

~ Lesson 75 ACTS ~

A Heart of Readiness

Acts 21:1-14

We are continuing our study in Acts and we are in chapter 21 looking at the final stretch of Paul's 3rd journey as he makes his way to Jerusalem. Today we will be looking at verses 1-14 and in these verses, we are going to see the tenacious drive of the Apostle Paul to do the will of God. A readiness within his heart to be faithful and serve the Lord. And this readiness of heart should be the heart of every Christian. To have a resolute heart toward God and His Kingdom.

We left off last week at the end of chapter 20 as Paul ended his farewell address to the Ephesian elders and now with the brethren in tears, he is getting on a merchant ship making his way to Jerusalem, **Acts 20:37-38**. Paul knows he may never see them again. He is heading to Jerusalem knowing that persecution awaits him there, **Acts 20:22-24**. Nevertheless, he is going bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, and along the way, the Holy Spirit is warning him of the dangers that await him there. And in these next 14 verses, we will see the Spirit warn Paul two more times. There are some scholars who say Paul was acting in disobedience to God's will by ignoring these warning signs, but I couldn't disagree more. These warning signs are not to prohibit Paul, but rather to prepare him for what is to come. Jesus has been doing this since the Road to Damascus, Acts 9:15-16.

Let's start with verse 1...

21:1) Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

Paul is traveling with a large company, (8 people), which was more than usual. The reason for this large company of men is that these are the representatives chosen by the churches to deliver the contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem, 1 Cor 16:3. So Paul and his eight companions, Acts 20:4, board the ship and set sail to Cos.

This word "departed" ἀποσπάω, literally means "to tear away from." This expresses the emotions of this meeting. Paul was torn away from the Ephesian elders as the ship was getting ready to set sail not knowing if he will ever see them again. This was a coaster ship. It is the same ship they boarded in Troas, and it has been running along the coast from port to port. Paul is at the mercy of the ship's itinerary and if he wants to be in Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost, he needs to follow in line with the ship's travel plans.

It is probably Friday afternoon at this point. They left Troas on Monday morning and arrived at Miletus on Thursday morning, Tychicus and Trophimus were probably the messengers to go get the Ephesian elders that afternoon. And then the next day on Friday they meet Paul on the docks of Miletus. And now probably sometime Friday late afternoon the ship is setting sail. Luke says **running a straight course we came to Cos**. This is a nautical term meaning to have the wind behind them. Conybeare says this trip from Miletus to Cos would only take about 6 hours in good weather conditions.* Then... **the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara**. This was probably the normal route for this coaster ship traveling up and down the coast of the Aegean Sea. But now they come to the port at Patara and they must change to a bigger ship that is suitable for going across the open water of the Mediterranean Sea to Syria.

21:2-3) ² And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

The trip from Patara to Tyre was about 400 miles. But with good conditions and a large ship, the journey probably took about 3-4 days. By this time it has been about 23 days since Paul left Philippi. Paul had 50

* Conybeare, W. J., & Howson, J. S. (1858). *The life and epistles of St. Paul* (Vol. 2, p. 225-226)

days to get to Jerusalem in order to make it there by the Day of Pentecost. So once he lands at Tyre, he is on the mainland and he has 27 days to get to Jerusalem. No doubt this is on Paul's mind as he is booking passage with these ships. After this journey across the open sea, they dock at Tyre and while the ship is unloading its cargo, they evidently have a few days before the ship departs again, so notice what Paul and his company decide to do... they find some fellow Christians.

21:4) And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days...

This again just shows the heart of Paul and the love of the brethren. He wants to find his fellow Christians. This word "finding" ἀνευρίσκω, means to find after diligently searching. It wasn't like they just happened to come across some Christians, no Paul sought to find Christians in this town. Paul had passed through these parts on other occasions, Acts 15:3. Paul knows the ship is going to take some time to unload its cargo and head to the next port so in the meantime he finds the brethren and Luke says they spent seven days there in Tyre. That's a long time considering he is in a hurry to make it to Jerusalem by a certain time. But he still has time. It's only about 120 miles from Tyre to Jerusalem so even walking would only take about 5-6 days. But in looking at this, I am surprised that Paul would want to wait around for the merchant ship. Especially if it's going to be seven days before they depart. But I think there are a couple of reasons why he waits for the ship instead of walking. 1) Paul is enjoying spending time with the brethren. But knowing Paul, his mission of getting to Jerusalem has been the objective even over spending time with the brethren. We saw this when he sailed past Ephesus to Miletus so he would not have to spend time in Asia, Acts 20:16. So what changed? I think the unsurety of booking passage on a ship was creating this haste, but now that he is on the mainland, the pressure is slightly off and he can spend this time with the brethren. But the main reason I think he is willing to stay is because they are carrying a lot of money. And to travel on foot for a long distance is probably not the safest thing, 2 Cor 11:26 (perils of robbers). So knowing he has some extra time, he keeps the cargo on the ship and waits for their departure.

Notice what the brethren are saying to him while he is there for seven days...

21:4) And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days... They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

This word "told" is in the imperfect tense, a continual action in the past. They were continually telling him not to go up to Jerusalem. But they are not dreaming this up because Luke says... **They told Paul through the Spirit.** The Spirit is warning Paul through the brethren of the dangers that lie ahead. This is where people think Paul was in disobedience to the Spirit. But I disagree because it is not that the Spirit was telling Paul not to go, but rather that the Spirit revealed this knowledge to them, and through the Spirit they interpreted it to mean not to go to Jerusalem. The fact that Paul uses the word "through" and not "by" makes a big difference. But Paul is determined to go to Jerusalem, and "to finish his race with joy," so he departs. But notice the impact Paul makes on these brethren in just a week's time...

21:5-6) ⁵ When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. ⁶ When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

This isn't as emotional as the departure from Miletus, but still the brethren are there with their families and wives and children to say goodbye.

Paul and his company knows it is the will of God to go to Jerusalem, so Luke says, **we departed and went on our way.** What would it be like to be a companion of the Apostle Paul? I think it would be a hard life! This is why Mark abandoned them on his 1st journey. Paul was tenacious and driven and he would not

let things dissuade him. These men that are with him are tough guys knowing that whatever happens to Paul could very well happen to them too. But they press on to Jerusalem.

21:7) And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

The ship travels a short distance down the coast to the next major port called Ptolemais. But here they only spend one day because of the ship's itinerary. But I love that even though it was just one day, Paul still found the brethren in that city. Then the ship travels further down to the major Roman port of Caesarea.

21:8-9) ⁸ On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Again, Paul finds the brethren and this time it is a familiar name to us, Philip the Evangelist. It's hard to say if this is the first time Paul has ever met Philip, although this is a man we know from earlier in the book of Acts. Luke identifies him as **Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven**. Remember the seven deacons that the Apostles appointed to oversee the distribution of the daily needs in Jerusalem, Acts 6:1-5. Philip started as a deacon, but because of the persecution of Stephen they were dispersed, and he went to Samaria and started preaching the Gospel. At that point he became an Evangelist, operating in the gifts of the Spirit, Acts 8:4-13. Then Philip preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, he was "harpazoed" to Azotus and then came to Caesarea, Acts 8:26-40. This was back in 33ad and now it is 58ad. So for the last 25 years, Philip has been living in Caesarea and now he has a wife and four daughters. Luke doesn't mention anything about the daughters prophesying to Paul, however he mentions another prophet who comes to meet them in Caesarea.

21:10-11) ¹⁰ And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

These "many days" in Caesarea could be up to 2 weeks. And in the meantime, a prophet named Agabus comes to them. We have seen Agabus earlier in Acts when he came to Antioch to warn of the famine that would come to Jerusalem, Acts 11:27-28. This guy is pretty dramatic. He takes Paul's belt off of him and ties his own hands and feet as a sign to show what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem. This type of dramatization was typical of the Prophets. Jeremiah wore a yoke on his neck to show the bondage of Israel, Jer 28:10; Isaiah walked around three years naked, Is 20:3; Ezekiel slept on his side for over a year and ate food prepared over cow dung, Ezekiel 4; Hosea married a prostitute as sign of Israel's harlotry, Hosea 1:3. So here Agabus gives a sign of this bondage that will happen to Paul. But notice the words from the Holy Spirit, which are the actual words that are being spoken by the Spirit. **"Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"** This is different than the brethren up in Tyre who interpreted the revelation of the Spirit. But notice the Holy Spirit doesn't prohibit the Apostle Paul, He is just preparing him for what is to come. And not only Paul, but all the companions with him. So far Paul's companions have been on board going to Jerusalem even with the previous warnings, but now after Agabus did his thing, they are second guessing if they really should go to Jerusalem. And they start trying to dissuade Paul from going.

21:12) Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Notice it is Luke and the rest of the company with Paul pleading with the Apostle Paul not to go. But look at Paul's response. Much like what he said on the docks of Miletus...

21:13) Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

This is the same resolute mind of Paul that would not be moved, Acts 20:22–24. What an amazing man this Paul was! Resolute in his faith to run the race that was set before him. He had his mind set on the prize, to do the will of God and preach the Gospel. Paul's stance was so immovable that finally Paul's companions realize that he would not be persuaded.

21:14) So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

They saw the drive that Paul had and that he would not be persuaded from going to Jerusalem. At this point the only thing they can say is "The will of the Lord be done." They trust God and continue on their journey. There have been several warnings from the Holy Spirit of the sufferings that Paul would endure in Jerusalem and every time Paul's companions interpreted these warnings as the Spirit forbidding Paul. We have these same warnings in the Bible for us today... 2 Tim 3:12; Matt 5:11-12; 1 Peter 4:12-13. These aren't to deter us, but rather to encourage and strengthen us to endure and be ready for what is to come. The human instinct is self-preservation... to avoid being killed. And there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, God gave us this instinct because He does want us to be alive. So when the brethren heard of what awaited them in Jerusalem they didn't want to go to Jerusalem. However, self-preservation must always be second to Jesus. Jesus Himself said in Luke 9:23–24-²³ "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

Paul wasn't afraid of death, and neither should any Christian, because on the other side of death is Glory! Phil 1:20-21; 2 Tim 4:6; 1 Cor 15:55. Now we don't go looking to be a martyr, but if we are persecuted for doing the will of God, there is great reward for the Christian who endures and is faithful even unto death, 1 Pet 4:14; Matt 5:11-12. Jesus promises the crown of Life to the one who is faithful until death, Rev 2:10. This is exactly what we spoke about last week. The reward of the inheritance to those who are faithful.

Paul says, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?..." Paul knew God was calling him to Jerusalem and he was going to finish his race with joy and receive the prize of running well. Notice these words... **For I am ready.** The Greek says, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐτοίμως ἔχω. "For I have a readiness..." That really caught my eye this week. We should all have a readiness about ourselves for Jesus Christ. This word readiness, is ἐτοίμως, it is the adverb of ετοιμος and ἐτοιμάζω, to be ready. It is those who are ready, eagerly waiting and expecting our Savior that will be His bride. John uses the same word in Revelation 19:7- *Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready* (ἐτοιμάζω)." And we make ourselves ready by being faithful to Him and serving Him with our whole heart. Looking to Jesus and only having eyes for Him.

Jesus tells the parable of the Ten Virgins and He says the same thing in Matthew 25:10- *And while they went to buy* (the virgins who ran out of oil), *the bridegroom came, and those who were ready* (ἐτοιμος) *went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.*

Behold, your King is coming! Are you ready?