

This story has a lot of real estate in acts- we have spent weeks on it here. We aren't even finishing it today

Paul does church
Paul comes back to Jerusalem
Gets arrested
Shares Jesus
People get mad at him, then each other
Get the Roman government officials involved.
Lots of twists and turns.
And an important thing happens- Jesus gives him a call, confirms a call

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." (Acts 23:11)

It all leads up to this crew of Jewish men just so mad that they are going to kill him. They commit themselves to it. Paul's nephew overhears it and tells Paul. Paul tells a guard, the guard tells the commander, and the commander, who has spent three days trying to figure this mess out, is like, get this guy out of here.

Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen[to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix." He wrote a letter as follows:

Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. [very sanitized version of the story] I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him. [AKA- im done with this guy, you figure it out.] So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. [30ish miles from Jerusalem, sort of a half way point] The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace. (Acts 23:23-35)

Rather unceremonious exit from Jerusalem. As he leaves, the language and imagery here reminds me of some parallels with Triumphal Entry, kind of a bizarro version of it. Not saying this is a direct link that the writers intended for us to know but we have this day set up in our calendar when our attention is drawn to it.

Some similarities:

Jesus riding in on a donkey/Paul riding out on a horse

Both had people in the wings plotting their death.

Both surrounded by crowds, but not for the same reasons

Paul left in the dead of night, while Jesus entered in sun shining, birds singing; a bad night for Paul, a good morning in the life of Jesus and his followers.

Paul was kicked out, Jesus was welcomed in (at least by the crowd for the moment).

Paul was in chains, Jesus was (in the religious leaders' eyes) killing it as a revolutionary.

Paul was with enemies, Jesus was with friends, even if they would abandon Him.

But the one thing, despite all the differences and similarities, that was exactly the same, is that both the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the unceremonious exit, were both roads marked by obedience. By Paul, to Jesus, and by Jesus, to the Father. The details of these roads may have been different, but they were both focused on doing the will of God.

Why bring all that up? Because facts are, if you are here today and have surrendered your life to Jesus, everything that comes afterward in this path called life is marked by our obedience.

And very likely, as you pursue Jesus and try to do what He says to do, whether very specifically what He says to do, or the big commands and mission He has given us, which would keep us plenty busy, the road will probably look a little like both of these at some point.

There are times when we look around and obedience to Jesus is terrifying and costly.

At times we might look around and be very encouraged, blessed even, by what is happening in our life because of our obedience to God.

But what we very clearly see in the life of both Paul and Jesus, (and something to emulate) is that whatever the road looked like at whatever moment in their life, their eyes were fixed on something ahead.

Paul: Rome

Jesus: the cross

And when we have our eyes on the prize so to speak, Paul says it like this, pressing onward toward the goal, he uses that language in Philippians, we won't be overwhelmed, deterred, slowed down, or overcome by what the road looks like to get there, because what is ahead is what matters most.

Hiking story. Vacillate between two things happening

I just can't go any further.

People in this room

I am distracted and not moving because what is right here is good for now.

People in this room.

This works on a macro and micro level

Whether we are cast aside, or welcomed in

Whether the road is the darkest of nights or the joyous of days

Whether the road is lined with worshipers and encouragement or surrounded by danger

Whether welcomed like a king or bound in chains

Whether people are speaking truth about us or not

Whether the road is short, or much longer than we realized