

Hazardous Duty  
March 2, 2014

I know that most of us are dealing with personal issues. I hope you have shared some of those concerns with those in your Bible study group. Let your Bible study group be a prayer support group for you. God works through the loving prayers of His people. So pray for each other each day.

As I said, I know that most of us are dealing with personal issues. This morning I want to give you help to face those issues with courage and faith. If you will receive this teaching, God will be able to give you new ways to cope with your issues.

Think a moment about the thing you are most struggling with. It may be a health issue. It may be a curable health issue. Or it may be something chronic and incurable. It may be something that is now, or will in the future, cause you a loss of mobility. It may prevent you from working. It may prevent you from engaging in the activities you enjoy. It may even result eventually in your death.

For some of you your biggest concern right now may be a money issue. You are in need of a job, or a better paying job, or a job with better working conditions, a job with health benefits or retirement benefits. Your boss doesn't understand you. Or you don't understand the boss. Maybe you need a job with a better boss.

Some of you are concerned about housing, where you will live in the near future, or in retirement. It may be retirement that you are worried about. You may not be able to afford to retire, or you may have to move somewhere less expensive in order to retire.

Or maybe the most significant issue in your life right now is a person in your life who is a pain in the neck. There is friction, tension, anger, resentment, a need for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Maybe the relationship problem is with a family member. You are dealing with a parenting issue. Or maybe it is an issue of you needing to parent your parent.

Or maybe your biggest issue is something else. There are a number of different kinds of issues you might be dealing with right now in your life.

In the large space at the top of the sermon insert, I encourage you to write in the thing that you are most struggling with right now. You don't have to show it to anyone else. You aren't going to be graded on these or hand them in. If you are afraid someone might look over your shoulder and see it, draw a small picture to represent it. Or use some kind of personal code for it. This way only you will know what it represents. I encourage you to write or draw that in right now.

To help you deal better with this issue, and all the others in your life, I want you to ask three questions of yourself this morning. To guide our thinking towards those three questions we're going to be looking in the book of Acts.

In Acts 20-21, we find Paul the missionary, traveling to Jerusalem. On the way he stops in the city of Miletus and shares with his companions, and the church there, the following information.

**Acts 20:22-24 (NIV)** And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 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.

He is trying to get to Jerusalem by a particular date, the Day of Pentecost. They sailed from the city of Miletus, in what is today part of Turkey. They eventually arrived at the city of Caesarea on the coast of Israel. We pick up with them there where something happens that confirms the earlier word of revelation Paul had received.

**Acts 21:10-11 (NIV)** After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 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.'"

God made it clear that it was His will that Paul go to Jerusalem and face the troubles he would experience there. This was God's revealed will. Yet God's own people were not, at first, willing to accept this. God's own people tried to prevent God's will from being accomplished. Look at their reaction to this prophecy.

**Acts 21:12 (NIV)** When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

The Christians there tried to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem. They did so out of their love for Paul. Yet it shocks me that they knew God's will and tried to prevent it from happening.

As we look through Bible history, we see God's enemies try to prevent God's will from being accomplished. They never succeed. We expect God's enemies to try. But sometimes it is God's own people who do so. King Saul tried to prevent David from becoming the next king. Jonah tried to prevent God from showing mercy to the Ninevites. And here in Acts 21 we see Christians trying to prevent God's will and we ask ourselves, what was wrong with them. How could they work against God?

### **1) Am I resisting God's will concerning the issue above?**

Has God been speaking to you about that issue in your life? Has God told you something specific to do and you don't want to do it. You want a different answer. You want a different solution. And so you are resisting what God has revealed that He wants you to do.

Maybe you don't have some direction from God about dealing with your issue. But I am sure that some of you have gotten direction from God. You just don't want to do it.

If you explained the situation to another Christian, an objective, unbiased Christian, likely he or she would be as shocked at your resistance as we are when we read this passage.

If you KNOW what God wants you to do, do it. Change your attitude and behavior. Adopt Paul's attitude. Let's see Paul's response to their resistance.

**Acts 21:13 (NIV)** 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."

Paul was focused on God's will. He was focused on what God wanted. If in God's plan, Paul needed to spend time in prison, so be it. Paul was ready to go. After all that Jesus had done for Paul, Paul was ready to do whatever Jesus needed him to do. Paul was ready for anything.

Are you ready for anything God would ask you to do? Are you ready for hazardous duty? Are you fully surrendered to Jesus and His cause?

If Jesus said to you, I need you to have a chronic disease, would you be willing to do it?

If Jesus said to you, I am going to have you outlive your spouse by decades, would you be willing to do it?

If Jesus said to you, you are going to struggle on a small income the rest of your life, would you say okay?

If Jesus said to you, you will never be famous, would you agree to it?

If Jesus said to you, you will never get credit for how smart you are, would you accept that for Him?

Would you be willing to go through what Job went through, if that is what Jesus asked of you?

Would you be willing to give a chance at glory and riches and power like Jonathan did, if that is what Jesus asked of you?

Would you be willing to go suffer like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, or Paul, if that is what Jesus asked of you?

If Jesus said... well, is there anything Jesus could say to you that you say, "Nope, not me. Get someone else to do that.,"

**2) Am I a conditional follower of Jesus? Is my faith in Jesus, perseverance in His service, and joy in my salvation dependent on my circumstances? Will I live faith, persevere in service, and express joy only if the issue above is solved, removed, or ends well for me?**

I'll gladly serve You, Jesus, as long as I don't lose my health.

I'll gladly serve you, Jesus, as long as I never have to go in a nursing home.

I'll gladly serve you, Jesus, as long as nothing happens to besmirch my good reputation.

I'll gladly serve you, Jesus, as long as I never run out of money.

**I'll gladly serve you, Lord, as long as \_\_\_\_\_.**

What is in that blank in your heart? What conditions have you put on Jesus? I heard the testimony of one of our missionaries many years ago. He told God he would go anywhere but Wyoming. I don't remember what he had against Wyoming. Guess where he ended up serving Jesus? Yeah, Wyoming.

I doubt that many of you have laid a condition on Jesus. You've never prayed such a prayer as, "I'll follow You, Jesus, as long as I am always healthy." You've never done that.

You did not say that before the issue you wrote down began. But are living as if you said that now that the issue has entered your life? I'll serve you, Jesus, if You remove this problem. I'll serve you if You heal me. I'll serve You if You improve my finances. I'll serve You if you get me a better job. I'll serve You, if You change or remove that troublesome person from my life.

Are you living like that? You likely haven't said that to Jesus. But are you living like that. Have you become a conditional follower of Jesus? Have you laid conditions on Him? Or are you ready for anything? Paul was ready for anything.

Paul had already been through a lot in service to Jesus. He gives us a run down in 2 Corinthians 11. He had been stoned once, beaten with rods three times, and whipped five times. He had been shipwrecked three times, once drifting for a day and a half in open water. He had been in danger of bandits, hungry, cold, tired, chased, jailed, and much more. His whole ministry had been one problem after another. Suffering marked Paul's ministry.

He was marked for suffering from the beginning. Look back with me at Paul's conversion. He is in Damascus, blind, confused, worried, when God sends a Christian to heal him and set him right. Look with me at the last part of what God says to this other man, named Annanias who was afraid to go to Paul. God says,

**Acts 9:15-16 (NIV)** "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

We read that and read the life of Paul and we are silently thankful that God didn't call us to suffer for Jesus. Aren't you? Aren't you glad that you don't have to suffer for Jesus? Well, you are mistaken. Paul did not get to live a normal Christian life. He didn't get to

marry, have kids, buy a home, join a church, work a regular job, live in a nice neighborhood.

He did not get a normal life like you have. But he isn't the only one to suffer. He was meant to live out the Christian life with faith, courage, perseverance, and joy before Kings. You are to do the same in your normal Christian life.

In the middle of that issue on your paper, you are to live like a Christian, not like an unbeliever. Paul had his assignment and we have ours. You may not suffer like Paul suffered, but you suffer. We ARE suffering for Jesus.

You put your faith in Jesus and received Him as your Savior and Lord. You entered the kingdom of God. You joined the army of Jesus' followers. You enlisted. You were inducted, baptized into His name. His task for you is to live like a Christian, to live as He would live your life. Your reaction to the issues and problems in your life should be like Jesus would face them, not like all the non-Christians around you.

You belong to Jesus. The Spirit of God lives in you. He is using your life to speak of the reality of His kingdom. He is putting you in situations where you can show faith and hope and love and joy and courage to the world in a situation that the world says should defeat all of those things. And those around you who see your faith and hope and joy and love and patience and acceptance of your condition will sit up and take notice. Are you missing the meaning of your life situation? Are you missing the point of that thing you wrote in the blank? It was no accident. God planned this for your life. God has a purpose for it. Will you accept it as an assignment from Jesus?

### **3) Will I accept the issue above as an assignment from Jesus?**

Whatever else contributed to you ending up in this situation, God allowed you to be in this situation, this problem, this suffering, because He needed you to. He needed to assign someone in your life sphere to experience these things and yet, show great faith and hope and joy in Jesus Christ.

You need to realize that what you wrote in that blank is an assignment from Jesus. Just because He didn't appear to you on your last trip or when you got saved, just because he didn't tell the one who baptized you I must show him or her how much he or she must suffer for my name,... just because those things didn't happen doesn't mean you weren't meant to suffer as a soldier of Jesus.

Everything you are experiencing, God has allowed to happen in your life. He has given you hazardous duty. Will you accept this as an assignment from Him?

I want to close with a story that came out of Africa last month. This was related by one of our missionaries.

A few days ago, a chief and his wife were confronted by a group, and when they confessed to accepting Jesus, she was shot in the stomach and he was dragged away. Later his dead body was found; he'd been brutally beaten. His wife called from the hospital and said, "I will not give up my faith, and if you start a Bible

study, I want to be the first one to attend.” She also requested that he have a Christian funeral. Security had to be called in because of the volatile situation. This was the first Christian funeral in this area. The wife of the deceased sent a letter to the funeral, saying that she had forgiven the men who did this and that she would not stop following Jesus. A believer shared a bold Gospel witness at the funeral, and 15 men accepted Jesus! Ten of them were guards sent to keep the peace; the other five were from another tribe.

(Prayer request on the IMB website for January 22, 2014)

Some of our brothers and sisters are being killed, beaten, run from their homes, living across the border from their own country in refugee camps just because they are Christians. The point is that Christians suffer for the name of Jesus. Just because we don't suffer in that way doesn't mean there is no suffering for us. Christians are not immune to suffering. But all OUR suffering is directed by God's hand. God is in control of our lives.

And whatever God has planned for us, He will give us the power to live it with courage and joy. Our courage, gratitude, and joy in the face of our suffering will be a testimony to God's presence and power in our lives. This is what the people around you need to see.

Invitation:

We know about suffering, of course. Jesus suffered for us. He died for us.

if you are not yet a follower of Jesus, He invites you to become one today. He promises to forgive your sin. He promises to give you eternal life. He promises you heaven instead of hell. He promises you strength for living.

These promises are yours if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Receive Jesus as your Savior today by believing that He died for you. His death paid for your sin. Receive Jesus as your Lord by turning your life over to Him.