

Acts 21:1-14

Introduction

1. In our passage last week, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to follow his example in shepherding the flock, and one of his examples was that of self-sacrifice
2. In Acts 20:22-24 he revealed that he was heading to Jerusalem in spite of the danger he knew awaited him there (READ)
3. Our passage today is an abbreviated account of his journey from Miletus (where he met the Ephesian elders) to Jerusalem, but it includes two small accounts that reinforce the danger that Paul would face there
4. It appears that Luke's purpose in including these accounts was two-fold:
 - a. The first is that these verses serve as transition to the final third of the book which focuses entirely on Paul's arrest and journey to Rome
 - b. The second is that Luke uses these verses to give us a glimpse into the faith and courage with which Paul faced the tribulation that lay in front of him

A. Twice along the journey Paul was warned by others about what awaited him at Jerusalem (21:1-12)

1. The first warning came when he landed in Tyre (READ 21:1-4):
 - a. When Paul, Luke, and the others arrived in Tyre, they found some disciples and stayed with them for a week
 - b. At some point, the Holy Spirit revealed to the disciples there what Paul would face at Jerusalem so they were telling Paul not to go:
 - 1) On the face, the text seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit was telling Paul, through the disciples, not to go (e.g. **"they kept telling Paul through the Spirit..."**)
 - 2) However, another way to interpret the preposition (dia) here is **"on account of"** and when understood this way it means they were telling Paul not to go on account of or as a result of what the Spirit revealed to them (not that the Spirit was warning Paul through them)
 - 3) The imperfect tense indicates they were doing this repeatedly, probably over the entire course of the week
 - c. In spite of their pleading, Paul continued on his journey to Jerusalem (READ 21:5-6):
 - 1) Acts doesn't record who established the church at Tyre, but there's no record it was Paul which makes these few verses especially endearing
 - 2) It's unlikely the disciples there had personally met Paul prior to this visit
 - 3) Yet, he must have endeared himself to them over these seven days because when it came time to leave, entire families-including wives and children-accompanied him all the way to the outskirts of the city where he would board his ship
 - 4) They even spent time kneeling down on the beach praying together, no doubt about what Paul was going to face in Jerusalem
2. The second warning came when he landed in Caesarea (READ 21:7-9):
 - a. We remember Philip from Acts 6; he was one of the seven men chosen by the church to help care for the needs of the widows

- 1) We learned in Acts 8, that when the believers were forced out of Jerusalem due to Saul's persecution, Phillip traveled to Samaria and began to minister there until the Lord supernaturally snatched up and transported him to Azotus
 - 2) From there, Phillip made his way to Caesarea preaching the Gospel through the cities along the route
 - 3) This is now some 20 years later and Philip is still living in Caesarea with his family, including four daughters who are gifted in prophecy
- b. While Paul and his companions were staying with Philip, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea (probably Jerusalem specifically) and delivers a prophecy regarding Paul (READ 21:10-11)
- 1) Agabus' prophecy appears to be more detailed than what Paul revealed to the Ephesian elders; there he claimed that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him
 - 2) Here, the Holy Spirit reveals that the Jews will "**bind**" him and "**deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles**" (which takes place later in chapter 21)
- c. Much like the believers at Tyre, upon hearing what the Holy Spirit had to say the disciples, along with Paul's own traveling companions, begin to beg Paul not to go to Jerusalem (READ 21:12)

<p>B. Paul responds with courageous faith (READ 13)</p>
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1. Paul was obviously moved by their concern because their tears broke his heart
2. However, he insisted that he was prepared to face not only imprisonment but death for the sake of Christ
3. This shouldn't surprise us because we've seen Paul respond in similar fashion before:
 - a. When the Jews at Psidian Antioch started to object to Paul's teaching, Luke wrote that Paul and Barnabas "**spoke out boldly**" until they were run out of the city (Acts 13:46)
 - b. At Iconium, Luke says the disbelieving Jews "**stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren**", but Paul's response was to "**spend a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord**"; he stuck around until they rose up and attempted to stone him (Acts 14:2-7)
 - c. At Lystra, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came down, stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead; he responded by getting back up, going back into the city, left for Derbe the next day...but then RETURNED a short time later to Lystra, Antioch, and Iconium! (Acts 14:19-23)
 - d. When the city leaders in Philippi arrested him and Silas, beat them, threw them into prison unjustly, and then tries to send them away secretly, Paul confronted them and forced them to do it in person (Acts 16)
 - e. The only time we see Paul possibly struggle with maintaining his courage was when he faced similar persecution in Corinth; if you remember, the Lord encouraged him by telling him not to be afraid, to go on speaking, and promised that no one would harm him (Acts 18) and as a result Paul stayed there for a year and a half
 - f. One final example of Paul's courageous faith came from when his traveling companions were attacked and dragged into the theatre by the angry mob during the riot at Ephesus; had it not been for the other disciples and some of the political leaders preventing him from doing so, Paul would have rushed into the theatre himself (Acts 19:29-31)

4. Where does this sort of courageous faith come from? Rather than speculate, I will allow Paul to speak for himself:
 - a. READ 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10
 - b. READ Philippians 3:7-14

C. The disciples respond by accepting the will of God (READ 14)

1. The last thing we see in our passage this morning is how Paul's traveling companions and the disciples at Caesarea respond to his decision to continue on to Jerusalem:
 - a. They "**fell silent**" which means they stopped trying to persuade him otherwise
 - b. They remarked, "**The will of the Lord be done!**" which means they were willing to accept whatever God's will was for Paul
2. It's easy to accept the Lord's will when the results from our earthly perspective are positive; it's a lot harder when we don't know what the future holds, or when we suspect the future may be filled with difficulty or hardship
3. The only way this is possible is to fully understand something Paul wrote to the Romans (READ Romans 8:26-39):
 - a. Our faith and trust in the will of God is grounded in all kinds of promises that we find in this passage
 - b. Look at just a few of them:
 - 1) The Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to God's will—so, no matter what we face we have God's Helper living inside us providing the strength, peace, and endurance we need
 - 2) The Lord causes all things to work together for good for—which means that no matter what we face, God will use it ultimately for our good and according to His purpose
 - 3) He has already ordained our eternal destiny—which means nothing can change it
 - 4) He sacrificed His own Son on our behalf—which means that there is nothing He won't do for us
 - 5) Jesus intercedes for us and nothing—absolutely nothing—will be able to separate us from His love or the love of our Heavenly Father

Conclusion

1. We are facing unprecedented times here in the United States, and in many places around the world
2. There are some positive and encouraging trends in Christianity; according to many sources:
 - a. Overall, Christianity is growing faster than the world's population (1.27% vs. 1.20%), but not as fast as Islam, Sikhs, and Hindus
 - b. While the growth of Christianity in Europe and North America is stagnant or declining, it is literally exploding in Asia and Africa
 - c. The percentage of the world that is unevangelized continues to shrink—in 1900 almost 55% of the world was unevangelized but by 2019 that has shrunk to just under 29%; in terms of numbers, this translates to 2.2 billion people that still need to hear the Gospel
 - d. The number of non-Christians who know at least one Christian has grown four-fold over the last century

3. This is all great news, but as we've seen in the book of Acts, as the Gospel advances and people get saved, persecution increases and that's exactly what we see (according to Open Doors):
 - a. Christians are still the most persecuted group in the world, and the trends are getting worse
 - b. Since 2013, the number of Christians martyred for their faith every year has doubled and the number of countries in which Christians are persecuted has grown to over 140
 - c. Instances of imprisonment, torture, rape, expulsion, forced labor, execution, and other forms of persecution against Christians have continued to increase, with the majority being where Christianity is growing the most (Asia and Africa)
 - d. According to Open Doors, over 100 churches are attacked, burned or vandalized every month, and an average of 11 Christians are killed for their faith every day

4. While we may not currently be facing such harsh persecution here in the U.S., we are not exempt and should expect that persecution will increase here as well; The American Thinker published an article back in 2015 predicting a rise in persecution here in the U.S. and claimed it would happen in five stages; see if you recognize any of these today:
 - a. The first stage begins with attempts to stereotype Christians; the author gave the example of President Obama referring to Christians as "bitter" and clinging to our guns, religion, antipathy to people who aren't like us
 - b. The second stage involves justifying the vilification and hatred of Christians for our refusal to accept changes in moral values or the new norms of society; we are called close-minded, intolerant, bigoted, unfair, homophobic, mean-spirited, science-deniers, and even harmful to culture and society
 - c. Stage three involves marginalizing Christians' role in society; we should be excluded from places or positions of power and influence like politics, academia and media
 - d. The fourth stage involves prohibiting or criminalizing Christian ideas, behaviors and practices not just in public, but within our own churches, businesses, and educational institutions—e.g. prohibiting Christian displays in public places, bans against teachers and coaches engaging in any form of religious expression (e.g. bible on desk, praying), making it illegal for counselors to help teens escape homosexuality, arresting pastors for hate-speech when they preach against certain sins
 - e. Stage five involves persecuting Christians outright—this obviously involves violence against Christians, vandalizing of churches, frivolous criminal charges and lawsuits, but also includes attacks by the media, forcing Christians to engage in things that go against their convictions and the Word of God (e.g. provide products or services for gay weddings or coming out parties, providing health coverage for abortions or sex change operations, etc.)

5. So, what should our response be?
 - a. First, like Paul, we need to develop courageous faith and continue to persevere and complete the mission to which Jesus Christ has called us
 - b. Second, we should resolve ourselves to accept God's will in this matter—no matter what the future may bring—because we know His will is perfect and our reward is certain