



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Part 7 *Paul Completes His Third Missionary Journey*

Acts 21:1-17

April 6, 2008

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- In **Acts 19:21**, Luke writes, “Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”
- Then, while the Apostle prepared to leave Ephesus, Luke records Paul saying, in **Acts 20:22-23**, “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.”
- Several points are certainly clear in these passages leading up to Chapter 21:
 - The Holy Spirit is leading Paul to Jerusalem;
 - Paul is resolved to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and travel to Jerusalem [hopefully in time to celebrate Pentecost];
 - Paul realizes that persecution awaits him in the holy city; yet, he presses on still.
- To the astute reader, the parallels, here, between the final stages of Jesus’ ministry and the final stages of Paul’s are inescapable. As John Stott notes, there are at least seven powerful parallels between the final stages in the life of Jesus, and those of the Apostle Paul:
 - 1.) Just like Jesus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem with a group of disciples (Acts 20:4; Luke 10:38);
 - 2.) Just like Jesus, Paul was opposed by hostile Jews who plotted against his life (Acts 20:3, 19; Luke 6:7, 11; 11:53-54; 22:1-2);
 - 3.) Just like Jesus, Paul made or received three successive predictions of his ‘passion’ or sufferings (20:22-23; 21:4, 11; Luke 12:50; 22:19; 23:46); these visions included being handed over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11; Luke 18:32);
 - 4.) Just like Jesus Paul declared his readiness to lay down his life (20:24; 21:13; Luke 12:50; 22:19; 33:46);
 - 5.) Like Jesus, Luke was determined to complete his ministry and not be deflected from it (20:24; 21:13; Luke 9:51);
 - 6.) Like Jesus Paul expressed his abandonment to the will of God (21:14; Luke 22:42);
 - 7.) Paul, like Jesus, set His face [“like flint”] to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51).
- Luke’s purpose, certainly, in the Book of Acts, is to demonstrate the “closeness” of Paul and Jesus. Paul had purposed to live a life of obedience, being conformed to the image of Christ.

- ❑ Many Christians state that this is their desire as well. However, to “look like Jesus” also involves, as Paul learned, being treated like Christ. This involves passion and resolution. Yet, it also involves suffering.
- ❑ It is these two characteristics that so few modern believers exhibit – passion and the willingness to suffer for Christ’s sake. Yet, because Paul demonstrated both in his life, his influence, for the sake of Christ, is still felt today.

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- ❑ Here, in this passage, Paul will finally arrive back in Jerusalem.
- ❑ What is incredible is that, even as his fate in Jerusalem becomes clearer and clearer [he will be persecuted], he never despairs, but rather remains passionate about his mission, strengthening other believers along the way.
- ❑ This is what makes the last stages of Christ’s [and Paul’s] life all the more amazing – even while He knew clearly what would happen to Him, he remained steadfast and resolved to obey the will of the Father.
- ❑ For nearly all of us today, to know of such impending persecution and suffering would lead us to the brink of utter despair or a nervous breakdown; yet, for our Lord and the Apostle Paul, they pressed on with even greater passion.

I. Paul Departs Ephesus for Jerusalem
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- ❑ Luke begins Chapter 21, by stating, in **Verse 1**, “When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;”
 - The Apostle’s entourage, here, leaves Miletus in hopes of reaching Jerusalem by Pentecost.
 - As was clear at the end of Chapter 20, this was a very emotional parting for all involved. Luke states that there was grieving and weeping as Paul departed the Ephesian elders.
 - In fact, here in 21:1, Luke states that, literally, “we *tore* ourselves away from them.”
- ❑ From Miletus, the band traveled some forty miles to the island of Cos. This island was the location of the famous medical school begun by Hippocrates in the fifth century, B.C.
- ❑ From there, the group traveled ninety miles to the city of Rhodes [which had been founded in 408, B.C.], and then over sixty more miles to Patara.

- ❑ At this point, in **Verse 2**, Paul and his entourage board a large vessel and sail on the open water toward Phoenicia.
- ❑ They pass, in **Verse 3**, within site of Cyprus and eventually arrive at the city of Tyre in Syria.
 - The journey from Patara to Tyre is over four hundred miles. According to ancient sources [Xenophon of Ephesus, *Eph. Tale* 1.11-12 and 1.14.6; and John Chrysostom, *Hom. Acts* 45] the trip took anywhere from three to five days.
 - The ancient city of Tyre sat one hundred (100) miles north of Jerusalem in the nation of Syria.
 - According to Luke, Paul remained in Tyre for a full week – seven days.
 - Once at Tyre, the ship unloaded its cargo, boarded a new load and prepared to set sail once again.
- ❑ At this point in the Book of Acts, Syria had had a Christian presence for about twenty years. Likely, the Christians arrived in Tyre as a result of the dispersion of the Hellenists out of Jerusalem following the death of Stephen [Acts 11:19].
- ❑ This is likely the first time that Paul had met with this group of Christians; however, after only a week, it is clear that he had developed a close bond with them.
- ❑ In fact, Luke makes it quite clear that, **“they [the Syrian Christians] kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.”**
 - As will be seen later, it the Holy Spirit would not have “inspired” these brethren to urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem.
 - Rather, what seems rather clear is that the Holy Spirit revealed to them, perhaps through a prophet, that Paul would face great persecution in Jerusalem.
 - In response, then, to this Spirit-wrought knowledge, the people of Tyre [who had quickly developed a love for the Apostle Paul] urged him not to go to Jerusalem.
- ❑ At the end of the week, the group of Syrian Christians, along with their entire families, escorted Paul, Luke and their entourage out of the city. They knelt on “a well-known, smooth beach” and bided each other farewell.
 - This scene demonstrates at least two powerful truths:
 - Even though Paul had known these brothers and sisters in Christ only a week, he had developed a great bond with him. The reason for this is most certainly that the bond of Christ is the greatest bond that humans can know. Few things are sweeter than fellowship [and even suffering] with other believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Secondly, the fellowship of the Syrian Christians served to strengthen Paul as he continued his travels closer to Jerusalem. One might wonder how Paul kept his sanity, knowing he would face such suffering; yet, God in his grace, provided Paul with sweet Christian fellowship during each step of this journey. Christian fellowship is, indeed, one of the greatest gifts of God [Tragically, too few of us today realize this].
- After setting sail from Tyre, the group arrived, in **Verse 7**, at Ptolemais. Ptolemais rested on the southern coast of Phoenicia, approximately twenty-five miles south of Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea. The city was nearly eighty miles to the north of Jerusalem, and it had large Jewish and Christian communities.
- Ptolemais was known in Old Testament times as the city of Acco (Judges 1:31). Furthermore, it later becomes known, in the Middle Ages, as Acre. Today, the city is known by its Old Testament name of Acco.
- After landing at Ptolemais, Paul and his team remain for a day, before traveling, in **Verse 8**, [quite possibly by boat once again] south to Caesarea. This city was also known as Caesarea Maritima, and sat about forty miles south of Ptolemais.
- Caesarea was technically a part of Judea, and was considered the major port city south of Mt. Carmel. It contained four harbors and was one of the great engineering achievements of King Herod the Great who founded the city.

II. Paul Arrives in Caesarea

- Once in Caesarea, Paul, in **Verse 8**, enters the house of Philip the evangelist, “who was one of the Seven.”
 - Philip had earned the reputation and title of “Evangelist”, in part most certainly, because of his work in Samaria in Acts 8. The term “evangelist” is used by Paul in Ephesians 4:1 [with respect to the *gift*] and in 2 Timothy 4:5 [with respect to Timothy himself].
 - Not only this, but he was one of the “Seven” Hellenists [Greek-speaking Jews] chosen in Acts 6:5 for the purpose of distributing food to the Hellenistic widows.
- Luke adds, in **Verse 9**, that Philip “had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.”
 - Philip had settled here, in Caesarea, some twenty years earlier (Acts 8:40).
 - These were four unmarried women who possessed the first-century gift of prophecy.
 - This should not come as a great surprise to the modern reader; for, Luke states, in Acts 2:17-18, that the gift of prophecy was given to both men and women.

- Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 11:5 describes the manner in which women would have prophesied in the church.
- Also, in his Gospel, Luke even mentions Anna, a woman who prophesied [Luke 2:36-38].
- Luke gives no additional information concerning either Stephen or his daughters.

<p>a. The Prophet Agabus Foretells of Paul’s Persecution in Jerusalem</p>
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- Luke, then, states, in **Verse 10**, that “as we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.”
 - This is most certainly the same Agabus Luke mentions in Acts 11:27-30.
- Then, in **Verse 11**, Luke writes, “And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”
 - This manner of prophesying was reminiscent of several Old Testament examples:
 - Ahijah the Shilonite tore his new cloak into twelve pieces in front of Jeroboam in order to demonstrate the tearing apart of Solomon’s united kingdom (1 Kings 11:29-31)
 - Isaiah going around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush, “so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.” (Isaiah 20:2-4)
 - Ezekiel prophesied the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem by acting as though he was laying siege to a replica of the city [Ezekiel 4:1-8].
 - See also Jeremiah 13:1-11; 19:1, 13; 27:1-22; and Hosea 1:2.
 - The belt used by Agabus would not have been short, for “to bind himself hand and foot with such a girdle would have been an acrobatic performance.” Ernest Haenchen
 - Consequently, it must have been “a long piece of cloth which was worn as a girdle.” John Stott
 - Darrell Bock writes, “The translation refers to a ‘belt,’ which may well be a money belt. Paul may well have kept in it some of the Jerusalem collection money he was gathering.”

- The words of Agabus are reminiscent of the prediction of Jesus Himself, concerning His own death, in **Luke 18:32** (Matthew 20:18-19; Mark 10:33).
- **This prophecy of Agabus could have hardly been any more clear and vivid.**
- “The action was as much part of the prophecy as the spoken word: both together communicated the effective and self-fulfilling word of God (Isaiah 55:11).”
F.F. Bruce

b. The People Beg Paul not to go to Jerusalem

- Upon hearing the prophecy of Agabus, Luke writes, in **Verse 12**, “When we heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.”
- This point of Luke’s is quite interesting. In fact, he *includes himself* in the number of those pleading with Paul not to go to Jerusalem.
- Yet, they had all, no doubt, heard the testimony of Paul...that **he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem.**
- Furthermore, they had heard the words of Jesus [if not in person, through the testimony of the apostles], who had clearly said [**John 16:33**], “In the world you have tribulation...” and in **John 15:18-20**, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...”
- Finally, they had all witnessed the **very clear** prophecy of Agabus. The most basic understanding and interpretation of this prophecy was **not** that Paul should not go to Jerusalem; but, rather, that *when* he goes, he will face persecution.
- Yet, because of the love that the Caesarean Christians had for Paul, they sought to persuade Paul to reconsider his calling to travel up to Jerusalem.
- In fact, one can imagine what type of arguments they may have used.
- They probably attempted to use human reason to persuade Paul, saying, “Paul, if you go to Jerusalem and are persecuted, you will no longer be able to proclaim the Gospel. Consider how much more effective you could be if you stayed outside of Jerusalem and could preach throughout the Jewish and Gentile worlds! Have you considered another missionary journey!”

- If they were anything like us today [which they most certainly were!], they may have even used Scripture [Jeremiah 29:11, for example] – albeit out of context! – in an attempt to persuade Paul to avoid Jerusalem.
 - They may have said, “Paul, the LORD loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!”
 - “The LORD wants to bless you, Paul, not curse you. He wants to prosper you and give you victory! The LORD wants you to succeed in all you do! He would never want you to suffer like that!”
 - Yet, from this, we see that even Christians in the first century did not always “get it” at first.
 - **They were, no doubt, well-meaning; yet, unbiblical, at times, in their understanding and expectations concerning the nature of the Christian life to which God has called us.**
 - Darrell Bock correctly asserts that “well-intentioned people can be wrong about what God desires.”

c. Paul Demonstrates his Resolve to go to Jerusalem

- Then, in response to the peoples’ pleading, Luke writes, in **Verses 13-14**, “Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, ‘The will of the Lord be done!’”
 - This situation provided Paul with the opportunity to demonstrate the true calling and resolve of a Christian, in front of others who did not fully understand the nature of life to which our LORD has called us.”
 - In fact, the verbiage that Paul used was powerfully vivid. For he says, “What are you doing, weeping and *breaking my heart?*”
 - The verb used here, translated, “*breaking* [my heart]” is often used for beating clothes in order to clean them.
 - It is an intense verb that accurately reflects the emotions of Paul, who feels as though the people are not supporting the purpose to which the LORD has called Paul; rather, they are “beating his emotions.”
 - Interestingly, the words of Paul are very similar to the words of Peter in Luke 22:33, when he says to the LORD Jesus Christ, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!”

- Paul may have even reminded the brethren of his specific calling to go to Jerusalem:
- See **Acts 19:21**, “Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”
- **Acts 20:22-23**, “And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.”

d. The People Fall Silent

- After Paul admonishes the Caesarean Christians, Luke writes, “And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, ‘The will of the Lord be done!’”
 - Few things mark a fundamental change in humans than silence!
 - What a powerful testimony Paul had proven to be with regard to God’s plan for his life!
 - Paul’s resolve and commitment to God’s calling had now powerfully changed these growing Christians.
 - So poignant were Paul’s words, that the people **fell silent**. They had stopped their vain attempts to persuade Paul. They had simply “given up” and realized that God’s will must be done.
 - In fact, it is certainly no coincidence that, through the testimony of the Apostle Paul, the people had gone from “fighting against” the will of God to declaring words that echo the words of Christ – **“The will of the Lord be done!”**
 - Just as Christ had asked the Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane, “If You are willing, remove this cup from Me...” Then, he said, “yet not My will, but Yours be done!” [Luke 22:42]...So the Caesarean Christians “gave up” and declared, “The will of the Lord be done!”
 - In other words, the LORD used Paul’s resolve as the means to transform the perspective of His people!
 - Even Peter will later write, in **1 Peter 4:12-14**: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

III. Paul Arrives in Jerusalem

- ❑ Finally, in **Verses 15-17**, Paul arrives in Jerusalem.
- ❑ Jerusalem is sixty-four miles from Caesarea – about a three day journey on foot.
- ❑ It appears that somewhere, in a small town or village between Caesarea and Jerusalem, Paul stops at a disciples home to lodge – Mnason of Cyprus.
- ❑ After lodging in the home of Mnason, Paul continued on to Jerusalem.
- ❑ Luke, then, makes it clear that Paul is well-received by fellow Christians in Jerusalem. He writes, in **Verse 17**, “the brethren received us gladly.”

- ❑ In conclusion, as we examine the end of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, several points, pertaining the will and leading of God in our lives, are clear: He is **CLEAR**, **CONSISTENT**, and **TRUTHFUL**.

1. The first point we see here, in Acts 21 is that the LORD is always **CLEAR**.

- One of the primary points which the Reformers emphasized, when attacking the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, was that the Scriptures are clear.
- This is often referred to as the doctrine of the *perspicuity* of Scripture.
- So it was with Paul. The Spirit had *clearly* called him to follow in Christ’s footsteps into Jerusalem in order to suffer as His LORD did, as a testimony to Christians of all times.
- In fact, the Spirit had revealed this to the Syrian Christians in Verse 4.
- The Holy Spirit had also *clearly* revealed this through Agabus.
- **Yet, the people still protested!**

• However, their protesting did not spring from confusion as to what the LORD was doing; but, rather, their objections arose because the LORD’s clearly-revealed will stood in contrast to what they wanted!

- Thus, we often object to the LORD’s will by seeking to avoid the CLEAR commands of Scripture revealed in God’s will.

- We attempt to “rationalize” and “allegorize” Scripture to the point that it becomes meaningless. We do this, not because we are confused by the Scriptures, but because we do not like what they say!
2. The second aspect that we see here is that, with respect to the leading of the LORD in Paul’s life, He [the LORD] was always CONSISTENT.
- Going back to Acts 19:21 and 20:22-23, the Holy Spirit was leading Paul to Jerusalem.
 - Never did the LORD contradict Himself on this point.
 - However, there seems to be a bit of confusion, given Acts 21:4. Here, while Paul was in Syria, the Christians their “...kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.”
 - The question then becomes, “How could the Holy Spirit urge the people to tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, when, earlier, it appears that it is the Person of the Holy Spirit who is leading Paul there?”
 - The answer seems quite simple: The Syrian Christians were, indeed, Spirit-indwelt believers. They were “in the Spirit.” In fact, it appears that there was likely a prophet among them who would have prophesied of Paul’s sufferings in Jerusalem.
 - However, upon hearing of his persecution, they reacted to this by urging him not to go.
 - In other words, the revelation of Paul’s sufferings in Jerusalem was Spirit-wrought; yet, their personal urgings were not.
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- The application of this today is profound.
 - I often here people say, “**The Holy Spirit told me...**”
 - Yet, what the individual claims the Holy Spirit said is independent of, and even at times, contradictory to the clear teaching of Scripture.
 - Yet, the Holy Spirit will ALWAYS act in a way that is consistent with God’s Word.
3. Finally, God is always TRUTHFUL with us!
- In an age where people are crying out for authenticity, God is ALWAYS Truthful with us.

- The reason is because HE IS TRUTH!
- Even when the truth is not what we want to hear, God speaks it!
- However, at the end of the day, this truth [that God is truthful] is most comforting.
- We know, then, that we can trust God. What he says is always true.
- He does not seek to flatter us in order to get something from us. Rather, He speaks the truth for our good and His glory!
- This is why the words of the prophet Agabus are so refreshing! They may present a difficult picture, but it is true!

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- Tragically, today, the Church is gripped by false health, wealth, and prosperity teaching.
- It may tickle the ears and makes us initially feel good, but it is a lie. Ultimately, it leads to a spiritually impotent life and heartache and despair. This is because **what people are so often told by the Church is simply not true.**
- We are told that God wants us to live a life without struggle; yet, we still struggle. We struggle in our relationships, in our marriages, financially; yet, we are still told that God wants us to be “free” from such struggles.
- **Then, we come to Scripture, and we read it!**
- When we do this, we realize that the LORD actually promises difficulties in this world...He promises persecution and suffering...He promises struggles.
- Yet, we, like the Apostle Paul, can face these with joy! Paul does, indeed, say, “If you desire to live a godly life, you will be persecuted.”
- Even Christ says, “In the world you will have tribulation.” He is HONEST and TRUTHFUL with us. Yet, the hope comes, not from “worldly” happiness, through material possessions; but, rather, through Christ.
- For, as Jesus, Himself states, in John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, so that *in Me* you may have peace.”
- Christ, not the world, is the source of our peace, hope, and joy!