

This morning we are going to be looking at Acts 21:1 – 23:35, although we won't be reading the whole passage. As we begin the chapter, Paul has just left the Ephesian elders and is heading towards Jerusalem, where he knows trouble awaits. Let's begin by reading Acts 21:1-15:

*Acts 21:1-15 - After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ² We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶ After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. ⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem **for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." ¹⁵ After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.*

After this passage, Paul meets with James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. After he goes to the temple to purify himself, he is seized by the Jewish mob. Let's continue reading in v. 35:

³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!" ³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?" "Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸ "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?" ³⁹ Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people." ⁴⁰ Having

received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

Despite the fact that they want him dead, he stops and asks to speak to the people. He shares with them that he is a Jew like them, zealous for the truth, but when Jesus revealed himself, he realized he was wrong and turned to faith in Jesus.

Paul tells them that he is a Roman citizen, and so they bring him to a trial. In ch. 23, the mob plots to take his life, but Paul's nephew finds out, and Paul is sent to Herod's palace.

There is a lot in this passage, but I want to focus on the courage of Paul, and see what we learn from this passage about where to find the courage we need to face the trials of life. There are many things to be afraid of in this life. Fear of losing someone we love. Fear of having a difficult conversation. Fear of stepping out into the unknown. Fear of sharing our faith. How do we find courage to face our fears?

1) The love & encouragement of Christian friends

Paul stops in many places on the way to Jerusalem and receives the love, prayers, and tears of his friends.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, 14 - For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing... ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Whatever you are facing, you are not alone, so don't try to face it alone. Lean on others for prayer, encouragement, and accountability

2) Trusting in the will of God.

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." ¹⁵ After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

Paul knew that God's will was for him to go to Jerusalem. And he trusted God. He trusted that God loved him, that God was good, and that even if he was hurt or killed, that God would use it for good.

Acts 20:21-24 - *I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.* ²² *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to **Jerusalem**, not knowing what will happen to me there.* ²³ *I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.* ²⁴ *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

John 14:26-27 - *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

There are many parallels between Jesus and Paul. Like Jesus, Paul is rejected by his own people, arrested without cause, and imprisoned, misrepresented by false witnesses, slapped in the face in court, a hapless victim of a secret Jewish plot, and subjected to five trials. Even so, he faces the crowd and courageously shares his testimony and the gospel with them.

God is working all things together for good. Even if things go bad, God can bring good. You can't screw up your life beyond repair.

Romans 8:28-39 - *And we know that in all things God **works** for the **good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* ³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* ³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* ³³ *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these*

things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Where does courage come from? Trusting in the will of God. Knowing that He is working all things together for good, and that His love will never leave you.

3) **Accepting the approval of God.**

Paul tells his testimony to the crowd:

¹⁹ "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' ²¹ 'Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Paul recognizes that he is a terrible sinner. And yet God saved him and is using him for His glory. We are all sinners saved by grace. He knows us and loves us. What can anyone else do to us?

***Psalm 118:6-7** - The LORD is with **me**; I will not be afraid. **What can** man **do to me**? ⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.*

No matter what anyone else says about you, no matter what happens, you have the approval of the one whose opinion matters most.

***2 Timothy 1:7** - For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

4) **Hoping in the resurrection.**

*⁶ Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. **I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.**"*

We have fear because there are things we don't want to lose this side of heaven. Our children. Our safety. Our health. Our job. But as believers, we know that this life is not the end. We know that all that we do in the name of Jesus will somehow last into eternity.

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 - When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Put your hope in the Lord, and in the resurrection. Let the love and prayers of your brothers and sisters encourage you where you are afraid. Accept the approval of God, and trust in His will.