

Paul had been warned by the Spirit of God that he would face imprisonment in Jerusalem, but also knew that he was supposed to go there. The first verse in our passage describes him tearing himself away from the Ephesian elders, for they thought they would never see one another again in this life. He had told them *"I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."* Acts 20:24 This was the effect of being crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20ⁱ). Each of us should find the same truth working in our lives. But too often our life is the most precious thing to us, rather than the calling of God.

Luke gives us a diary of the journey to Jerusalem that includes each port in which they stopped. ¹ *And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.* ² *And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.* ³ *When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.* Acts 21:1-3 Again, we see Luke's presence by the use of the word "we". The Bezan text adds a stop at Myra which was a prominent east to west and north to south trading port. From there to Tyre was about 400 miles by sea. If Luke is this detailed in his journaling of the locations, the rest of his reporting in this book is likely to be just as accurate. We are reading some amazing history.

⁴ *And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.* Acts 21:4 It may have taken a week to unload and load cargo, or else they may have been waiting for another ship for the final portion of the journey. Meanwhile they did something we appreciate as a church in a tourist destination, they sought out fellow believers. This is something we should do as well. Fellowship is a necessary part of our lives in Christ. We learn from one another and are encouraged when we hear testimonies of what God is doing in other places (Romans 1:11-12ⁱⁱ). Spirit filled Christians desire to worship together.

As in other locations, the Spirit of God warned Paul that what lay ahead was difficult (Acts 20:23ⁱⁱⁱ). The believers interpreted this as a warning not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul already knew it was God's will. This is an important lesson. God's warning about something does not mean that we should avoid it. It may be preparing us for what we are soon to face. We can easily misinterpret what God is saying. I believe that Paul knew that it was God's will to go to Jerusalem. We saw in Acts 19 that Paul determined *in the Spirit* to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21^{iv}). And we will see in verse 14 of this chapter that the believers finally agreed that it was God's will.

Love for our fellow believers causes us to desire that they do not suffer. However, God can use suffering for something greater. Some of the good that came out of that time

in imprisonment included his letters. The letter to the Philippians tells us the whole Roman palace guard heard the gospel because of his imprisonment (Philippians 1:13^v). **What we desire and God's perfect plan often clash. That is when we must decide if the flesh or spirit will prevail.** Paul had determined to let the life of Christ in him prevail regardless of the cost to his body. Have you made that determination? For Paul, to live was Christ and to die was gain (Philippians 1:21^{vi}). He lived each day by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave His life for him. By the grace of God may we all come to that same resolution. Paul was a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1^{vii}).

⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. Acts 21:5-6 Just like that difficult departure in Miletus, we see a heart rending picture of what was believed to be the last goodbyes of believers with the beloved Apostle Paul. Why did they love him so much? Because he loved them. The love of Christ flowed through him. He poured out his soul to them and they loved him for it. This is what we are all to be like, for the fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22^{viii}; 1 John 4:20^{ix}).

I've been reading Andrew Murray's book Absolute Surrender. You can find it on-line for free. I highly recommend it. In regards to this love that comes from the surrendered man or woman of God he writes: "That blessed text; often it has been limited! — 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.' (Romans 5:5^x) It has often been understood in this sense: It means the love of God to me. Oh, what a limitation! That is only the beginning. The love of God is always the love of God in its entirety, in its fullness as an indwelling power, a love of God to me that leaps back to Him in love, and overflows to my fellow-men in love-God's love to me, and my love to God, and my love to my fellow-men. The three are one; you cannot separate them." Paul loved God. That love overflowed to his fellow man. That is why they loved him so.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. Acts 21:7-9 Again they find believers with whom they can fellowship, though this time only for a day. They finally arriving at their place to disembark, Caesarea. Philip the evangelist was still living there (Acts 8:40^{xi}). This is the same Philip who was one of the first deacons and who evangelized Samaria (Acts 8:5-6^{xii}). Perhaps this time in Caesarea is when Luke gathered his material for Acts chapters six through eight. Philip's daughters all had the gift of prophecy. That must have been a wonderful household. This shows us that the gift was given to women as well as to men. It would be manifest

as a timely word from the Lord that other believers would recognize in their spirit to be from God.

¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Acts 21:10-11

Agabus was probably the same prophet who predicted the famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28^{xiii}). He acted out his prophecy in dramatic fashion and added something Paul may not have heard before. He would be delivered into Gentile hands. That again sounds like what Jesus faced when he entered Jerusalem for the last time (Matthew 20:19^{xiv}).

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Acts 21:12-13 And once again, this time in the church of Caesarea, the people urged Paul not to go. They loved him and didn't want to see him suffer. But that is not the point of the prophecy. You can't avoid the future that God has determined. When Paul saw their grief, it broke his heart. We see another one of his statements of dedication. *"I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* Paul was ready lay down his life for Jesus! And that should be our determination too. If I live for His glory, I will go where He sends. If we are His servants, we will follow where He leads. Jesus cannot ask us to do anymore than He has already done for us. Paul would tell the church in Rome that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18^{xv}).

¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." Acts 21:14 The KJV reads, "we ceased saying, "Let the will of the Lord be done." From that I once believed they were no longer asking for God's will, from which one would conclude that Paul was disobeying the Spirit by going. In fact, the Greek is just the opposite. They quit trying to dissuade him and instead were saying, "Let the will of the Lord be done." John Stott says this expression is "not in feeble resignation but as a positive prayer." Again, we see that our loving desires can be contrary to God's plan. We want all those we love to be healed and have a peaceful life free from trauma and pain, but God's plans often include momentary suffering (2 Corinthians 4:17^{xvi}).

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. Acts 21:15-16 The group has finally made it to Jerusalem with the representatives of the various Gentile churches and the financial gift for the church of Jerusalem. Mnason was probably a Cypriot who was at Pentecost and converted and then moved to Jerusalem. His home must have been large enough to house all these guests. That means he invited the Gentiles into his home and

understood they were brothers in Christ (Acts 10:28^{xvii}). Perhaps he was chosen as the host because he already demonstrated an acceptance of Gentile followers of Christ.

17 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Acts 21:17-19 The leadership in Jerusalem had accepted Paul's outreach to the Gentiles as a work of God (Galatians 2:7^{xviii}). They welcomed the support for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul most likely introduced the elders from the various locations as he relayed the testimony of each church in each area. The more I think about this, the more I think it was the prompting of the Spirit to move the Apostles out of Jerusalem to do something similar to what Paul had been doing. Sometimes we see the work of God in another person's life and it sparks a fire in our own to do what God has uniquely called us to do (Hebrews 10:24^{xix}).

20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. Acts 21:20-21 The church in Jerusalem was still mostly Jewish. They were continuing to obey the laws of Moses. Even today, Messianic believers struggle with whether or not they should keep what laws can still be kept, for God made a covenant with the children of Abraham (Exodus 31:16^{xx}). Others claim the law can't be kept as there is no temple. Still others claim you shouldn't even try for Christ is a fulfillment of the law (Romans 10:4^{xxi}). Many Jews of that time accepted Jesus as the Messiah but were upset because they thought Paul was teaching Jews to forsake Moses. However, the elders glorified God when hearing the testimonies of what God did among the Gentiles. They understood the importance of Paul's ministry.

Paul's response followed his own teaching. *3 We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,* 2 Corinthians 6:3 Paul did anything possible to help people come to faith. He didn't attack Artemis in Ephesus. He worked to support himself though he taught that ministers should be supported by the church (1 Corinthians 9:11-12^{xxii}). He did not insist on his rights. In Jerusalem, he did not want Jewish believers to think he was against Moses. That might cause them to reject the gospel. Earlier in Galatia, Paul had rebuked Peter when he acted like Jewish believers were better than Gentile believers by eating kosher (Galatians 2:11-12^{xxiii}). The issue was offending Gentile believers. To Paul, the most important thing was that people come to know Jesus as their Savior. Whether they kept the law or not was not the issue. He became all things to all men so he might win some. Making too big an issue over minor doctrines is contrary to this priority. We need to be sensitive to not put

obstacles in the way of those seeking a relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit will convict them about the less important details as they mature spiritually.

22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. Acts 21:22-24 James and the elders suggested that Paul demonstrate his obedience and commitment to the laws of Moses by purifying himself and financing some fellow Jewish believers to do the same with him. This was supposed to convince Jews that Paul still honored the laws God gave to Moses and was not teaching Jews to forsake those laws. The difference was that he interpreted those laws through their fulfillment in Jesus who perfectly lived them for us.

25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Acts 21:25 The previous edict of all that was required of Gentiles was reiterated to make clear the difference of what was expected of Jews versus that of Gentile believers (Acts 15:20^{xxiv}).

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. Acts 21:26 We must understand that James and Paul have already agreed that salvation is by grace received through faith (Acts 15:9^{xxv}). They have agreed we should be morally upright as commanded in Scripture. What was in question was how Jews should go about living out their customs and traditions. There was no need for them to change. To dispel the rumor that Paul was teaching the diaspora to reject Jewish traditions, which would help the Jerusalem Jews to be more open to the gospel, Paul took the Nazarite vow of purification with several other men. It was a similar gesture as that of circumcising Timothy. Paul was not bound even to the freedom He had in Christ. He could give up that freedom so that he might lead others to Christ. He was willing to become all things to all men so that some might be saved (1 Corinthians 9:20-23^{xxvi}). He notified the temple when they would be presenting their offering and was willing to cover the cost which was quite expensive.

How much of our freedoms are we willing to give up so as not to offend others that they might be saved and share in the blessings we have in Christ? **How passionate are you about not offending others so that they might be saved?** Paul was willing not only give up the liberties of his lifestyle, but to be imprisoned and even to die following Jesus and sharing the saving knowledge of the cross.

Questions

- 1 What was the warning given to Paul?
- 2 Why did the believers try to dissuade him from going?
- 3 Why wouldn't he yield to their wishes?
- 4 Why was there so much love between Paul and fellow believers?
- 5 What does verse 14 mean?
- 6 How can our love for others be crosswise with God's plan?
- 7 Have you been encouraged to be more zealous because of someone's testimony?
- 8 Why didn't Paul object to James' suggestion?
- 9 What was the most important thing to Paul?
- 10 What did James and Paul agree on?

ⁱ **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

ⁱⁱ **Romans 1:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Acts 20:23 (ESV)**

²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

^{iv} **Acts 19:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

^v **Philippians 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

^{vi} **Philippians 1:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

^{vii} **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

^{viii} **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

^{ix} **1 John 4:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

^x **Romans 5:5 (KJV)**

⁵ And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

^{xi} **Acts 8:40 (KJV)**

⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

^{xii} **Acts 8:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.

^{xiii} **Acts 11:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

^{xiv} **Matthew 20:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

^{xv} **Romans 8:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

^{xvii} **Acts 10:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

^{xviii} **Galatians 2:7 (ESV)**

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised

^{xix} **Hebrews 10:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

^{xx} **Exodus 31:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.

^{xxi} **Romans 10:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

^{xxii} **1 Corinthians 9:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

^{xxiii} **Galatians 2:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

^{xxiv} **Acts 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

^{xxv} **Acts 15:9 (ESV)**

⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

^{xxvi} **1 Corinthians 9:20-23 (ESV)**

²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.