

~ Lesson 76 ACTS ~

The Heart of a Humble Servant**Acts 21:15-26**

We are back in the book of Acts, and we are continuing through chapter 21 looking at verses 15-26 as Paul finishes his 3rd journey and finally makes his way to Jerusalem. And as I was studying these verses, I saw Paul and the heart of a humble servant to preach the Gospel. This entire time Paul has had this intense desire to go to Jerusalem. He is bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, and to do this he must humble himself to the will of God knowing that chains and tribulations await him there, Acts 20:23. And in this process he will have to cast off pride and humble himself through some tough situations and even fellow Christians and risk his life in order to preach the Gospel. I was reminded of what Paul said in **Philippians 2:1-8**. As Paul enters Jerusalem, he doesn't consider himself "the great Apostle Paul." But rather he esteems others as more important than himself, and he comes to Jerusalem as a humble servant to do the will of God... even unto death.

So let's start in verse 15 as Paul makes his final descent into Jerusalem...

21:15) And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.

Paul had always planned to return to Jerusalem after his 3rd journey. He had it in his heart to collect a contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem and now he has come to Jerusalem to deliver this collection and to preach the gospel to the Jews, 2 Cor 1:15-16; Acts 19:21; Romans 15:25, 30-31. Paul had a heart for the Jewish people to receive salvation. So much that he said he would even give up his own salvation if it meant salvation to the Jews, Romans 9:1-4; 10:1-4. Of course, his death wouldn't bring salvation to the Jews, but in this statement, we see the heart of Jesus working through the Apostle Paul. Knowing that chains and tribulation awaits him, but he presses on knowing that if he goes to Jerusalem, it might cost him his life. But remember his response in Acts 20:22-24; 21:13. It is this passion that is stirring in the Apostle Paul's heart during his 3rd journey. And in these verses as he enters Jerusalem, we see Paul become a servant to bring the Gospel to the Jews. A man willing to lay down his life for the chance that some might receive everlasting life through his Word.

Paul has been traveling with his nine companions since he left Ephesus, and he is making his final descent into Jerusalem trying to make it there by the Day of Pentecost. They left Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, Acts 20:6, and now they have 50 days to get to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. They arrive on the mainland at the docks of Tyre and they make their way down to Jerusalem. They find Philip in Caesarea and stay with him several days, and now they are ready to make the final descent into Jerusalem.

21:15) And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.

So far since they left Troas they have been booking passage on merchant ships traveling along the coast of Asia and then Syria, but now they have reached Caesarea and from this point they have to walk inland to Jerusalem. This word "packed" ἀποσκευασάμενοι, means "to pack away vessels," specifically for a land journey. So Paul and his nine companions begin traveling by foot to Jerusalem, but they get some extra help from the disciples in Caesarea...

21:16) Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

This is a large crowd leaving Caesarea and they make arrangements to stay at Mnason's house. Mnason is described as an "early disciple, ἀρχαίω μαθητῆς," a principal or founding disciple. Possibly an early convert from the Day of Pentecost in 32ad. And being from Cyprus, he could have been one of the disciples that founded the church in Antioch, **Acts 11:19**. Mnason was a Hellenistic Jew, but evidently he also had a house in Jerusalem. And since this is a large crowd traveling with Paul, they didn't want to be a burden on the poor saints in Jerusalem, so they make arrangements to stay at Mnason's house.

21:17) And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

Jerusalem was about 60 miles from Caesarea, so it probably took them about 2-3 days to get to the city and upon entering the city Luke says the brethren received them gladly. This is a good start to his trip. The fellow believers in Jerusalem welcome Paul and his company. Remember there are many uncircumcised Gentile Christians traveling with the Apostle Paul, Acts 20:4, along with Luke and Titus. From this list, Aristarchus may have been the only Jew besides Paul traveling in this company, Col 4:10. Timothy was a half Jew, Acts 16:1. Which later on these uncircumcised Gentiles become a major problem for the Jews in Jerusalem, but at least in the beginning the fellow believers receive them with joy. Then the next day they make arrangements to see the elders of the Jerusalem church...

21:18) On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

This is James, the half-brother of Jesus, the leader of the Jerusalem church. There doesn't seem to be any of the original 12 Apostles there because Luke only mentions the elders. James is not Paul's authority, only Jesus Christ is. Paul makes that clear when writing about the so called "pillars of the church" in Galatians 2:6-9. But it is very interesting to see the humble position Paul takes in an effort to keep the peace with the Jews in Jerusalem and he becomes all things to all men so that he might save some, 1 Cor 9:22. Eight years ago, Paul made another trip to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem council meeting and Luke specifically mentions Apostles and elders being present, Acts 15:4, 6. But this time it is James and his group of elders. Although Luke doesn't mention anything about the collection, no doubt Paul presents the large sum of money that had been collected from these "Gentile" churches. You can just picture the joy that Paul has as he is presenting this gift to James and then Paul goes on to explain all that God has been doing among the Gentiles...

21:19) When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Paul begins recounting one by one each of the things God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Paul had passed through Jerusalem at the end of his 2nd journey four years ago, but there is no mention that Paul spoke with James or the elders at that time. So it is very possible that Paul and James hadn't spoken since the Jerusalem Council meeting eight years ago and there was a lot that God had done through Paul in the last eight years. Namely Paul's 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys, Acts 15:40-21:14. Paul had brought the Gospel to the whole world... from Antioch to Rome. So Paul spends the time to detail all that God had been doing for the Gentiles through his ministry since they saw each other 8 years ago. The things God had done for the Gentiles through the hands of Paul is truly amazing. And if it weren't for the tenacious drive of the Apostle Paul, this could not have been accomplished. But notice the response from James after Paul details the wonderful works of God, **Acts 21:20-25**. Does that sound like a response that is excited for what God had done in the world? Look at verse 20 again...

21:20) And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord...

Luke says, "They glorified the Lord," that's good. There is at least some recognition to the wonderful things God has done among the Gentiles, but then James feels like he has to compete with Paul and show how great they are doing in Jerusalem.

21:20) ... And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;

Many of the Jews in Jerusalem were transitional Christians, Jews transitioning from the Law to the Faith. Remember how the book of Acts has been showing us the slow transition of the Gospel. The Jerusalem Council meeting was 18 years after Pentecost and Jews in Jerusalem were still trying to understand how one is truly saved... by the works of the Law or by grace through faith, Acts 15. Paul brought the freedom

of the Gospel to the world, but many Jews were having a hard time receiving this freedom. Paul describes these transitional Christians as “weak in the faith.” But even in their weakness, Paul tells us we must bear with their weakness and lead them to edification. Not pridefully, but humbly, **Rom 14:1-2, 14-15, 21; 15:1**; 1 Cor 8:9-13; Gal 4:9. This is the humble mindset that Paul has as he is speaking to the Jerusalem elders.

James was the leader of the church of Jerusalem, and he was completely zealous for the Law. He was a Christian, but he was zealous for the Law and his influence had compelled the Judaizers to infiltrate the churches that Paul had established, and they were trying to tear down the Truth. Paul speaks extensively about these Judaizers in the book of Galatians and even calls them accursed, *ἀνάθεμα*, **Galatians 1:6-8; 2:4-5**. And notice where these Judaizers come from... **Galatians 2:11-13**. I don't believe James was one of these extreme Judaizers who Paul would call accursed, I believe he was a Christian, but he was a weak Christian, still bound under the Law and unfortunately his influence in being zealous for the Law fueled these Judaizers and it caused great havoc within the church. This is what spurred the Jerusalem Council meeting in 50ad. This was a tense meeting in which the council, even 18 years after the cross was still arguing and trying to decide how one is truly saved.

Next week we will discuss our freedom in Christ Jesus and yet we will see that even within this freedom, Paul, knowing that he is free from all men, he is willing to become a servant to all so that he might save some.