

“Freedom Lost”  
Acts 21:27-33  
(Preached at Trinity, February 20, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to this passage we come to a new condition in the life of Paul. Prior to this, with the exception of a brief imprisonment at Philippi, we’ve followed Paul as a man of liberty traveling from place to place planting churches and spreading the Gospel of Christ.
  - A. We should see this as a great blessing. Paul did and prayed for it.  
**2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** – “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you: <sup>2</sup> And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.”
  - B. It is a great blessing that we live in a free land. If we desire to go on a street corner and pass out tracts we have that freedom.
2. Paul’s life is now about to take a major change in direction. From this point on we will be witnessing Paul as a prisoner.  
But we will see him pressing on as a soldier of Jesus Christ.
3. As we’ve seen, there are some who question whether Paul should have even been in Jerusalem at all.
  - A. Some teach that Paul did not actually have a mandate from God. They hold that **Acts 20:22** is not speaking of being bound by the Holy Spirit but being bound in his spirit.
  - B. Others teach that the Holy Spirit gave Paul the command but had changed his command to Paul.
  - C. Still others teach that not only did Paul not have a divine order to go to Jerusalem, he was actually commanded not to go. They interpret the warnings from so many Christians as warnings from God. They believe that Paul’s presence in Jerusalem was an act of disobedience. James Montgomery Boice held this position.
  - D. I don’t believe this is the proper conclusion. I agree with most of the other commentators including John Dick, Matthew Henry, John MacArthur, and F.F. Bruce that this was not an act of disobedience at all but a demonstration that Paul would not be deterred from His appointed task.
  - E. Paul was fixed in his courage and determination.
    - a. Paul saw his mission as a Divine mandate. He was “bound in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem.  
**Acts 20:22** – “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:”
    - b. There was no doubt for Paul. He knew what he would have to do and he would not be deterred from his duty.
4. Paul was exactly where God wanted him to be.

- A. But what about his arrest? What about the difficulty? What about Paul's suffering? Doesn't this prove that Paul was outside God's will? Doesn't smooth sailing demonstrate God's hand in our labors and difficulties prove that God's blessing is not on it?
- B. There are a couple important things you must understand here.

I. First, God has ordained all things according to His purpose

- A. Every aspect of your life has been ordered by God
  - 1. Where you live – God could have placed you anywhere in the world
  - 2. When you live – God could have ordered your birth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century into a life greatly different from what you know today
  - 3. God has ordained the condition into which you are born
    - a. Some are born into poverty, others into wealth
    - b. Some are born into slavery, others into freedom
    - c. People are born into every type of civil authority – conditions of freedom or conditions of absolute tyranny.
- B. God has ordained every detail of your daily circumstances – every second of every day
  - 1. Each day is filled with opportunities. Opportunities are often disguised as difficulties.
  - 2. No one knows what tomorrow will look like – Your life is always contingent upon God's purpose
    - a. Our problem is we have made detailed plans and then become frustrated when they don't come to fruition.
    - b. You must make all of our plans contingent upon God's sovereignty.
 

**James 4:13-15** - "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: <sup>14</sup>Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. <sup>15</sup>For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."
  - 3. All of our plans must have the big "if" attached to them  
"If the Lord will"  
Our mind should be this:  
I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but by God's grace I will strive to serve Him in it
  - 4. We don't necessarily know what God is doing, but we know it is right and good and perfect
 

**Deuteronomy 32:4** – "*He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*"
- C. Paul had learned to trust God in every condition
  - 1. He knew that it was dangerous to go to Jerusalem. He knew that he'd most likely give up his freedom and possibly his life.

**Acts 21:10-11** – “And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. <sup>11</sup> And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.”

**Acts 21:13** – “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

2. Paul was determined to obey God and serve Him no matter what. He saw his life as bound up in the service of Christ.
  3. Paul has now lost his freedom but it was merely a new opportunity to preach the Gospel. He preached to the Jews, to the Roman authorities.
- B. Are you trusting God with your life?
1. Trusting God means finding full and total contentment in Him. He is sufficient. To have Him is to have everything. To know Him is the greatest treasure.
  2. Trusting God means trusting that He is concerned about you
  3. Trusting God means believing that His ways are perfect
  4. Trusting God means resting in what He does.
- II. We must press on in every circumstance
- A. Just because Paul had lost his freedom did not mean his life had ended.
1. This was by no mean the end Paul’s life of ministry. He now saw himself as an “ambassador in bonds.”  
**Ephesians 6:20** – “For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”
  2. Paul saw this as just another opportunity to serve Christ.
    - a. Watch Paul’s actions –  
He immediately saw it as an opportunity to preach the Gospel  
**Acts 21:39-40** – “But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. <sup>40</sup> And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue. . .”
    - b. Paul’s life was a living demonstration of his teachings.  
**2 Timothy 4:2** – “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”
  3. Paul labored extensively even though he was no longer a free man
    - a. Paul wrote four books of the Bible from his imprisonment at Rome – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.
    - b. He saw it as yet another opportunity to spread the Gospel of Christ. He had the opportunity to preach to Roman officials and possibly even the emperor himself.

- B. Do you see your life in this way?
1. But you answer, "But I'm not called to be a preacher."
    - a. You *have* been called to deny yourself and follow Him.  
**Matthew 16:24** – "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."
    - b. But does this mean we have to be willing to serve Him in every circumstance, even if it is dangerous? Does the mean we are to be so open with our faith that others might ridicule us?  
**Matthew 16:25** – "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."
    - c. You may not be called to a public preaching ministry but you *are* called to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  2. If your life belongs to Christ and you have committed yourself to serving Him then are you not willing to serve Him in every condition?
  3. Remember, who is the Lord of your condition? Who carefully planned your life?
  4. It's been said of the holy angels that if God sent one to the earth to dwell in a royal castle with all of the wealth this world has to offer and then sent another to dwell in the meanest condition in filth and poverty it would make little difference to either for they see their very existence as being in the service of their Creator.
- B. God has ordained every circumstance of your life and expects you to serve Him in every circumstance.
1. Whatever you face tomorrow you must seek Christ and His Kingdom first  
**Matthew 6:33-34** – "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. <sup>34</sup>  
 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof."
  2. Although every Christian may have entirely different circumstances our duty is still the same – to live unto the glory of Christ, to serve Him, to obey Him, to see Him precious
- C. You must press on in spite of how you feel
1. Paul had many emotions crowding in
    - a. He was grieved over the reaction of the Christian community with regard to his plans. They were pressing him not to go. They were weeping over him. Paul's heart was about to break.  
**Acts 21:13** – "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?"
    - b. Paul must have been terrified at the thought of going to Jerusalem. Paul told the church of Corinth:  
**1 Corinthians 2:3** – "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."
  2. There may be many things to discourage you; many things that will tempt you to leave off of your duty.
  3. You must not be distracted. You must not take your eyes off of Christ.

- a. There will be many occasions for disappointment. There will be many times when you will be tempted to give up. The only thing that will keep you pressing on is your relationship with Christ.
- b. As the days passed and Paul sat in prison he was forgotten by most of the brethren he had ministered to. He was cold and alone. He beseeched Timothy  
**2 Timothy 4:13** – “The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring *with thee*, and the books, *but especially the parchments.*”
- c. Few stood with Paul. Again, Paul writes to Timothy,  
**2 Timothy 4:9-11** – “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: <sup>10</sup> For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me.”
- d. In every trial, in every difficulty, Paul had one source of strength.  
**2 Timothy 4:16-17** – “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge. <sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”
- (1) Some see the lion as Nero.
  - (2) Some see it as referring to difficulty in general  
**2 Timothy 4:18** – “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
  - (3) But Paul could have also been talking about Satan  
**1 Peter 5:8** – “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”
  - (4) Satan will accuse you and tempt you. He will seek to discourage you and if it were possible, destroy you.  
**1 Peter 5:10-11** – “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. <sup>11</sup> To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

#### Conclusion:

1. God has ordained every circumstance of your life and then commands, “Follow Me.” But He has promised His presence. He will keep you to the end.  
 William Hendriksen – “The man of trust and prayer has entered that impregnable citadel from which no one can dislodge him; and the name of that fortress is Christ Jesus.”
2. We have wonderful freedom. We must take advantage of it. But if it is lost, we must see new opportunities of service to Christ. We have many witnesses who have gone before us. Joseph, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – and countless martyrs.