

PAUL'S LEGACY (2)

ACTS 21



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Paul's Legacy (2): Acts 21
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Introduction to Acts 21

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem is both glorious and disastrous – or, so it would seem.

He has much good news to bring concerning the ongoing work of Christ, but enemies are lurking. Paul, under advisement by the elders of Jerusalem, hoped to placate his enemies by demonstrating that he did not despise Jewish laws and traditions. But the effort blew up in his face.

Agabus' prophesy comes to fulfillment as Paul is beaten, taken captive, and set to be flogged. But the never-say-die apostle still has a few trump cards left in his hand, as we shall see.

There is much for us to learn here about courage, faithfulness, and being a witness to Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Warnings and Farewells

Pray Psalm 26.8-12.

LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house,
And the place where Your glory dwells.
Do not gather my soul with sinners,
Nor my life with bloodthirsty men,
In whose hands *is* a sinister scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.
But as for me, I will walk in my integrity;
Redeem me and be merciful to me.
My foot stands in an even place;
In the congregations I will bless the LORD.

Sing Psalm 26.8-12.

(Aberystwyth: *Jesus, Lover of My Soul*)

Lord, I love Your dwelling-place, there where all Your glory shines.
Keep my soul before Your face, lest for sinful way it pine.
As for me, in righteousness, I shall walk on level ground.
Save me, Lord, renew and bless! Let me with Your Church be found!

Read and meditate on Acts 21.1-6.

Preparation

1. What did Paul find in Tyre?
2. What did the disciples tell him?

Meditation

Luke slows down the story now to let the drama build. He remarks each stop along the way (vv. 1-3), mentions the seven-day stay in Tyre (v. 4), and hints (the mention of Syria, v. 3) that home in Antioch was close, though it would not be gained at this time. He wants us to enter the uncertainty, sadness, and yet, the courage and conviction of the apostle Paul as he headed for what he was now certain would be a bad situation in Jerusalem.

The believers in Tyre urged Paul not to go there (v. 4), undoubtedly because, as with the elders in Ephesus, he had shared his heart concerning what he was expecting. We notice that their words were informed (Greek: “kept saying to”) by the Spirit of God. Not to deter Paul, however; quite the opposite.

Jesus had said that, as the Good Shepherd, He laid down His life for His sheep (Jn. 10.11). He expects the same of every shepherd appointed to watch over the flocks of the Lord. Sometimes this requires sacrifices – time, convenience, family, work, friendships. But for God’s flocks to rest secure in Him, His shepherds need to follow Paul as he followed Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1; cf. 2 Cor. 12.15).

The Kingdom of God expands on earth as it is in heaven, bringing righteousness, peace, and joy to all who enter and abide in it. However, it also provokes trials and tribulations because it can be an irritant to those who prefer to be their own gods rather than know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. We need to be prepared for this, but not deterred by it in our calling or witness.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

In Proverbs 11.14 we read: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." How do we reconcile this passage with Paul's dismissal of all the warnings he received about not going to Jerusalem? Paul said, "...the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me" (Acts 20.23). And Luke records that, "They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21.4).

There are times in our lives when we seek counsel from other believers about questions we are facing. Perhaps serious things about a job change, or a move to another city, or about a marriage proposal, or where to give a tithe, or how to navigate a health issue. The operative issue here is that because of uncertainty, *we seek* the counsel. And it is very often wise to do so.

But Paul was not seeking counsel from anyone about what he knew for certain the Lord had called him to do. Just like Jesus, Who assuredly knew what He was facing, "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9.51). Jesus was to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had foretold: "For the Lord GOD will help Me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed." (Is. 50.7)

When we can say with Job: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19.25-27), and with Paul: "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1.12), when we also believe those things with our whole heart, then we will be able to set our faces like flint to follow the Lord Jesus wherever He leads us. Regardless of any appreciated, but unsolicited warning.

For reflection

1. The believers who tried to dissuade Paul did so out of love for him. But is the love others have for us to be heeded over the clear leading of the Lord? Explain.
2. How can you know for sure what the Lord is leading you to do on any given day (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17; Matt. 28.18-20; Matt. 6.33)?
3. We all need counselors in our life. Who counsels you about the Lord's will for your walk with and work for Him? Have you thanked them recently? Have you thanked God for them?

*Luke reckoneth up briefly the course of his sailing; and that not only to win credit to the history, that we may know what was done in every place, but that the readers may weigh with themselves the invincible and heroic fortitude which was in Paul, who would rather be tossed and troubled with such long, unlevel, and troublesome journeys, that he might serve Christ, than provide for his own quietness. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 21.1-6**

Pray Psalm 26.1-7.

Commit your day to the Lord. Focus on encouraging others in Him. Seek His help and Presence to resist temptation and abide in His Word. Pray for those you expect to see today.

Sing Psalm 26.1-7.

(Aberystwyth: Jesus, Lover of My Soul)

Vindicate me, Lord on high; I have walked within Your Word.
Never wav'ring, though I sigh, I have trusted You, O Lord!
Prove me, Lord, prove even me! Test my heart and try my mind.
Let Your steadfast mercy be in the path for me to find.

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Men of falsehood shall not sit in my presence, nor will I
suffer any hypocrite to find favor in my eye.
All the wicked I abhor; 'round Your altar let me stand,
loudly singing evermore of Your gracious, mighty hand.

2 Undeterred

Pray Psalm 124.6-8.

Blessed *be* the LORD,
Who has not given us as prey to their teeth.
Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;
The snare is broken, and we have escaped.
Our help *is* in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.

Sing Psalm 124.6-8.

(Neumark: [*If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*](#))

Blest be the Lord who has not given us to our foes to be devoured.
We shall escape and rise to heaven by His eternal grace and power.
Refrain v. 8
Our help is in Your Name, O Lord, Who made creation by Your Word.

Read Acts 21.1-14; meditate on verses 7-14.

Preparation

1. Where did Paul and his companions stay for many days?
2. Of what did Agabus warn Paul?

Meditation

Luke continues slowing down the trip to Jerusalem, as he relates Paul's southward movement from Tyre to Caesarea (v. 7), and their stay there with Philip "many days" (v. 8). We feel the drama building to a pre-denouement peak with the arrival of Agabus and his terrifying word of warning (v. 11). The Holy Spirit clearly revealed to Agabus that Paul would be arrested by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles. But was that prophetic word contrary to Paul's reason for going to Jerusalem?

Not at all, even though the brethren and those in Caesarea seemed to have taken it so (v. 12). Paul was carrying a gift from many churches to relieve the suffering of the Church in Judea (Rom. 15.25, 26). Ministering to God's people took priority over personal safety or convenience for Paul. Maintaining oneness among the many disparate congregations of believers was a focus of Paul's ministry wherever he went. He would not risk that oneness by departing from his appointed task, come what may.

Paul was undeterred, and he rebuked his friends mildly, because he had long ago made up his mind that if he had to die for the Gospel, so be it (v. 13). Paul was making his way to Jerusalem, stopping frequently to meet with and encourage other believers – many of them the fruit of his ministry. Luke was building the drama toward the events in Jerusalem, but we're also learning something about the ongoing work of Christ: Despite continuous opposition, the Gospel had taken root in many places, and the believers had a strong sense of oneness in the Lord. And this too is part of Paul's legacy to future generations.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116.15).

The Lord has blessed our family in so many ways, not the least of which is an abundance of people. We have four children, fourteen grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Two dear grandchildren are already in heaven—one lost through miscarriage and the other in an accident. Even though they are no longer residents

of earth, they are still very much our beloved and remembered family members. As are both sets of our departed parents and a brother.

In Acts 21.8 we read of Paul's visit to Philip the evangelist. One of "the seven." And who might these seven be? They are the original group of deacons chosen by the early church to serve the Hellenist widows. The church was told to "seek out seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" to be appointed over this generous and loving task (Acts 6.3). And the men they chose were: Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, and Stephen (Acts 6.5). Our brother Stephen, by this point in time, had already been martyred by stoning; but he was still counted: one of the seven.

We will remember also, that our brother Paul tended to the clothes removed by the murderers so they wouldn't get dirty. And he consented to Stephen's death (Acts 7.58; 8.1).

This was a really loaded visit! So much happening, so many memories swirling, but the grace of God ruled supremely over the feelings of everyone involved. God changes hearts and minds. There is no doubt about it. We are all new creations in Him (2 Cor. 5.17). And while this visit could have conjured up feelings of anger and remorse over the past, I don't think it did at all. But what it undoubtedly did kindle was a loving memory of Stephen. One of the seven.

Jesus gave us a special way to remember Him, because He knew this to be an important function of our minds and hearts. "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'" (Lk. 22.19, 20). "This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me" (1Cor. 11.25).

All these remembered saints are "cheering us on", as many have observed: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of [cheering] witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus..." (Heb. 12.1, 2). And remembering. And thus, being encouraged by their examples.

"Undeterred."

For reflection

1. Why is it important that we remember our connections with believers from previous days?
2. What's the key to forgiving those who have offended against us in the past?
3. How can daily Scripture reading and prayer help us to gain the kind of "undeterred" vision that Paul had?

When we see trouble coming, it becomes us to say, not only, The will of the Lord must be done, and there is no remedy; but, Let the will of the Lord be done; for his will is his wisdom, and he doeth all according to the counsel of it. When a trouble is come, this must allay our griefs, that the will of the Lord is done; when we see it coming, this must silence our fears, that the will of the Lord shall be done; and we ought to say, Amen, let it be done. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 21.8-18

Pray Psalm 124.1-5.

We cannot know in advance what temptations or trials we may face. But, like Paul, if we keep our eyes on Jesus and His calling, we can count on Him to be on our side and buoy us through every challenge. Commit yourself afresh to the Lord, and call on Him to make His Presence with you known throughout the day.

Sing Psalm 124.1-5, 8.

(Neumark: [*If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*](#))

If You had not been with us, Jesus – let all who love You say with pride –

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When foes rose up to fright and seize us, they would have swallowed us alive!

Refrain v. 8

Our help is in Your Name, O Lord, Who made creation by Your Word.

When all their anger flared against us, the flood would us have swept away.

Torrents and waters sore had drenched us, were not You all our hope and stay!

Refrain

3 Much to Tell

Pray Psalm 57.9-11.

I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.
For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory *be* above all the earth.

Sing Psalm 57.9-11.

(Faben: [*Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*](#))

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!
For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Read Acts 21.1-19; meditate on verses 15-19.

Preparation

1. How were Paul and his team received in Jerusalem?
2. What Paul do once he arrived there?

Meditation

Luke continues to slow down the action: They “packed up” (v. 15)? He hasn’t said that before, although they’d done it plenty of times, and it seems like a meaningless detail. But Luke’s just tapping the brakes a bit more to let the sense of anticipation build in us, the readers. Luke wants us to feel more of what Paul and his team were probably feeling as they made their way to Jerusalem.

We note that “some of the disciples” from Caesarea, along with Mnason of Cyprus (v. 16: recall that Cyprus was Paul’s first stop as a missionary), accompanied Paul and his team. They were as interested and concerned as we are, and Luke uses this detail once again to build the drama of the story.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul and his companions were received with gladness (v. 17). Whew! That breaks the tension a bit. Here, as in Philip’s home in Caesarea, the family of Jesus rejoiced to receive Paul, who had previously ravaged them. This is “forgive and forget” at a very high level. Only grace can accomplish this.

Paul’s first task in Jerusalem was to greet the Church and report to the leaders how God had blessed their decision concerning the Gentiles (Acts 15) through his ministry (vv. 18, 19). And what a great story he had to tell! Not only more believers and churches throughout Asia, and not just Jews but Gentiles as well, also into Greece; and he delivered their financial gift to relieve the family members in Judea!

Here we see the living Body of Christ. Rejoicing in distant new believers. Praising and thanking God for their concern. Sensing the growing scope and breadth and unity of the Body of Christ. Experiencing the power of the Kingdom of God. Sharing in the legacy of the apostle Paul.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“We packed and went up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21.15).

There is a finality here that we haven't seen before. Paul was an itinerant evangelist who had a good bit of life left in him. However, he knew that he would not come this way again. "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more" (Acts 20:25).

There is an essence of otherworldliness to following Christ, and we must embrace it. It is not easy to do because it is contrary to our human nature. We love home. We love security. We thrive on family. And yet. We have been called to another love. Another King. Another way of thinking about all these things.

When Jesus was journeying, on the road to somewhere new to share the Good News of salvation, someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." But Jesus, knowing that this would be a sticking point for all His followers present and future, said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then to double down on the truth of this He said to another listener, "Follow Me." But this person responded, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus responded to this excuse, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." Then another person thought they had it all nailed down tightly by saying, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." Nice try. "But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'" (Lk. 9:57-62)

And because of this teaching we have forebears like Peter and Barnabas and Silas and Paul and Luke and Stephen and Philip and Timothy and all the myriad disciples of Jesus Christ, through the ages, whose Personal Mission Field took precedence over their personal preferences and security.

Have we packed up and left for our Jerusalem? (Acts 21:15)

Do we trust God in the same way these people did? (Prov. 3:5, 6; Acts 20:24) Is He our first love? (Rev. 2:4)

Joshua summed up our calling as Christians like this: "But take careful heed to do the commandment of the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Josh. 22:5).

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage" (Ps. 84:5).

"Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Ps. 119:54).

Our packing and pilgrimage may go no further than our front door, but if our hearts are set on following Jesus, we can be useful, and travel everywhere through prayer and supplication (Phil. 4:6): "...the prayer of the upright is His delight" (Prov. 15:8); "...golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8).

We will have much to tell when we pack up, don't look back, and set out to follow Jesus (Acts 21:19).

For reflection

1. Have you "packed up" this world for Jesus? Explain.
2. The believers in Acts all seem like one big happy family. How do you think they managed that?
3. What do you have to tell about Jesus? To whom will you tell it today?

The evidence of how God changed the lives of Gentiles was presented to the Christians in Jerusalem. The strongest evidence was the Gentile believers themselves who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. At this time, Paul may have also given the money he had been collecting from the Gentile Christians (11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1). The love the Gentiles expressed to their suffering Jewish brethren was a mark of their genuine conversion. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts

21.19

Pray Psalm 57.1-8.

Pray about the day ahead, and how you may glorify God in it. Seek His protection against the devil and all temptation, and His strength to endure any trial. Pray that He will give you mercy and grace sufficient for all your needs, and thank Him abundantly for His Presence with you always.

Sing Psalm 47.2-8.

(Fabien: [*Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*](#))

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Send Your truth and lovingkindness; raging lions seek my soul.
Threats and sland'rous words without rest they against me fiercely roll.
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.
Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.
Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!
Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

4 Paul and the Law

Pray Psalm 19.12-14.

Who can understand *his* errors?
Cleanse me from secret *faults*.
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Sing Psalm 19.12-14.

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)
Who, Lord, can know his errors? Oh, keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
Oh, let my thoughts, let all my words before Your glorious sight
be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right.

Read Acts 21.1-26; meditate on verses 20-26.

Preparation

1. What did Paul agree to do?
2. Why did he agree to do this?

Meditation

The elders in Jerusalem knew that what the Jews were saying about Paul was not true (vv. 20, 21, 24). Paul was not telling Jews not to circumcise their children or to abandon their traditions. Nevertheless, James and the brethren wisely believed that some condescension to Jewish sentiments was appropriate, and Paul agreed. To the best of our ability, without compromising the Gospel, we must be ready to meet people where they are.

Don't read anything negative or paternalistic into that word *condescension*. Jesus con(*with*) descended (*came down among*) to us in order to lift us up to the Father, and we recognize that as a supreme gesture of love. The elders and Paul hoped he might be able to do the same. But there are no guarantees.

Paul was not obligated to submit to the ceremonial laws or traditions of the Jews. He understood what the writer of Hebrews would later elaborate in detail, that, with the coming of the great High Priest, these laws had been abrogated (Heb. 7-9). But submitting to them was not sinful, at least, not to the extent Paul did (cf. Num. 6.2, 13, 18). To offer a sacrifice would have been sinful because Jesus is the final sacrifice; but submitting to a vow and a period of separation for the purpose of holiness is perfectly acceptable, especially within this context. As Paul showed in Acts 17, we can and should meet people "on their turf" to the extent that we can do so without violating the Gospel or the Law of God.

Paul kept the Law of God and instructed us to do so (cf. Rom. 3.31). When the Law is rightly understood no contradiction exists between it and the Gospel.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul had been warned by his friends in many cities not to go to Jerusalem because trouble awaited him there. Ironically – and tragically – that trouble would come from within the very community who should have perceived the truth of Paul's message – those who believed in God and honored the Law which Paul also honored (v. 11). Sadly, persecution and trouble can also arise from within the ranks of those who should share our views.

David understood this, and Jesus, and Paul, and all those who are persecuted, identify with his prayer: “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (Ps. 55.12-14).

But, as Solomon said, “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1.9).

Church history shows us that bad things have happened to believers from within the ranks of their fellow Christians. We see that already in the book of Acts (15.1 2)! Many of us know from personal experience the cruelty that can be perpetrated by those we were together with in the house of God. We must guard our hearts against becoming a source of trouble, keeping our affections focused on Jesus and His love, and not allowing them to lapse into mere self-interest (2 Cor. 6.12). Schisms, blame-laying, gossip, jealousy – Paul knew them all, and we will, too. But remember what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said about the inevitability of sin: “Let that come, if it must come, only not by me!”

Such problems will not occur if we are filled with the Holy Spirit's power to live out the fruits of His personality in: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5.22, 23). Paul's problems came both by those who did not have the Spirit, and throughout his ministry by those who claimed they did (cf. Gal. 1.6-9).

We must at all times strive to maintain love: “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13.1). How? “For this very reason, giving all diligence, add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Pet. 1.5-7).

There is no room for hatred or jealousy when our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul's attempt at peacemaking was indeed a gesture of love; much to be admired and emulated. But like Jesus – and like many other believers – he was attacked despite his loving gesture.

Problems and injustices will come; but we must hold on to love and make sure that, when troubles come, they do so “not by me.”

For reflection

1. What causes gossip, division, jealousy, and other problems in local churches? How can you keep from being party to such things?
2. Paul showed his love for God and his neighbor (the Jews in Jerusalem) by keeping the Law. What should we learn from him about the role of God's Law in our lives?
3. What does it mean for you to “Let brotherly love continue” in your Personal Mission Field? In your church?

The religion Paul preached, tended not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. He preached Christ, the end of the law for righteousness, and repentance and faith, in which we are to make great use of the law. Matthew Henry (1662-1714),

Commentary on Acts 21.19-26

Pray Psalm 19.7-11.

Praise and thank God for all His Word – the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation. Ask Him to give you a greater hunger for His Word and greater delight in reading and studying it.

Sing Psalm 19.7-11.

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
the simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

5 Hatred and Lies

Pray Psalm 85.4-6.

Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.
Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?
Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?

Sing Psalm 85.4-6.

(Lyons: [*O Worship the King*](#))

Restore us, O God, renew us in peace, and cause all Your wrath against us to cease.
Will You evermore all Your wrath to us show? Revive us that we may Your joy again know.

Read Acts 21.1-36, meditate on verses 27-36.

Preparation

1. What was said about Paul?
2. How was Paul rescued from the mob?

Meditation

The “Jews from Asia” may have been from any of the cities where Paul had ministered, perhaps Ephesus (since they recognized Trophimus the Ephesian, v. 27). They found Paul in the temple and, shouting lies and pointing fingers, provoked the mob to seize and beat him (vv. 27, 28, 30, 31).

By the time the Romans arrived, Paul was doubtless a bloody mess. The mob understood who’s in charge in Jerusalem – not the religious leaders but the guys with the swords. They kept shouting and demonstrating, but they left off beating the apostle (vv. 31, 32). The Romans, more reasonable perhaps, decided to isolate Paul so they could get at the truth of this situation (v. 33). Which they intended to do by flogging it out of him.

The amazing thing in this incident, which begins the denouement of the book of Acts, is the way Paul managed to keep his composure, as we shall see. This situation didn’t sneak up on Paul. He had factored it into the possibilities involved in going to Jerusalem, and doubtless prepared himself for it, so that, long before the event, he was thinking, praying, and strategizing how to respond.

Paul didn’t let past bad experiences – as in Lystra, Philippi, and elsewhere – keep him from pressing forward for Christ. He was not trapped in his past, but, looking to Christ and keeping His promises in view, Paul lived toward these (Phil. 3.7-14). Christians who live toward the future will know how to conduct themselves when it gets here, come what may.

Everything erupted into noise, violence, and irrationality as a mob formed and began beating Paul. Thank God for the Romans, eh? And for Roman citizenship for Paul, as we shall see. The goodness of God is in all the earth (Ps. 33.5), even, sometimes, in corrupt authoritarian governments (Rom. 13.1-4).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul went to Jerusalem, knowing that challenges awaited him there. He was trusting in Jesus’ promise that: “when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in

you” (Matt. 10.19, 20).

I'm sure he had thought through his response to the prediction of Agabus that he would be bound and given into the hands of the Gentiles (Acts 21.11). But humanly speaking, this scene must have been extremely disquieting and terrifying. “And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut” (Acts 21.30). Bang! Shut tight. He had been thrown to the wolves, who were viciously beating him.

You could have studied long and hard about big grizzly bears and how to handle a confrontation with one; but I imagine when you are looking into that big hairy toothy face, knowledge or no, it would be exceedingly frightening.

The same for Paul. And yet, what he wrote to the Philippian church was no doubt as true for him then as when he faced persecution: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4.6, 7). Peace, in these situations, does surpass all understanding because it is not a natural occurrence. It is extraordinary. And it is a gift from God.

Jonah must have felt the same way – the light of day shut off from him, surrounded in the deep, enclosed in the belly of that big fish. But he prayed: “The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple” (Jon. 2.5-7).

For all the saints past and present, God is our promised help in every situation of life: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling” (Ps. 46.1-4). “Be still and know that I AM GOD” (Ps. 46.10).

Even if the doors are shut on us.

For reflection

1. How should you prepare for situations where your faith is challenged?
2. Do you really believe God can provide the words you will need at such a time? Explain.
3. Why do you think the Gospel disturbs and troubles some people?

[The Jews from Asia] cry out as if they are in extreme danger and call on all to bring help, as if their whole religion is in peril. That lets us see how inflamed they were with fierce hatred against Paul, simply because in warning that the full and genuine truth is found in Christ, he was teaching that an end has been put to the figures of the Law. John Calvin (1509-1564) Commentary on Acts 21.27

Pray Psalm 85.7-13.

Call on the Lord to help you gain a greater measure of your salvation today. Thank Him for meeting your needs and being present with you always. Look to Him to guide your path and empower your work today.

Sing Psalm 87.7-13.

(Lyons: [O Worship the King](#))

Lord, show us Your love; restore us, we pray! And help us to hear the words that You say.

Paul's Legacy (2): Acts 21

Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand. We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined; both goodness and peace in Him do we find.
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst, and righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The Lord by His grace will give what is good; our land will produce abundance of food.
And righteousness will go before the Lord's face, and make of His footsteps a way in this place.

6 Hold on a Sec!

Pray Psalm 102.12-14.

But You, O LORD, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.
You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the set time, has come.
For Your servants take pleasure in her stones,
And show favor to her dust.

Sing Psalm 102.12-14.

(Leominster: [*Not What My Hands Have Done*](#))
But You, O Lord, abide forever in Your place.
Arise and stand on Zion's side and lavish us with grace!
Revive Your Church, O Lord! Let all her dust and stones
be strengthened by Your mighty Word, and compact be as one.
Read Acts 21.1-40; meditate on verses 37-40.

Preparation

1. Whom did the commander think Paul was?
2. What did Paul say about himself?

Meditation

So, bloodied, bruised, and borne away by Roman soldiers, Paul wanted to defend himself before his fellow Jews (v. 39). His heart for his people is evident. His civility toward the tribune is almost unbelievable. No ranting, no threats, no demanding his rights; he just asked permission, based on his status as a Roman citizen.

Paul recognized the man's authority and respected it accordingly. His asking in Greek surprised the Roman, who had obviously heard wild and crazy rumors about Paul (vv. 37, 38). Again, as in Philippi, Paul played his citizenship card and appealed to Roman protocol to continue his mission in the face of a mob that had been beating him to death (v. 39).

So he stood to speak – this time in Hebrew (Aramaic, v. 40) – always thinking about the best way to fulfill his mission. Never-say-die Paul was always looking to give it one more try. These are the kind of people who turn the world rightside-up for Jesus Christ, people who will not stop seeking ways to proclaim the Lord until they've breathed their last.

Agabus was right. The plan of James and the elders was good, but it did not achieve the desired result. Paul was beaten within an inch of his life and taken captive by Rome. But God was not finished with Paul yet – not by a long shot. Paul understood that suffering was part of the ongoing work of the Lord. But neither suffering nor captivity would keep him from seeking ways to fulfill his calling.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

And to fulfill this calling he had to rely on the strength that can only come from God. He could not conjure it up on his own.

Much of Scripture is written to comfort us in our weakness and to spur us on to greater achievements, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's read what David, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Isaiah, and Paul teach us about God's strength:

"I will love You, O LORD, my strength" (Ps. 18.1).

"The LORD *is* my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?

The LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27.1)

"God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46.1).

Wisdom said, "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength" (Prov. 8.14).

"He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Is. 40.29).

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12.9, 10).

So before Paul had received medical attention for his injuries, when he was hungry and tired, he took pleasure in his circumstances. Most gladly. And that is the miracle of God's grace being sufficient for Paul. We have read Paul's writings on the subject. And here, we have the privilege of seeing him living out his words. His was no "do as I say, not as I do" religion (1 Cor. 11.1). And just like Jesus, Paul's works always aligned with his words.

Instead of longing for a nice hot shower, some professional bandaging, a scrumptious meal, and a good night's sleep, will we, in the face of persecution, be as willing as Paul to make the request: "permit me to speak to the people"? (Acts 21.39) Allow me to keep on going.

If we are willing, God will make us able (Jude 24, 25).

For reflection

1. How would you counsel a new believer to prepare for the possibility of persecution?

2. In times of trouble, we need to believe what we read in God's Word. Explain.

3. Write a prayer that you might use to help you in a time of trouble or even persecution.

When [Paul] argues with those from the outside, he does not hesitate to use the help of the laws. Here he impresses the tribune by the name of his city. And likewise on another occasion he says, [he was accosted] "publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison." John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 47

Pray Psalm 102.15-24.

Pray for revival among the churches of your community, our nation, and the world. Pray that God will move multitudes of His people to seek Him in prayer for revival, renewal, and awakening.

Sing Psalm 102.15-24.

(Leominster: *Not What My Hands Have Done*)

Then let the nations fear the glory of the Lord!

For He shall in His Church appear to heed our sighing words.

Then let our children learn to praise the Lord above.

He hears their groans and knows they yearn to dwell within His love.

Yet let us tell God's Name and praise His glorious grace;

let all as one His love proclaim together in this place.

Though now our strength is low; though shortened grow our days,

Our God will not forsake us so, but keep us in His ways!

7 The Power of Love

Pray Psalm 147.1, 19, 20.

Praise the LORD!

For *it is* good to sing praises to our God;

For *it is* pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful...

He declares His word to Jacob,

His statutes and His judgments to Israel.

He has not dealt thus with any nation;

And *as for His* judgments, they have not known them.

Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 147.1, 19, 20.

(St. Ann: [*O God, Our Help in Ages Past*](#))

Praise God, for it is good to sing loud praises to the Lord!

With joy our songs of praise we bring to God and to His Word.

His Word He to His Church bestows – His promises and Law.

No other nation God thus knows: praise Him with songs of awe!

Read Acts 21.1-40; meditate on verses 37-39.

Preparation

1. How did Paul try to show respect for others in this chapter?

2. What did he ask of the commander?

Meditation

It's been a little more than twenty years or so since Paul encountered Jesus on that Damascus road (cf. Gal. 1.15-18, 2.1; Acts 18.11, 19.10). A little more than twenty years earlier Paul would have been among that crowd calling for the heads of those who preached the Gospel. Acts 21 gives vivid testimony to the power of love, of Jesus' love for Paul, and the love of Jesus through Paul for lost people.

Luke slowed down the action in this chapter so that we could glimpse the legacy Paul had accumulated in those twenty years. Disciples and churches everywhere he went. A new generation of leaders called, trained, and ready to serve. Many of his epistles already written, sent, read, and being copied and shared around (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans, at least; cf. Col. 4.16).

And at the end of Acts 21, we see the power of love at work in Paul – the very power that had energized his mission and established this glorious legacy. Beaten badly and barely rescued by the Romans, Paul showed no anger or vindictiveness, no resentment or indignation, only patience, civility, and a heart of love for the people who nearly killed him.

Paul had written earlier, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2.20). He shows us what can happen in a life completely given over to Jesus. And he calls us to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11.1).

Let us ask ourselves: What legacy have we been creating over the last twenty years?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

What legacy? Indeed. How I wish I had embraced Paul's attitude of, "...none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I can finish my race with joy..." (Acts 20.24) Instead, I fear, I have been unpleasantly surprised by cruelty and unkindness. Most surely, I can say with Jeremiah, "Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me" (Lam. 3.19, 20). Yes, I am sorry.

So much of the last twenty years would not have been wasted in anger and sadness had I merely been expecting the suffering. After all, Jesus promised it would be so. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16.33). It just seemed so convoluted to be coming from within the church.

But why should it, that is what Jesus experienced, and Paul. So really, why shouldn't I?

If happiness is the difference between what we expect and what we experience, then in a certain sense, if we expect the tribulations, we will maintain our happiness, "most gladly" (2 Cor. 12.9) when we experience troubles. Paul did.

I am comforted, though, when I read the rest of Jeremiah's lament: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lam. 3.22-24)

The power of God's love changes minds and hearts. And my heart will be changed. I long to be more like Jesus, and like Paul, and to say with him that we "know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." "If God is for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8.28, 31, 35, 38, 39).

"Beaten badly and barely rescued by the Romans, Paul showed no anger or vindictiveness, no resentment or indignation, only patience, civility, and a heart of love for the people who nearly killed him." That love is one aspect of Paul's legacy. And because God's compassions are new every morning (Lam. 3.23), that legacy can be mine as well, starting today!

For reflection

1. What do we mean by Paul's "legacy"?
2. Why should we as Christians be thinking in terms of leaving a legacy (cf. Ps. 45.17)?
3. What are some things that might make up the legacy you will leave to future generations?

God seasonably interposes for the safety of his servants, from wicked and unreasonable men; and gives them opportunities to speak for themselves, to plead for the Redeemer, and to spread abroad his glorious gospel. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 21.27-40*

Pray Psalm 147.2-7.

Give thanks and praise to the Lord for the Gospel, for His salvation, for the Church, and for our mission to take Jesus to the world. Pray for your work in your own Personal Mission Field today.

Sing Psalm 147.2-7.

(St. Ann: [*O God, Our Help in Ages Past*](#))

The Lord builds up His Church and He His people gathers in.
The broken hearts He tenderly repairs and heals their sin.

The stars He counts, He knows the name of every chosen soul;
His pow'r is great, and great His fame Who understands us whole.

The humble God exalts above; the wicked He casts down.
Sing thanks to this great God of love; let songs of praise abound.

Paul's Legacy (2): Acts 21

For reflection or discussion

1. What can we learn from Paul's example about the use of our testimony in sharing the Good News of Jesus?
2. How can we remain calm and reasoning when someone begins to get loud or angry or threatening as we bear witness for the Lord?
3. Sharing the Gospel always entails some risk. People don't like being told they're sinners, or lost, or that they lack something in their lives. Some handle such information better than others. What is our responsibility in making sure our words are always seasoned with grace?
4. In what ways are you applying the teaching and example of Paul in your Personal Mission Field?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 21?

For prayer:

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