

All for the Fame of the Name
Acts 21:1-16

Main Idea: *Upholding and living for the glory of Christ's reputation should be the highest aspiration of every believing heart.*

Introduction: Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 20. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 20 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)...

Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story

Last week we explored Paul's farewell address to the elders of the Ephesian church. Paul warns the church about fierce wolves from both outside and within the church and gives these leaders some specific instructions and an example to follow for difficult days. Today, we will follow Paul as he makes the last leg of his journey to Jerusalem. He makes two key stops – one at Tyre and the second at Caesarea at the home of Philip, the evangelist (whom we met back in Acts 8). In both cases, Paul is going to be warned about what awaits him in Jerusalem. In each case, it is the Spirit giving the warning through God's people. And yet, Paul goes on to Jerusalem anyway.

Question: is Paul in disobedience to God's plans for His life by seemingly dismissing the continued warnings the Spirit is giving through the people? If so, we need to deal with the prospect that one of our heroes somehow missed the will of God for his life. But if not, then we need to ask a deeper question: what was the point of him risking his life in going back to Jerusalem? Why was the Spirit leading him there, and why was Paul himself so determined to go there?

Exposition of Acts 21:1-16: All for Reputation of Jesus

Paul goes to Tyre - Acts 21:1-7

Paul and his companions make their way to Tyre. There at Tyre, Paul is warned through the Spirit about trouble awaiting him in Jerusalem. We don't know exactly how the Spirit spoke to these individuals, but the message was clear: trouble awaits! Now, it's important to note that the Spirit did not explicitly say to NOT go to Jerusalem, only that danger is ahead. Paul's friends interpret the Spirit's message as a reason not to go, and they try to persuade him. But Paul graciously ignores this advice and continues on his journey.

Paul goes to Caesarea

Acts 21:8-12 Paul ends up at the home of Philip, the evangelist. Luke tells us about these daughters, who have the gift of prophecy. Another prophet appears again, Agabus. If you recall from chapter 11, Agabus prophesied about a coming famine that would affect Jerusalem, and it motivated the church at Antioch to send a collection to help the suffering Christians there (who would have lost jobs, homes, etc. for following Jesus). Paul and Barnabas were part of that effort. Well, Agabus shows up again and this time he has a specific word for Paul about Jerusalem. He binds himself and tells Paul that this is what awaits him – imprisonment! Hearing the prophecy, Paul's friends plead with him not to go to Jerusalem. It's a death-sentence! Furthermore, it's a waste of his calling and potential. Think about it from their perspective: Paul had all this success in reaching the Gentile world; this was supposed to be his main calling – why then go back to Jerusalem when he doesn't really need to. What good is it going to do to have him arrested, and possibly put to death when there are so many other Gentile cities that he hasn't tried to visit yet that may be receptive to the gospel. Furthermore, think about all the young Christian churches, and leaders, and friends who could still benefit from his ministry – his letters, his friendship, his mentoring!

Now, notice the pronoun there in the text: *we*. Whenever you see a "we" in the narrative, you know that it is Luke speaking. Luke himself, Paul's companion, is begging him not to go. How does Paul respond?

Acts 21:13 - Paul is willing to die for the sake of Jesus's name/reputation

One of most pronounced statements we have from the lips of Paul about what his priorities are. We'll come back to this text in just a moment but let's first finish out the passage. Exasperated, his friends commit him to the Lord.

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Acts 21:14-16 - And so, after much pleading, they finally give up trying to reason with him, and they just simply leave it all to God's will.

Question: Did Paul miss the will of God?

So, coming back to our original questions: did Paul somehow miss the will of God? Is he in disobedience to the Spirit in insisting on going to Jerusalem despite the prophecies being given? Or, is there something else going on in this passage? Now, I have heard some say that Paul is outside the will of God and refusing to listen to the voice of the Spirit, and that this decision sends him on a trajectory that was full trials and suffering that God didn't intend.

I disagree. To the contrary, Paul is acting not only in accordance with the will of God and the Spirit, but also from a deep-seated conviction about what is most important about his life. To show you what I mean, I want to briefly revisit Paul's travel plans shared in the previous chapters. The first mention of a trip to Jerusalem appears in Acts 19:

Acts 19:21 - Paul resolves to go to Jerusalem in the Spirit

Luke tells us that Paul resolves *in the Spirit* to go back through Macedonia, to Jerusalem, and then to Rome. To resolve something in the Spirit, or more literally, by means of the Spirit, infers that he sensed the Spirit's leading in this decision.

Last week, we saw in Acts 20 during his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, how Paul is bound by the Spirit, or in the ESV he is constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, even though trouble awaits him.

Acts 20:22-24 - Paul is constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem

In both cases, Luke shows us that Paul is operating under the direction and influence of the Spirit, and that Jerusalem is the next destination for him. He understood the risks, and those risks get repeated to him by these different prophecies being spoken over him. His friends, out of their natural affection for him, encourage him not to go due to the impending dangers.

So, if it was the will of God for Paul to go to back to Jerusalem, and to do so knowing full well the dangers and risks involved, we now need to ask the question: why did Paul want to go back to Jerusalem, and why would was the Spirit of God leading him to do so?

Why Jerusalem for Paul?

To answer this question, we need a little bit of help from the letter Paul wrote just before he started his journey to Jerusalem: the book of Romans! Now, in Acts 20:2-3, we find Paul spending 3 months (winter) in Greece (Corinth) where he presumably wrote Romans. If we go to Romans, here is what we find about Paul's travel plans, and what motivates him. First, in the opening paragraph notice what Paul says about the purpose of his mission: Romans 1:5 - *Paul carries out his mission for the sake of Jesus's name/reputation among the nations*. For the sake and reputation of the name of Jesus, the king, the Son of God, the Messiah!

Next, let's look at his travel plans... Romans 15:18-21 - *Paul wants to proclaim Jesus's name (fame/glory/reputation) to be known in places where it is currently unknown*

Paul feels like he has finished the circuit around the Mediterranean, "naming Christ" everywhere he has gone. Again, similar language as Acts 21 and Romans 1:5, we find Paul wants to see Christ's "name" become famous, and His reputation magnified. He goes on in the next verses. How is he going to do this? Well, he tells us in the next verses:

Romans 15:22-24 - So, the ultimate place he wants to travel is to Spain, and he's hoping that just as Antioch served as a mission base for him, so the Roman church will too. However, there is something that is of even more importance than evangelism for Paul, something that keeps him from going to straight to Rome and then on to Spain. Let's read on:

Romans 15:25-29 - The reason for going to Jerusalem is to bring this collection to suffering church in that region, to aid Jewish believers in need of aid from their Gentile brothers and sisters in Macedonia. Now, here is an important point: he

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didn't have to be the one to deliver the aid. Someone else could have done it! But Paul insists on being there personally to deliver the aid himself. Why?

Paul's missions... While Paul desires to spread the fame/name of Jesus to the world, he is concerned about the reputation of Jesus in light of his relationship with the Jerusalem church. At first glance, it looks like it's a controversy of God's guidance; but looking more broadly at the text, it's really not about guidance at all. It's really about...the inestimable worth of Jesus's reputation, and how Paul goes about safeguarding it from distortion, misunderstanding, and ridicule.

Remember: Paul knew he had a major PR problem amongst some Jewish Christians, particularly those around Jerusalem. due to the controversies surrounding his ministry: relation to Israel, to the law, breaking Roman laws, stirring up riots, etc. Yet, for Paul, his own reputation was not the issue as much *as the reputation of Jesus, which he was supposed to be an ambassador*. So he makes plans to go to take up a collection on behalf of the church in Jerusalem, and make a personal visit to them, to not only show his support and solidarity with them (on behalf of the churches of Macedonia) but also to let them know that his gospel is Christ's – and it's for both Jews and Gentiles, and whatever fake news they have heard about him, he's there to not only clear up, but to show that his motives are for Jesus, and Jesus alone, and not anything else.

Now, let's go back to our text in Acts 21 and read Paul's own purpose statement with fresh eyes: Acts 21:14 - *What is Paul's highest aspiration?*

The honor, fame, and glory of the reputation of the Lord Jesus

Paul is jealous for and passionately committed to the fame and reputation of Jesus. In fact, going a step further, Paul is willing to give his own life if it means more glory and fame for Jesus's reputation.

For whose sake is the Spirit revealing Paul's coming troubles in Jerusalem?

So, here is the question: for whose sake is the Spirit of God sharing these warnings about Paul's trials in Jerusalem? If Paul already knew what was awaiting him, why is the Spirit sending these prophecies to him? To tease him, agonize him, test him, cause him to fear? I don't think so. That's not how the Holy Spirit works. The Holy Spirit's primary role is to illuminate and draw people to Jesus and form Christ within them, empower and embolden them to be a witness for Jesus, and to encourage and comfort them with the peace of Christ when they are distraught. In other words, the Spirit is all about Jesus! So why then?

I suggest the Spirit's warnings weren't for Paul's sake as much as it was for his friends. What do his friends discover from Paul through the Spirit about what matters most in the life of the church and every believer? God intends through Paul's example (and steadfastness) to help strengthen the faith of these leaders, so that they too would have the courage, the wisdom, to understand what being a disciple of Jesus entailed: *all-out commitment and dedication to spreading His fame and upholding His reputation by our witness – even at the costs of our lives.*

Main Idea: *Upholding and living for the glory of Christ's reputation should be the highest aspiration of every believing heart.*

Application: How do we uphold and bear witness to the reputation of Jesus in a Pauline way?

Do my actions...

Serve the spiritual good of others for Christ?

Is it helping and meeting the needs of others in Jesus's name? Paul's collection served the people, it was for their good and God's glory (produce thanksgiving).

Reflect the sacrificial love of Christ?

Paul could have just sent delegates and a note of encouragement. I'm sure they would have understood. But he risks his own life for them to see, in person, what the "gospel" looks like in person.

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Help others find salvation in Christ?

Paul wants to lead to the salvation of others; it brings them somehow closer to Jesus.

All for the fame of the name!

Finding Jesus in a Den of Wolves
Acts 20:17-38

Main Idea: *Christian leaders are called to shepherd the flock of God with truthful, Christ-centered teaching and humble, Christ-like love.*

Exposition of Acts 20:17-38

Paul's example - Acts 20:17-21

Paul's commitment - Acts 20:22-24

Paul's charge - Acts 20:25-31

Paul's prayer - Acts 20:32-38

Application: Finding Jesus in a Den of Wolves

The Dangers of Love/Compassion without the Truth of Christ

The Dangers of Truth without the Love/Compassion of Christ

Paul's solution?

- 1) Teach the whole counsel of God
- 2) Live in accordance with the Jesus-ethic of "giving" over "receiving"

Questions for Small Groups:

- 1) What is the core message Paul preaches about Jesus?

- 2) What impresses you about Paul's character/devotion in Acts 20?

- 3) What "wolves" do you see in the church today?

- 4) How are you walking the line between "truth" and "love" in your daily witness? What's been challenging? Encouraging?