

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 21:1-14

Topic

Paul takes a series of cruises to return to Jerusalem and is warned along the way that **chains and tribulations** await him upon arrival

Title

Cruisin' for a Bruisin'

Acts 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.

Acts 21:2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

Acts 21:3 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.

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

Acts 21:5 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.

Acts 21:6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

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

Acts 21:8 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.

Acts 21:9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Acts 21:10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Acts 21:11 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.' "

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

Acts 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."

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

Introduction

Someone was describing the courage of first responders to a crisis situation. They said that first responders are "running towards danger while others run away from it."

All of us who run from danger appreciate and salute those who are trained to run towards it to help others.

I don't think it cheapens the phrase to apply it to the apostle Paul. Once he decided to return to Jerusalem he was running towards danger. In chapter twenty he said of his return,

Acts 20:22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there,

Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

In chapter twenty-one we hear two of the warnings – one from a group of believers in the city of Tyre and the other from the prophet Agabus.

The believers tried to talk Paul out of going up to Jerusalem. He remained resolved to go. The question we have to ask ourselves is this: Was Paul *right* or *reckless* in running towards danger?

The answer has to do with his love for Christ and for Christians. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Love For Christians Is Your Rule Of Life, and #2 Love For Christ Is Your Overrule Of Life.

#1 Love For Christians

Is Your Rule Of Life (v1-12)

The highlights of Paul's Mediterranean cruises were the moving and emotional meetings he had with believers along the way – many of whom were complete strangers to him. Let's 'feel the love' as we cruise with Paul and his party from Miletus to Tyre.

Acts 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.

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

Departed from them looks back into chapter twenty. Paul had an emotional meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus. They wept and prayed and hugged and kissed. The love continues at every stop of Paul's journey.

The travelers took a couple of short coastal cruises and then boarded a more seaworthy vessel to sail over to **Tyre**. It reads like a travelogue. You half expect Luke to talk about visiting the famous Colossus of **Rhodes**. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It stood one hundred feet high making it the tallest statue of the ancient world.

Not a word about it or any other sightseeing until you get to **Tyre**. Then he said, **finding disciples, we stayed there seven days**. I'm told that the word used for **finding** indicates an intense search.

The sight the travelers most wanted to see in every port was the cross of Jesus Christ. Not a physical cross, but the effect of the cross in the lives of believers. They wanted to find the local church.

Every Bible-teaching church is precious as a site. Visitors and members alike ought to be able to 'see' Jesus in its gatherings. It

should at once be an oasis, a hospital, a library, a lecture hall, a music hall, a seminary, and anything else that reveals Jesus Christ.

The **seven days** stay was probably due to the ship being offloaded and loaded. Of interest to us during their stay was that **they told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem**. The way it's worded it sounds like the Holy Spirit was telling the disciples one thing but telling Paul another. Since it's not possible for the Holy Spirit to contradict Himself we need a better explanation.

We know that everywhere Paul went the Holy Spirit was telling him through the gift of prophecy that danger awaited him. But there is no indication the Holy Spirit was forbidding Paul to go. The prophecies were a forewarning but not a prohibition.

The same thing happened in Tyre. Paul was forewarned. The disciples tried to dissuade him from going. Why? It's natural when you love someone. You don't want to see them harmed.

It would seem, then, that the statement **they told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem** means one of two things:

1. **Spirit** either refers to their own human spirit which naturally wanted to see Paul kept from harm, or,
2. **Spirit** refers to the Holy Spirit but the disciples misapplied the warnings. They assumed the warnings were a prohibition when they were really just a forewarning of what awaited Paul.

Acts 21:5 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.

Acts 21:6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

See how close they had grown one to another in so short a time. When you bring the whole family to say goodbye you're really saying something about how much you love someone.

Think again in terms of cruising the Mediterranean. If you had a camera and had already boarded the ship you'd probably be clicking

pics of the scenery. The most moving and memorable scene was the prayer meeting on the beach.

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

Again they immediately sought out the local Calvary Chapel. **Greeted** is from a word that means to *enfold* in the arms. We might say they hugged.

Let me ask you: Your first day at school, or on a new job. As you meet fellow students or teachers, do you hug them? You might if they are Christians! There is a love between strangers who are brothers and sisters because they are saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 21:8 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.

Phillip the deacon had fled Jerusalem twenty years earlier. No matter! He became **Phillip the evangelist**. He preached to Samaritans and a revival broke out. He preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, baptized him, and a church was later founded in Ethiopia. Eventually he settled down; but we can be sure he continued to exercise his gift of **evangelist**.

We talk a lot about spiritual gifts. Sometimes they change, or at least they are exercised differently. Their not mine or yours; they are the Lord's and are given to you to serve others. Let the Lord mold and shape your gift to fit the situation. Be flexible.

The meeting between Paul and Phillip is the showcase. You see the supernatural love that Christians have for one another. It was on account of the vicious persecution led by Paul before his conversion to Christ that Phillip had fled Jerusalem. Two decades later Phillip shows hospitality to Paul – the man who ran him out of town. It is a testament to the transforming power of the Gospel.

Acts 21:9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

There are probably a lot of reasons why the Holy Spirit thought it important to record the ministry of these four unmarried ladies. One reason that I think is precious is that it would encourage Paul. Twenty years earlier, as Saul, he had destroyed whole families as he persecuted the church at Jerusalem. He meant it for evil; but God used it for good. Phillip's family were proof of God's providence.

Acts 21:10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Acts 21:11 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.' "

Agabus was what I call a prop-prophet. He used props and was rather flamboyant. It was his style. He was old school, more like the Old Testament prophets.

The same spiritual gifts are exercised differently by different believers. Enjoy the diversity.

We have the clearest statement of the kinds of warnings Paul had been receiving in every city. And we see the typical reaction of the disciples in verse twelve:

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

Of course they **pleaded with him!** They loved Paul as their brother and did not want those things to befall him.

The night before He was crucified Jesus said,

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Love for Christians was ruling the hearts of the believers in these cities. Love for Christians is your rule of life. When in doubt about something or someone, defer to love. Bear all things; believe all things; hope all things; endure all things.¹

¹ First Corinthians 13:7

There is something else to note. The love of the believers did not persuade Paul from going. That's because another love was at work.

#2 Love For Christ Is Your Overrule Of Life (v13-14)

Paul loved Christians as his rule of life. He regularly risked his life for them. He was running towards danger for the sake of his love for Christians by taking an offering from the Gentile churches to the struggling church at Jerusalem.

Why, then, would he not listen to pretty much every believer who was telling him to abandon his trip? Because he loved Christ most and it overruled every other love. His overruling love for Christ is the motive for what he said in verse thirteen.

Acts 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."

The word for **breaking** means *weakening*. The concern of the Christians was **weakening** Paul's resolve to obey the Lord! He knew that the believers were sincere and cared deeply for his well-being. But they were focusing on his physical well-being. He had a spiritual well-being to consider. And not just his spiritual well-being but theirs. It would not do for him to care more about himself than the ministry. It would set a terrible example.

We can totally understand and identify with the concern of the believers. They loved Paul. But they should have let their love for Christ **overrule** their love for Paul. Their pleading was not helping him; it was hindering him.

We would do well to pause and prayerfully consider our counsel and advice to one another. We know that the Christian life will involve trials and tribulations. We will encounter sufferings and afflictions. There will therefore be times we want to encourage a brother or sister to avoid hardship. But God may have set hardship on their path; it may be the course that has been custom designed for their growth and God's glory.

Sometimes the most loving response we can have is to encourage someone to count it all joy in the midst of their trials.² Or to remind them that in the world they will have tribulation, but to be cheerful about it because Jesus has given us ultimate victory.³ Or to affirm to them that no temptation will overtake them except what is common to all of us and that God is faithful to not allow more than we can bear.⁴

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

Paul would not allow himself to be **persuaded** because he was overruled by his love for Jesus Christ.

The believers finally concluded what Paul already knew, **the will of the Lord be done**. It was. We'll see him arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome a prisoner.

Our love one for another as a rule of life is how all men know we are Christ's disciples.

Our love for one another is at its highest and best when it is overruled by our love for Jesus Christ. Then it will want what is highest for a brother or sister – even if it is to endure hardship and count it all joy in the midst of their trials and tribulations.

- being changed to bring change -

² James 1:2

³ John 16:33

⁴ First Corinthians 10:13