

We are continuing this morning to go through the New Testament book of Acts, the story of the early church. We have been following Paul's missionary journeys, and we are up to chapter 21 today. Everything is going to change for Paul in this chapter as he enters Jerusalem. He is going to be assaulted, arrested, and brought to trial, and over the next six chapters there will be five trials as Paul tries to defend himself from the charges the Jews have brought against him. As we look at chapter 21, I want to speak in particular about courage, something that Paul displays in abundance in this passage throughout Acts, but especially in chapter 21.

Let's begin in v. 10-15:

Acts 21:10-15 - *After we had been in Caesarea 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.*

Notice his courage. Despite being told that if he enters Jerusalem, the Jews there will seize him and hand him over to the Gentiles, Paul tells them that this will not stop him from following the leading of the Spirit into Jerusalem and preaching the gospel of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection there.

In Jerusalem, as prophesied, Paul is seized by a mob.

Acts 21:27-40 - *When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into **the temple area.**) ³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they*

stopped beating Paul. ³³ *The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done.* ³⁴ *Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.* 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:*

The Jews have beaten Paul and are trying to kill him. The Romans intervene and take him away. Paul, as he is being taken away, asks for permission to speak to the crowd. That's right, to the crowd of Jews that just tried to kill him. Despite the fact that they want him dead, he stops and asks to speak to the people. In chapter 22, he shares with them that he is a Jew like them, zealous for the truth, but when Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah, he realized he was wrong and turned to faith in Jesus. And God sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people.

Look at his courage, willing to risk his life to share the gospel with a people who tried to kill him. Despite Agabus' prophecy, he still goes to Jerusalem, knowing that he will be persecuted and arrested. And even after it happens, he still wants them to know about Jesus. This passage is primarily about Paul's courage in the face of opposition and persecution. But it can also apply to other areas of life. Where do we find that kind of courage to face the challenges of life? What are you afraid of? Where do you need courage? Fear of losing a loved one? Fear of stepping out into the unknown? Fear of sharing your faith? Fear of losing your job? Let's look at where Paul finds courage:

1) His primary motivation is to bring glory and honor to Jesus

Acts 21:10-15 - *After we had been in Caesarea 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.*"

Listen to Paul. His goal in life is not his own happiness or comfort or fame but the glory and honor of Jesus. He will do anything to bring honor to Jesus by sharing the gospel with everyone he can. As he put it in the previous chapter when speaking with the Ephesian elders:

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.

What is your primary motivation? If you are primarily living for anything in this world other than God, then you will instinctively be afraid of losing that and choose to protect that over being courageous and risking losing it. The Bible calls that idolatry, something I preached about two weeks ago. If your primary motivation is your kids, you will be filled with fears and have a hard time following God. **Think of Jim & Carol Cymbala in the Brooklyn Tabernacle.** If it's your own comfort, or financial success, or a relationship, then you will be afraid of losing that and will instinctively choose that over God. If Paul had been more concerned about his own safety or reputation, he never would have had the courage necessary to preach the gospel to those who wanted him dead. But if your eyes are on Jesus and your desire is for Him to be glorified, then you will have courage.

Hebrews 12:1-3 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

He endured the opposition and persecution out of love for you. And if your eyes are on Him and your primary motivation is to bring Him glory and honor, then you will have the courage to endure anything that comes your way.

2) He trusts God is with Him and is working for good

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.

As Paul shared with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, 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.

There is great courage that comes from knowing God is with us. This is not just the courage that comes from talking yourself into something difficult, but instead trusting that God's presence and strength will help you. Listen to some verses that talk about the courage that God's presence gives us in the face of fear:

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.*

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.*

Isaiah 41:10 - *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*

Hebrews 13:5-6 - *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. **What can man do** to me?"*

Courage comes from knowing God is with you, and that He is always working things for good. Even if things go bad, God can bring good out of it. You can't screw up your life beyond repair. Let that encourage you!

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.*

Let Romans 8 encourage you! Nothing can separate you from His love! And He is always working for good! Where does courage come from? Trusting in the will of God. Knowing that He is always with us working all things together for good, and that His love will never leave you. And making your primary motivation to bring glory and honor to Jesus instead of living for something in this world that can be taken away.

3) He has an unshakeable hope in the resurrection

Acts 23:6 - *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."*

As I said previously, we have fear because there are things we don't want to lose this side of heaven that we place above our desire to honor God. Our children. Our safety. Our health. Our reputation. 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. We know that because we will live forever, that everything we do for the Lord matters eternally. And so, if our primary motivation is to honor Him, then we do not have to fear, because it all matters eternally!

Philippians 1:21-26 - *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*

Courage comes when we know that death is not the end.

4) He has the loving encouragement and prayers of Christian friends

I don't want to overlook this one. Because so often we need the encouragement and prayers of others to remind us of the truths I previously mentioned. To encourage is to fill someone with courage. In fact, 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, just as Paul did.

Ephesians 6:19-20 - Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Where does courage come from?

- 1) Make your primary motivation to bring glory and honor to Jesus
- 2) Trust that God is with you and is working for good
- 3) Have an unshakeable hope in the resurrection
- 4) Lean on the loving encouragement and prayers of Christian friends