

# ***“When It Doesn’t Make Sense!”***

## ***Acts 21 - 23***

Intro. – If you were in charge of the universe what would you do differently? A preacher responded to this question with the following: *“If I was in charge of the universe, I would have good people live to be 100 and bad people die at 50. If I was in charge of the universe, every Sunday would be perfect weather, every Christian would be healthy, and every passage of Scripture would be easy to understand and complete with a three point outline in the margin.”*

What would you do if you were in charge of the universe? Thankfully, we’re not and it’s a good thing because without question you and I would make a royal mess.

Like the college student who told his mom, “I decided I want to be a political science major and clean up the mess in the world.” “That’s nice,” replied the mom. “You can go upstairs and start with your room.”

Thankfully, God is in charge! Always has been and always will be. You see, God’s heavenly plan at times makes no earthly sense. The Bible makes clear that you and I are to walk by faith and not by sight. Why? Again, because there are times that God’s plan makes no earthly sense.

The Apostle Paul’s last missionary journey is a case in point. You and I would have had Paul’s third journey end with a tickertape parade; Christians lining the streets and all the major figures lined up contending for interviews. The scroll and interview rights would assure a “comfortable” retirement. But that is hardly the way things happened. Our text makes clear, at the end of his last (3<sup>rd</sup>) missionary journey, Paul’s life was anything but a retirement: Acts 21:27-31; Acts 22:22-24; Acts 23:12-15

Purpose: to learn what our response to perplexing trials should be

The ordeals Paul encountered at the end of his life and how he responded to them will teach us to properly respond to our own perplexing trials:

### **I Paul’s ORDEALS**

#### **A. Warnings Were Numerous**

- note: Paul was warned several times when making his way back to Jerusalem:
- 1. At Tyre – he was warned by the brethren (21:3-4) “through the Spirit” not to set foot Jerusalem...
- 2. At Caesarea – warned by prophet named Agabus who gives Paul an object lesson by tying his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt (21:11)...
- 3. Repeatedly Paul was warned about going to Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit – why then did he go?
  - a. some suggest Paul was stubborn and went contrary to HS... why spent 4 yrs in prison...
  - b. personally, I believe simply was preparing Paul – e.g. like talking to younger people about getting married... talk frankly with them NOT to talk them out of it necessarily, but, people ought to enter marriage with a realistic understanding...
- 4. Sometimes, well meaning brethren give some real poor counsel... thus, times come one must stand for their convictions regardless of well intended poor counsel...

#### **B. The Rumor Mill Was Grinding**

- 1. Reporting on his journey in detail upon arriving in Jerusalem (21:19)...., but, Jewish Christians were uncertain about Paul.
- 2. 21:21 = rumor started that Paul was telling all Jews to abandon Moses, the Law and their customs... because of their emotions and their impulsiveness, they were ready to believe it.
  - Illus. – know a preacher had a scare on left wrist from an accident... woman started rumor he got this scare from a knife fight while a gang member...
  - Matthew 18:15 makes clear what’s to be done with rumors – go to parties involved and find out what is up... until then “put a lid on it”
- 3. Paul acquiesces or agrees to a plan to help dispel the rumor held by the legalistic bro. (21:23-26)

#### **C. Mob Violence Erupts**

1. Jews from Asia stir up crowd by compounding rumor – not only Paul’s preaching against Jewish customs, but, also brought Gentiles into temple = not true!, but, that’s rumors for you.
2. 21:30 – whole city aroused... rushed together... and dragged him out... v 31 says “... seeking to kill him.”
3. Shows how “mob violence” is so unnerving – it sinks to the level of its lowest participant... In other words, people do things in mob situations they wouldn’t ordinarily do... e.g. “Kill the ref!”
4. Commander Roman Cohort comes to break up matters... - Paul been beaten within an inch of his life, but, now makes request, “May I speak to the crowd?”
  - a. Paul had confidence in the Gospel and love for Jewish people
  - b. Paul gave his defense – Acts 22:1-21... conversion!
5. Mobs often lead to emotions that override reason – Illus. – 22:22 “...*not be allowed to live...*”
6. Paul carried away and prepared to be flogged = note: Paul not wimp, didn’t let people walk...
7. Following night (Acts 23:11), Lord stood by his side and said, “...*testify for Me in Rome.*”

All of these ordeals make no sense. It would appear, Paul’s life was falling apart. But the Lord made clear, Paul was right where the Lord could best use him – so, remember: “God’s heavenly plan often makes no earthly sense!”

## II Our APPLICATIONS

- how do we learn from this to respond as we should to our own perplexing trials?:

### A. God’s Will is Often Difficult

1. By difficult, I mean difficult to understand.
2. There was no way Paul could understand all that was happening to him... His response? Faithfulness, obedience, resolve to persevere unto the Lord’s honor and glory!
3. There will be times in our lives we just won’t understand God’s will... will we give up... or will we persist, carry on, keep at it unto the obedience of the faith?
4. Illus. – young boy had an uncle who was an agnostic... One day on the farm the uncle was trying to undermine the young man’s faith. He said, “Look here at the garden. Pumpkins on such tiny vines... Now look at this big ole’ oak tree with little acorns. Seems to me if God knew what He was doing when creating the world, He’d put pumpkins in an oak tree and acorn on little vines.” Just then an acorn fell out of the tree and hit the uncle on the head. Young man said, “Sure glad that wasn’t a pumpkin aren’t you?”
5. God knew what He was doing when creating the universe... He also knows what He was/is doing when fashioning our lives!

Maybe you’re hurting and perplexed right now... God’s will can be difficult to understand at times... What is our response? Be assured and confident that God knows exactly what He is doing!

### B. God’s Will May Involve Controversy

1. Paul found himself at the center of conflict quite often. Why? Because he was guilty of doing something wrong? NO! The exact opposite – he was doing the will of God!
2. There will be times because of *faithfulness* that you will create/encounter controversy. Illus. – Florence Haynes (B.S. teacher)... come faithfully without her husband... very involved and giving of time, talents and money... BUT such created a big conflict with her husband... - Jesus said He didn’t come to bring peace, but a SWORD (Matthew 10:34).
3. When doing the will of God you won’t avoid it, you will be put right in the middle of controversy... What does God expect/want as to our response? = COURAGE/TRUST

### C. God’s Will Always Has Promise

1. Paul did go to prison... but while there he wrote letter that became a part of God’s Word... He made contacts he never would have made had he not been in prison.
2. Romans 8:28 “...*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*”

3. Be faithful, trust God, serve God, remain true to Him... -- God promises IT WILL BE RIGHT AND GOOD EVENTUALLY!

God's will always comes with promise. What is our response? CONFIDENCE!

**Conclusion:** Author, Henri Nouwen tells the story of a family he knew living in Paraguay. The father, a doctor, spoke out against the military there and its abuse of human rights. Local police took their revenge out on him by arresting his teenage son, and then tortured him to death. Enraged, townsfolk wanted to turn the boy's funeral into a huge protest, but, the doctor chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son's body as he found it in the jail – naked, scarred from electric shocks and cigarette burns. All the villagers filed past the corpse, which lay not in a coffin, but, on the blood-soaked mattress from the prison. It was a powerful protest, for it put injustice on grotesque display.

I use this to summarize this text, and to answer the question, "Is God unfair?"

"It's God who ought to suffer, not you and me," say those who bear a grudge against God for the unfairness of life. Thus, the curse word "God damned" often used by those who hold God responsible for all of life's inequities. And on the day of Calvary, God was damned. The Cross that held the naked and scared body of His Son exposed all the violence and injustices of this world. At this moment in history, the Cross revealed what kind of a world we have and what kind of a God we service: a world of gross unfairness and a God of incomparable grace and mercy.

No one is exempt from tragedy or disappointment. God Himself was not exempt. Jesus offered no immunity, no way out of unfairness, but, He did offer a way THROUGH it to the other side – a new heaven and a new earth. As long as we remain in this life, unfairness will not disappear; nevertheless, God alone will make sense of it all!