

Acts

Part 52 – “Knowing and Doing the Will of God”

Acts 21:1-16

The remaining chapters of Acts (21-28) form what we may rightly describe as the final section of the narrative. Luke has been documenting the spread of the Lord's gospel and his church from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the Gentile territories (1:8). The Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys have been a significant part of the gospel's advance. For much of the remainder of Acts Paul will be in Roman captivity. He will be moved about to various prisons and appear before various Roman authorities.

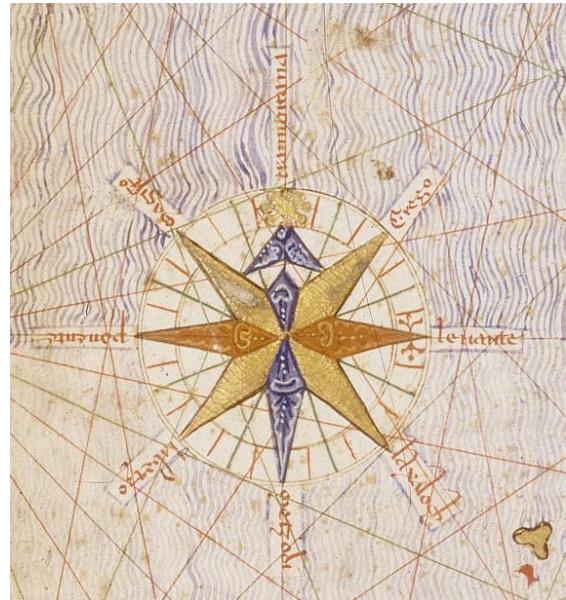
In these final chapters Luke will develop at least four themes: 1) Persecution and suffering often accompany faithfulness to Jesus, 2) The parallels between Jesus and

Paul in their experiences of treatment at the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities, 3) The gospel withstands all assaults, 4) The superintending providence of God to care for his servants (19:21; 20:22; 23:11; 27:23-24).

Beginning in chapter 21 Luke documents their journey from Miletus to Jerusalem. During their seven day stay at Tyre Paul is urged by the Christians there to not travel to Jerusalem having knowledge that he will endure great suffering. He receives the same warning from a prophet named Agabus. But Paul remains steadfast, willing to endure suffering for the sake of Christ and His church.

Main Idea: Disciples of Jesus must be more committed to doing God's will than to their own comfort.

- **Vs. 1** – “...torn ourselves...” Affection on both sides and, all the more, in light of Paul's prediction that they would not see one another again.
- **Vs. 3** – An eyewitness account. According to Chrysostom, the passage took five days.
- **Vs. 4** – “Through the Spirit...” that is, by prophecy. This text is perplexing to some who see in it indications that the Holy Spirit is giving contradictory messages. However, there is no need to see these words as indicating a contradiction in God's guidance. In view of what Agabus will tell Paul in v. 11, it is most likely that the Spirit testified to them all of the suffering that Paul would undergo in Jerusalem and they took it upon themselves, in view of that predication, to urge Paul not to go. In other words, they had correct knowledge about Paul's sufferings but reached a wrong conclusion about what Paul ought to do.
- **Vs. 8** – We last encountered Philip in 8:40 in Caesarea. This is Philip “the evangelist,” one of the original deacons appointed in Jerusalem.
- **Vs. 11** – Agabus comes to Paul in the style of an Old Testament prophet. And like those prophets did at times, Agabus illustrates his message to Paul. Be careful here. Agabus' prophecy will come true — it was accurate — but it was not a command. Christ prophesied his own death in Jerusalem many times, but not to provide a reason not to proceed there. Agabus' prophecy had the dramatic impact of inducing even Paul's companions, Luke included, to urge him not to go on to Jerusalem.
- Paul's firmness resulted from his sense that he was supposed to go to Jerusalem. He had been working toward this end for some years now, taking the collection from his Gentile churches, bringing with him representatives of those churches. He was probably well aware of the tension between the Jewish and Gentile churches — which we will soon be reminded of — and knew how important it was to act to resolve that tension. He was entirely willing to face death in the pursuit of these objectives. “Thy will be done” here resembles Christ's similar conclusion in Gethsemane.



Can we know God's will?

- **Mark 3:38** – “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”
- **Romans 12:2** – “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

1. God makes known His will by means of His Word.

Paul's conscience was captive to the Word of God. As an apostle, Paul received direct revelations from God concerning His will. In our day God ordinarily speaks to us by means of His Word as he has revealed it in Scripture. In Scripture God has made known His will for His people.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:3** – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:12-18** – “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; **for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**”

Application:

- Do not expect God-given discernment in making important decisions if you have rejected obedience to that which God has already revealed.
- Do not expect wisdom in key moments if you have not spent time in God's Word in the ordinary moments.

2. Faithfulness to God's will is not a way to escape suffering.

Paul knew that his commitment to do that which God had called him would bring about great suffering. He was not a fatalist nor did he have a death wish. Paul knew by way of revelation that he was to journey to Jerusalem; therefore, no amount of pleading would stop him. Christians in all generations and places will not suffer in the same ways. Many Christians suffer deadly persecutions. Many others will be marginalized and mocked. But all Christians will suffer in this life from one degree to another as they follow Jesus.

- **1 Peter 4:19** – “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”
- How did Paul withstand the pressure to abandon God's will?
 - a) He did not insist on surviving – Paul approached life with the same attitude of Jesus. Luke even demonstrates the parallels between the two in their commitment to travel to Jerusalem.
 - b) He was willing to disappoint people for the sake of serving Jesus – Paul was no doubt moved by the great affection that the disciples at Tyre had for him. It certainly would have been easier emotionally (and physically!) to follow their pleadings. But Paul's affection for his brothers and sisters never translated into conformity to their will over God's will.
 - c) He was confident that God was sovereign – Paul did not know how many days he had left but he was confident that his life would not end one second before that which God had ordained.

Application:

- Listen to those who love God more than they love you.
- God's will may not be what you desire.

3. Faithfulness to God's will has God's glory as its motive.

Paul's pursuit of the glory of Christ (the “name of the Lord Jesus” 21:13) was so valuable to him that he counted it as more precious than his own life.