

22 Acts 21:17 Bigotry exposed in Jerusalem

When you dislike someone it's easy to imagine they are worse than they are.

That's what these Jews who saw Paul at the Temple did. They imagined Paul had done the unthinkable and brought a non-Jew into the temple. They already thought Paul was a terrible person because of what they had heard, so they put two and two together and got ten. What if they had bothered to find out the truth? Paul described his love for them like this, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:2).

Paul loved his fellow Jews deeply and they hated him. Why? Because Paul also loved the Gentiles, who were hated by the Jews. The Jews wanted to keep all that God had given them and not share it with anyone else. Only a few decades later they lost it all. The temple was destroyed and they were scattered across the world. It's a sad story and it's no wonder Paul was in anguish over their stubbornness.

In reading this, we might naturally sympathise with Paul. But we have to ask ourselves, in reality, are we not more like the Jews? Is there something we hold onto that prevents us sharing the blessing of God with others? The time and money that God has blessed us with perhaps? A job, pastime or a possession? Or maybe it's the way we like our church to be which keeps us happy but is unwelcome and unappealing to outsiders.

None of us is perfect, but the way to transformation is to pray that we have a love like Paul's which reflects the heart of God.