



First Baptist Church Selmer

THE ROAD TO ROMANS • PAUL'S PERSONAL CONVICTIONS • ACTS 21:1-14,17-36 •

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MAIN POINT

When we are fully convinced that Jesus "is who He says He is", we will be obedient to His call and passionate about His priorities.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a time when you were convinced of something to the point that it shaped your decision-making.

Do your convictions always dictate your actions and values? Why or why not?

If we truly believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, how should it shape our actions and values?

We would all like to think that our actions and values are consistent with our beliefs. The reality of our lives, however, often paints a different picture. We allow ourselves to be distracted from the best things by lesser things. In other words, our priorities betray our hearts. By looking at Paul's determination to minister to the poor believers in Jerusalem, we learn what it means to live convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 21:1-14.

1 "And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. 4 And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed 6 and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. 8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. 10 While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" 12 When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, 'Let the will of the Lord be done.'" (ESV)

How did Paul know that he was on the right path when other Christians tried to convince him otherwise?

In what area of your life do you need to make sure you are on the right path?

Paul was convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead and that God wanted Him to travel to Jerusalem to minister to the persecuted Christians there and to continue preaching the gospel. Paul knew this because God had told him so. Thus, as we are checking the path we are on, we must remember to weigh anything we hear against the Word of God. God is not going to contradict Himself. If we think we have heard the Holy Spirit say something to us, the first place we must turn is back to the Bible. Once we do that, then we can move forward in faith, knowing that Jesus is not going to abandon us. He will continue to guide and direct us. Like Paul, the path may lead to uncomfortable places, but we can know that we will never go there alone.

How would you have responded to Agabus's warning (vv. 10-11)? How did Paul's companions respond (v. 12)?

How did Paul's response demonstrate that he was convinced that Christ had risen from the dead (v. 13)? What does Paul's response tell us about his purpose in life? What does it tell us about his faith?

How can Paul's words in verse 13 encourage you or others when facing hardship for doing what God has called you to do?

Paul was not being told that going to Jerusalem would result in an uncomfortable night's sleep; he was being told that he was going to face extreme persecution and suffering. Paul, however, demonstrated that he was fully convinced of Jesus' resurrection by responding to the promise of persecution with firm determination to press on serving the Lord. He said, "*I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (v. 13).

Why do you think Paul's friends changed their minds and accepted his decision in verse 14? What do you think persuaded them?

When Paul's friends saw they could not change his mind, they responded similarly to Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). They overcame their natural instincts and trusted God's plan for Paul's life.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACT 21:17-36.

17 "When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. 25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.' 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, 'Away with him!'"(ESV)

What did Paul share with the church in Jerusalem (v. 19)? How did they receive Paul's testimony (vv. 20-21)?

The members of the Jerusalem church glorified God when they heard Paul share of his ministry among the Gentiles, but they also warned him that there were many in Jerusalem who slandered Paul and had spread lies that he was teaching people to forsake the law (v. 21).

How did Paul's actions in these verses demonstrate that he was convinced of the gospel he preached?

Some people believe that following God results in an easy life full of earthly blessings. How does Paul's testimony contradict such notions? What about the testimony of other people in the Bible?

Read Romans 8:26-28 and 1 Peter 1:6-9. How might these verses change our perspective on suffering? What might God be doing in our lives by allowing us to suffer?

Nowhere in Scripture are believers promised a suffering-free life. In fact, we are promised the opposite: "*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Timothy 3:12). The good news, however, for Christians is that God has a design for their suffering. Romans 8:28 reminds us that "*God works all things*", including our suffering, "*together for our good*." First Peter 1:7 reminds us that God intends suffering to refine our faith and

make us more like Jesus. Paul not only understood these realities, but he lived them out. By devoting ourselves to divine priorities and trusting God in all circumstances, we too can demonstrate to the world what it looks like to be convinced of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How might your priorities need to change to prioritize living for God's glory and Christ's kingdom?

What temporal things most often distract you from eternal concerns? What is one step you might take this week to devote yourself to that which is eternal?

Are there any areas of your life where fear of consequences is keeping you from obedience? How might spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study help you overcome such fears?

PRAYER

Close in prayer by thanking God for sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins as an example for us. Thank Him for promising to work all things together for our good and for working in the midst of our suffering to make us more like Jesus.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 21:1-14, 17-36

21:1. The shipboard journey continued from Ephesus by way of Cos to Rhodes and Patara.

21:3. The most common vessels sailing the Mediterranean were grain ships from Egypt, heading to the rest of the Roman Empire (but especially Rome).

21:4. Some Christians in Tyre had received from the Holy Spirit the same message that Paul disclosed in Ephesus: Trouble awaited Paul in Jerusalem (20:22-23).

21:5-6. The departure from the Christians at Tyre resembled the departure from Miletus and the Ephesian elders (20:37-38). They knew Paul was heading for his deepest trouble

yet.

21:8. Philip the evangelist was probably so called to distinguish him from other Philips. He was one of those selected to serve in the church in Jerusalem. Philip eventually settled with his daughters in Caesarea. Some believe he may have been one of the original Twelve (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:14). But he is distinctly identified as one of the Seven (6:3).

21:9. The word virgin means Philip's daughters were young and unmarried.

21:10-11. Agabus explicitly stated that Paul would fall into hostile hands in Jerusalem. As it turned out (21:30-36), Paul was delivered by Gentiles out of Jewish hands, but then remained in Gentile hands throughout the rest of the book of Acts.

21:12. With such an explicit prophecy, it is not surprising that Paul's traveling companions and the locals begged him not to go on to Jerusalem.

21:13. Paul had already thought about the cost of obedience and decided it was worthwhile.

21:14. Ultimately, the only appropriate response for a believer is the one that Paul's companions stated: The Lord's will be done. One of the major themes of the book of Acts is the simultaneous reality of human choice and the sovereign divine will (4:24-28).

21:17 The Jerusalem church was comprised mainly of Christian Jews.

21:18 James is singled out as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, along with a group of elders. It is not clear how many of the original apostles would have still been in Jerusalem, but they do not appear in the following events.

21:19 As Paul did in his last major meeting in Jerusalem (15:4), he told James and the church elders what God had been doing among the Gentiles through his ministry.

21:20 Having listened to Paul's report about what God had done "*among the Gentiles*" (v. 19), the Jerusalem leadership rejoiced but also answered back with something like one-upmanship. Mention of many thousands of Jews converting in Jerusalem was perhaps exaggeration, for the city had a population between 25,000 and 50,000. At issue in the back-and-forth between Jerusalem leaders and Paul (minister to the Gentiles) is the role of the law in Christian faith; thus, the emphasis on Jewish believers being zealous for the law.

Perhaps this response also represented an attempt by believers in Jerusalem to strengthen their position as they saw the center of the church shift to Gentile Christians.

21:21 Rumor said Paul was teaching Jews who were dispersed among Gentiles to disregard Mosaic law and traditional Jewish rituals such as circumcision. To dismiss these fears, the brothers proposed a solution that would absolve Paul of the charges (vv. 23-24).

21:23-24 This proposal does not in any way imply that works of the law are necessary for salvation, which would fundamentally contradict Paul's preaching of the gospel (Rm 3:20).

21:25 The issue of the letter had been solved much earlier, and what Paul had or had not encouraged Jews living among Gentiles to do would not be clarified by the proposal of verses 23-24. James was apparently succumbing to pressures from the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Ultimately, his proposal backfired (v. 27).

21:26 It is somewhat surprising that Paul agreed to perform the ritual of purification. Perhaps he sensed this was part of God's overall plan, to which he was partially privy (vv. 10-11; 20:22-23).

21:27-29 Paul returned to the temple at the end of the seven days to complete the Nazarite sacrifices. These would have taken place in the Holy Place of the temple. Some Asian Jews spotted Paul there and leveled a specific charge against him, accusing him of defiling the sanctuary by taking the Gentile Trophimus into the sacred precincts. Trophimus was one of the Ephesian church representatives who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (20:4). Paul had not taken him into the area that was off-limits to Gentiles. The accusations of the Asian Jews worked, however, and a mob gathered, intent on killing Paul.

21:30-31 The temple was the center of Jerusalem life, for the courtyard served as a "town square." Word of the riot quickly spread, and soon a huge crowd had gathered, screaming for Paul's head. They dragged him out of the sacred area and shut the gates to avoid any further defilement of the temple area. They would have killed Paul had he not been rescued by the timely arrival of the Roman troops.

21:32-33 The Roman occupation force in Jerusalem numbered 1,000 troops. They were housed in the fortress of Antonia, which was built onto the northwest corner of the temple area. Its high towers provided a full view of the temple area. The Roman commander had the rank of a tribune and was the highest-ranking officer in Jerusalem.

21:34-36 Even with the soldiers protecting him, Paul had to be carried as the mob pressed in for the kill. Fortunately, the barracks were nearby.