

## FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

Acts 21:1-39 (Key verse: 21:13)

*Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?"**I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*

In today's passage, Paul returns to Jerusalem after spending three fruitful years in the province Asia. Now, with all that Paul achieved for the Lord in the province of Asia, we would expect Paul to be welcomed back in Jerusalem with open arms. Yet, that is not what happened! Instead, after arriving back in Jerusalem, a Jewish mob attacked and almost killed Paul. Actually, the Holy Spirit warned Paul that this kind of thing might happen to him even before he sailed for Jerusalem! (20:23) Yet Paul still went! Moreover, on his way to Jerusalem, the disciples in Tyre urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem for fear of his life. (4) But still..... Paul went! Then in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus visually showed Paul that in Jerusalem the Jews would bind and hand him over to the Romans. So with tears, those around Paul pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. (10-12) But still.....Paul went!

The question we must ask ourselves is: why? Why, despite the many warnings.....**did Paul willingly go to Jerusalem? It was because, by the Holy Spirit Paul understood that .....despite the dangers he would face .....for him to go to Jerusalem..... was part of God's bigger plan.....to advance the gospel of Jesus..... from Jerusalem to Rome.....and from Rome to the ends of the earth!** For Paul the Lord's will was more important than his physical safety. There are certain times when (as believers) our lives also form part of God's bigger plan.....to advance **to advance the gospel of Jesus**. Just like Paul in today's passage. At these times the Holy Spirit leads us to do something or go somewhere we would not necessarily have chosen for ourselves. Yet, in today's passage we will learn.....that when these times come.....the Lord's will must be more important than our personal preferences. May the Holy Spirit convict our hearts this morning, just as he convicted Paul's heart to obey God's will in every aspect of our lives! Amen.

Let's look at verses 1. After an emotional farewell, Paul and his companions left the Ephesian elders in Miletus. Then with great determination, they put out to sea for Jerusalem. They sailed straight to Kos. The very next day they went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. When they could not find a passenger ship to sail further, they went on board a cargo ship and set sail on to Syria. (3) At last, they arrived in Palestine, in the harbor town of Tyre .....about 160km north of Jerusalem. Look at verse 4a. Paul and his companions sought out the disciples there and stayed with them (in their bible house) for seven days. At first, Paul and his companions enjoyed their time with the brothers in Tyre.....especially after a long journey by ship. But then things became serious. One day the Holy Spirit revealed to the brothers in Tyre that something bad was going to happen to Paul in Jerusalem. So they shared this disturbing revelation with Paul. Naturally, they expected him to change his plan and avoid Jerusalem. Yet, to their great surprise, Paul remained determined to go to Jerusalem. So they urged Paul not to go saying things like: *Why do you want to go? Your life will be in danger in Jerusalem. Rather send someone else to deliver the offering. Ask Luke to share the mission report with the church in Jerusalem. But please, you must not go. Please stay with us! Here you will be safe!*

But what was Paul's response? Look at verse 5a. When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. Why? Did Paul not believe what the disciples told him? Not at all. Actually, Paul was already aware of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem by the time he greeted the Ephesian elders in Miletus. Do you remember what Paul said to them? He said: *I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.* (20:22-23) Paul did not know exactly what would happen to him in Jerusalem. But he did know that prison and hardships awaited him. But still he set sail for Jerusalem. Even now, after the brothers warned him of danger in Jerusalem, he still continued with his journey. The question is: why?

Do you remember what Paul did in Damascus (Acts 9) when he discovered that the Jews conspired to kill him? He escaped with a rope and a basket through an opening in a wall. Do you remember in last week's passage what Paul did in Greece when he discovered that the Jews plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Jerusalem? (20:3) He changed his plan and decided to go back through Macedonia. But why this time, despite the warnings, did Paul not waver in his course? It was **because, by the Holy Spirit Paul understood that**

.....despite the dangers he would face .....for him to go to Jerusalem..... was part of God's bigger plan.....to advance the gospel of Jesus..... from Jerusalem to Rome.....and from Rome to the ends of the earth! (19:21; 20:22) For Paul the Lord's will was more important than his personal preferences.

These days, we easily live our lives without considering God's plans. His will!! For we have so many of our own plans, right? We all have preconceived ideas about how our lives must progress. This is totally normal and dare I say, natural. However, as believers, we must remember that God is living; and He too has a will. It is true, that it is not always easy to know what God's will is. Especially when it comes to where we must work, what we must study, where we must stay and who we should marry. But when it comes to sinners in this world, we all know the will of God. God loves sinners and his will is for them to know Jesus and be saved from their sin through faith in His blood. Right? This is God's clear will..... that He made known to us in Scripture. So there can be no doubt about this.

What about you and me. I believe every one here have received salvation of their sins, through faith in Jesus. We accepted Jesus as the Christ of God. What then is God's will for us? It is for us to meaningfully participate in advancing the gospel of Jesus.....just like Paul. Let me ask you a question: how could you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Someone shared the gospel with you, right?! This is how God works? He does not only save us from our sins but also calls you and me to be his witnesses..... by sharing the good news of His grace with others.....Also as we learned last week.....He calls on us to be shepherds of His church. The moment when we consider our lives.....within this clear will of God.....then it becomes much easier to know what God's will is for..... where we must work....., what we must study..... which church to attend and..... even who we should marry. For we must do whatever will advance the gospel of Jesus in this world.....Just like Paul when he went to Jerusalem.

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Let's look at verse 7-8. (Read) After kneeling down in prayer on the beach with the brothers in Tyre, Paul continued his voyage south towards Jerusalem. He stayed one night with the brothers and sisters in (P)tolema-is and landed the next day in Caesarea, which was about 86km from Jerusalem. There Paul ended up staying at the house of a very special man of God, named Philip. Philip was not only an evangelist but also one of seven spirit filled men who 20 years earlier was appointed as the very first deacons evert in the church. (Ac 6:5) His home was spiritual. The word of God was overflowing.....with singing and deep fellowship among the believers. It was a good place for Paul to enjoy I time of spiritual preparation. But this stay could not be permanent. It was the calm before the storm.

Look at **verses 10**. After Paul and his companions had been there a number of days, the prophet Agabus came from Judea to Philip's home, with a special revelation from God. Look at verse 11. (Read) It was a visually dramatic scene. Without saying a word, Agabus came over to where Paul was standing. He reached out his hand and took Paul's belt from him. Then he tied his own hands and feet with it. Then he firmly proclaimed: "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt (Paul) and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" (11) Agabus' prophetic words cut to the heart. Look at verse 12: When those around Paul heard this, they and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. For now it was clear exactly what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem. How did Paul respond? Look at verse 13. Can we please read our key verse together? Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Paul's heart was breaking. He could not ignore the tears and pleading of his beloved co-workers. Nevertheless, he was determined to go to Jerusalem. It is truly remarkable! I am sure that all of us here want to obey the will of God in our lives, just like Paul, right? But if you are like me, at this point of the message, you may also wonder, but how could Paul be so firm in his decision. How could he say.....that he was not only ready to be bound (and lose his freedom).....but also if necessary be ready to make the ultimate sacrifice of losing his life. The answer lies in Paul's motive for going to Jerusalem.

Look again at verse 11. Paul said he was going to Jerusalem **FOR the name of the Lord Jesus**. This, however, was not Paul's original motive. Before Paul left for Jerusalem, while he was still in Ephesus, Paul already decided to go to Jerusalem, and from there travel to Rome. However, his motives for going to Jerusalem was not as pure as it was now here in verse 11. For in his letter to the believers in Romans, which Paul wrote in

Corinth before his departure for Jerusalem, he said: *Before I come [to Rome], I must go to Jerusalem to take a gift to the believers there. .... As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain.* (Roman 15:25-28 - NLT) Here we can see that initially, Paul's main reason for going to Jerusalem was to mainly deliver a monetary gift. He intended a quick pit-stop in Jerusalem, after which he planned to travel as a free man to Rome and stay there for a while.....and from there go to Spain! But this was not how God planned it. According to the prophet Agabus, In Jerusalem God would allow Paul to be arrested by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles, to arrive in Rome in chains. Also, according to God's plan, the main reason for Paul to go to Jerusalem was not to present the financial offering. Rather it was part of God's bigger plan to advance the gospel of Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome.. So although initially Paul's purpose coincided with the will of God, to go to Jerusalem and Rome, God's reason and way for this to happen were far different from what Paul had planned and arranged. This was a typical "instance of divine overruling of human plans, but to the achievement of one and the same end."

Obviously, the closer Paul got to Jerusalem, the more his motive for going there was challenged. For was it really necessary to deliver the financial gift in person if it meant he would be arrested and handed to the Romans? Of course not! If so, Paul could easily have changed his mind and simply sent someone else to deliver the offering. It was then that Paul realised, and deeply accepted, that he was going to Jerusalem ....not for himself or his own reasons. Instead, he was going to Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. With this realisation there was no turning back. How can we be certain of this? We can be certain, because when push came to shove .....Paul made such a firm and personal decision of faith to go to Jerusalem that those who wept and pleaded with him not to go.....realized that Paul would not be dissuaded. They gave up and said, (look at the last part of verse 14 and then verse 15.) "The Lord's will be done." After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.

**In conclusion:** As believers, we can be certain that a time will come, probably more than once, when the Lord calls on you and me to do something that forms part of his bigger plan to advance the gospel of Jesus. Something that will require a pure motive for the Lord Jesus.

us to give up our own plans to submit to His will. I believe there are many of us present here today who have received such a call to obey the Spirit's leading. Yet, though we are willing, we might still not be **READY** to act. How could Paul be READY to obey the Lord's will with such a pure motive? In the same way as Jesus when He decided to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross! In order to obey the will of God with a pure motive, Jesus struggled hard. At the last moment, Jesus had to fight a fierce spiritual battle in prayer. He prayed, "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42)

Like Jesus, Paul was also not immediately ready to go to Jerusalem. But by God's help and through deep and continual spiritual struggle, Paul was now ready. Tracing his steps, we can see how this came about. Paul had been compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Ac 20:22). It was what God really wanted him to do. However, God did not make it easy for him. Instead of enjoying peace and joy, the Holy Spirit warned Paul that prison and hardships awaited him (Ac 20:23). The Holy Spirit also made Paul face reality in Tyre and especially in Caesarea when the prophet Agabus visually told Paul what would happen. In this way, Paul motive for going to Jerusalem became purer and purer. Finally, Paul submitted his will to God and was ready to obey purely for the name of the Lord Jesus. The weeping of his co-workers was like a final exam. But Paul passed. Indeed, after time or preparation, Paul was ready to go to Jerusalem purely *for the name of the Lord Jesus*. Regardless of the sacrifices he might have to make.

We can be certain, when the Lord calls on us to do something for Him, the Holy Spirit will help us in the same way as he helped Paul.....until we too are ready to obey the Lord with a pure motive. If this is you, then work with the Holy Spirit.....listen to His voice as you read and study the bible. Open you heart to Him in prayer. Until you are ready to make a personal decision of faith. And once you have made the decision, be sure to act decisively, just like Paul who determinately set out to Jerusalem. Amen.