.4:8-11; Rom.9:30-32.
3. The high priests who linked people with God by sacrificing for their sins prepared the people for the High Priest who would link people with God permanently by his own blood. Heb.5:1-3/ Heb.4:14-15; 8:6; 10:11-12; 19-21; 1 Tim.2:5-6
4. The Tabernacle was to prepare people for the heavenly one: Heb.9:1-8, 23-24.
5. Shedding animal blood was to prepare people for fully sufficient shed blood of Christ: Heb.9:22; 10:4; Heb.9:11-15

6. The Passover lamb's blood kept the family safe from the avenging angel of death who wrecked judgment on Egyptian families. Christ became the *eternal* Passover Lamb who spares the lives of all who trust in his blood. 1 Cor.5:7; Rom.3:25.

Jewish people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ call themselves “completed Jews.” They understand that they are the true heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That what *they* found was exactly what those ancient patriarchs looked for. READ Heb. 11:13 a-b, 39-40.

Concl:

So, if we are spiritual descendants of the Jewish people, how should we think and speak of them, how should we treat them? The term “Anti-semitism” is 125 years old. The *spirit* of it has a long and bloody history. Some's recorded in the OT. Much of it's recorded in Christian history. Just a few centuries after Christ died for the Jewish people, Gentile Christians grew increasingly hostile to the chosen people. In fact, once Christianity became the religion of the Roman empire, the church pushed for laws that were passed limiting Jewish people. In the Middle Ages France and Germany ran red with the Jewish blood of those who refused baptism at the hands of knights on their way to try to take back the “Holy Land” from Muslims.

In the 14th century Bubonic Plague killed a quarter of Europe. Rumors started that Jews were to blame so mobs burned and hung many before the Pope could put a stop to it. Although earlier in life a defendant of Jews, in later years Protestant reformer Martin Luther advocated burning synagogues to the ground as well as Jewish homes.

During Hitler's pogroms in WW 2 Germany, most of the Church agreed to keep quiet about Jewish mistreatment and the genocide of God's chosen people. Israel Zangwill complained a century ago, *The Jews are frightened people. Nineteen centuries of Christian love have broken down their nerves.*

And yet they—to those of us called Christians—are our spiritual ancestors, part of our family. READ Rom. 11:11-12, 17-21, 25-26a.