

# Jerusalem Bound

Acts 21:1-14

Our next two messages are tied together around Paul being tied up and taken captive. We find Paul first traveling from Ephesus to come to the borders of Israel and Judea. He is, Jerusalem Bound. Next Sunday, we find him arrested in the city, and so he is, Bound in Jerusalem!

Recall that this was a long-planned and desired visit. It had a diaconal concern, as Paul had raised funds for the poor brethren in Jerusalem.

But let us not forget what drove the Apostle Paul in everything – it was the glory of his Redeemer – as we see in verse 13: “for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Jesus the Savior, Jesus the Lord, Jesus the High Priest, Jesus the Word, Jesus the Master, Jesus the Sovereign, the Creator, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Propitiation, the Sacrifice, the Resurrection and the Life, the One whose Name is high above all other names – both in this age and that which is to come – the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the King of kings, Lord of Lords, very God of very God.

We are looking at three points from this trip, and we will come back, time and again, to this name of Jesus as the answer to all.

And the first point is that of **the Bond of Christian Fellowship**.

As Paul and his friends - including Luke - make their way from port to port, and have stay-overs in several of them at least – we see how welcomed he is in the abiding tie of God’s people. What a point is this – that regardless of where we have been, or what we have experienced, or what adventures of ours upon the high seas or in some far-flung corner of the globe – what truly counts the most is the Christian tie that binds.

Love for one another in the Gospel is evident here. The world will hate you for following Jesus; but His people love one another. You see love in the attachment shown all along the way here – like a necklace of fine pearls. If love is the desire to unite, then it is hard to let go. We saw this at the end of Acts 20 – re-read 36-38.

This kind of bond has continued through the centuries, down to our day. You may know the lines of this familiar hymn:

*You will notice we say brother, and sister 'round here.  
It's because we're a family, and these folks are so near.  
When one has a heartache, we all share the tears,  
And rejoice in each victory, in this family so dear.*

*I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.  
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood.  
Joint heirs with Jesus, as we travel this sod,  
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.*

This love also demonstrates itself secondly in hospitality. Recall that they had no Holiday Inn, no Motel 6. There was probably some form of lodging or public house available, but this was unneeded.

And are you not impressed as I am with the whole family concern in verses 4-5 – the children engaged in showing love and hospitality, and escorting their guest out? How many today would say: “Oh no, we cannot help – we have these children, you see.”

I know much has changed since those times. However, these gospel commands still abide: “Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. (Hebrews 13:2-3)

<sup>10</sup> *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Rom 12:10-13)*

How did our Savior act? Did he close the doors of his heart and life to others? How far afield is being closed to our Redeemer? He did not serve only when it was comfortable or convenient to Him. He who welcomed us, enemies into His heavenly home, expects we would welcome fellow believers into ours.

But there is another strong theme here under this heading – Love for one another in their dangers and trials is a third subpoint. How often Paul was impressed with the faithfulness of fellowship especially when we in trouble, in prison, in danger, in suffering, in low times. Christianity does not make fair-weather friends, does it? Those kinds you can find in the world, and their name is Legion!

Notice that there doesn't seem to be anybody who doesn't know Paul's impending danger. They see it and are fearful for him. It is like those in the last days of Elijah, everybody saying to Elisha that the Lord was taking the fiery prophet from him. But this brings us into our next point – so draw your attention to the center in all of this: what is it that joins us as one? This love for one another? This demonstration, this hospitality, this care for each other especially when troubles arise?

It is the name of Jesus! When you love one another, serve one another, give to one another, sacrifice for one another, are you doing so in the name of your Lord? More than that, are you not doing these things for His name? Giving a cup of cold water, looking to Him and to what pleases Him? And even more than that – are you not in actuality serving Jesus Himself – to His name? Jesus tells us on the judgment

day: “When you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto Me?”

Oh, this is precisely how Jesus loves – this is the very mark of a Christian disciple – that our weaknesses, our needs, are such that our love is not driven away like a vapor, but like Christ, is touched with the feeling of one another’s infirmities! This brings us to the second point after the bond of love in the Gospel, is **the Hardships of Christian Service for Christ**.

Here is Paul, travelling once again to such great distances, overcoming such great opposition, all in order to bring the precious Word of life to the perishing, and to build up the Church of the Lord Jesus. You see this here on his journey as he passes by the island where it all began back Acts 13 – the island of Cyprus. How many miles had he travelled by this time? How many trials, how many persecutions endured, how many sleepless nights? How many disappointments, pains, difficulties, inconveniences had he endured? He is not sitting quietly by his fireside in his home city of Tarsus, reading and rereading the parchments – he is bringing the seed to the soil. So see the great distances overcome.

And see also the great opposition which stands along the way, even in his way. How had Paul been received by the Jews in the past? How often had they abused him? Imprisoned him? Resisted him? Attempted to take his life? And still his heart bleeds for his kinsmen, the Jew!

Now it is here we must register a strong difference with some writers on this passage. There are fine men who say that in Acts 21-28, with not much mention of planting or edifying churches, or preaching the gospel in synagogues, schools, or church, not much in the way of miracles wrought, the wicked reprov'd, sinners called in, and

believers growing in grace – that the theme for us to fix our eyes upon is simply that of persecution, suffering for the sake of the gospel.

We should disagree with that, and sharply. There is persecution here of course – there is a trial – this is one of our points in our message today. But this is found in a wider and more prominent theme. Paul is not merely suffering trials and tribulations; he is fulfilling his commission, especially in bearing witness to kings.

Look back with me as we read Acts 9.15-16 – the first conversion account. Recall that Paul desired not only to go to Jerusalem – but also to Rome. Now how is he going to get to Rome? How is he going to witness before the rulers, who continue to have questions and even persecute the Christian faith? How is he going to have this opportunity? Will he just continue going from city to city, facing riots, upheaval, arrest, and standing before whatever governor or minor ruler appointed by Caesar may be seated there? It seems clear enough that Paul is looking westward to Rome as he is traveling eastward to Jerusalem. He has a good idea what will take place there – he may even be counting on it – and his intention to appeal to Caesar is not far behind.

Think of how the book of Acts, for the next 250 years, would serve for other Christians, Pastors, men, women and even children, brought before some earthly throne, to make defense. Eventually, the Gospel would come under the protection of law, of leaders, of kings and queens, who would stand up for the right of Christians to believe their Bibles; and such madness of persecuting them – of simply putting them to death for what they believed – would be halted – at least for a while in the Roman empire. There would be waves of persecution raising its ugly head; you and I are living in a time that is returning to such persecution. Paul is showing us in these next chapters how to defend ourselves as we are brought before the authorities; why Christianity should be defended; why Christianity should not be

persecuted but properly protected. The Christian and the Gospel will always face opposition in a fallen world.

But there is another wrinkle here to be considered before coming to our 3<sup>rd</sup> point – not only are great distances covered in our hardships, and great threats along the way, but even opposition from well-wishing but confused believers: instead of well-intentioned dragons, they are well-intentioned but mistaken sheep. Their cry is singular, and that is: ‘spare yourself’! They even have a prophet who acts out the dangers ahead and the call to not follow through. The one who owns this belt will be tied. Paul doesn’t contest it.

Now, they had to know that the Spirit does not always lead to comfortable places... sometimes His call is to uncomfortable situations, or you are going to have to compromise your faith. Have you ever heard of people insisting that they could not surrender to God fully, or He will send me to Africa, or to India, or to China? Does the Spirit always lead us into the most comfortable situation? Of course not. Even the leaders, the ministers, are opposing Paul.

What careful and firm resolve is needed for this long and difficult road! Sometimes our leaders, pastors, parents will not understand. They finally resolve, saying the Lord’s will be done, and give up trying to persuade Paul otherwise.

But Christ’s name comes to the rescue again – because His name is strength; His name gives the stronger bonds which overcome the bonds of fears in this life; there is an expulsive power to the grace of Christ which kicks out such time-serving, flesh-sparing considerations. Paul replies, why would you soften my heart? Not break, but soften, weaken it, stopping my resolve! You are fighting against Christ in me! Christ makes our grip strong and firm. We are to be a readied people to suffer hardships – through much tribulation must we enter the kingdom of God!

And that leads us to the third point of our message today. **The readiness of God's people to serve**, to not be swayed, to be persuaded, even by those in the church! He is ready to serve elsewhere.

This readiness – please note – will silent those voices; to overcome them. It will go the distance – it doesn't just go part way but perseveres. Here is the nature of this grace in us. It goes the distance – why? Because Paul is fanatic? Paul is nutcase? No. Here is the point – the name of Jesus comes into play: because Christ Jesus is worthy, a name worthy for us to suffer for; worthy that we might overcome everything and anything that comes between us and glorifying the Son of God – as the Bible commands!

If Christ is worthy – as it says here – “I am not only willing to be bound and arrested, but even to DIE for Jesus!” – is that in you? Do you have this in you? Have someone worth dying for? Of course you do – because He gave up everything for you – He died in your stead – that you would have life and follow Him. Can we really live for Him if we unwilling to die to ourselves to Him?

Dear friends – you need courage, and so do I, to do this. This is not an easy undertaking, to live the Christian life. To be ready to march through all opponents? Again it comes from Jesus, doesn't it. He is our source of strength.

And the first and foremost way He ministers this strength to you – that you can do all things through Him – is by His Word. How did Jehovah encourage Joshua as he led a difficult people into a strange land? He was to take this Word, read this Word, believe this Word, and do this Word. Be strengthened and courageous by it – do not let it depart from your lips, from your heart, from your feet!

It also comes from prayer – courage and bravery comes from standing in the presence of God. Having the fear of God – the glory of God that saturates your life – pushes out the lesser fears, casting them out, for they cannot abide. Have the bright countenance of one who is in communion with the living God – like those who saw in the disciples that they had been with Jesus. We have much worse terrors that would come from eternity than anything time has to offer. We fear God; humbled and built up in prayer in the right way. How many times do Christians find themselves going forth without this weapon and fall flat on their faces? This is the way of unbelief.

Then not only His Word and the gift of prayer, He has given you glorious and golden examples to stir your faith; of others who have stood the test. He has given you negative examples of those who have fallen; but also great positive ones – heroes of bravery and courage; men and women and even children who have stood strong in faith, as Christ was theirs.

Take these things to heart – what kind of Christian will you be? Are you truly Jerusalem bound, like Paul – not to the Jerusalem that is below, but that which is above; to heaven you go, and that in a straight line?! People see that, know it in you, can feel it. Oh may that be seen in all of us. Amen? Amen.