

# No Matter The Cost

<b>Key Text:</b>	Acts 21 & 22
<b>Key Verse(s):</b>	“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:13-14)

## Background to the Study

The text gives an account of the final portion of Paul’s third missionary journey and his arrival back in Jerusalem. With characteristic attention to detail, Luke continued an event-by-event account of the travels. The first few days, Paul and those with him travelled in a boat that sailed along the coastline, probably stopping to load and unload some passengers and cargo at each place. In Patara, Paul and his team no doubt secured places on a larger boat that went across the Mediterranean Sea from Patara to Tyre, a distance of about 400 miles. “And finding disciples”, clearly there was fellowship, and the local people warned of difficulties ahead for Paul in Jerusalem. While the Holy Spirit was making Paul aware of coming danger, He did not forbid Paul to go. Paul had said in Acts 20:22, “I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem,” so he clearly had directions from the Lord. Embarking again, the travellers went about twenty-five miles to Ptolemais. Believers there housed the travellers overnight. Caesarea, which was about thirty-five miles south of Ptolemais, was the next stop. The trip had been completed quickly enough to allow the group to spend some days in the home of Philip “the evangelist.” Agabus (vs. 10) was from Jerusalem. In today’s text, he emphasized his message with a visual illustration by binding his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt. Men at that time wore loose outer garments that would be gathered around the waist with a belt (or girdle) while working or walking. Verses 12-14 reveal deep emotion and Christian love shared by these believers. The “we” in verse 12 means that Luke and the others traveling with him – Philip, Philip’s four godly daughters, and other local believers – all tried to persuade Paul not to go. Their impassioned pleas had an effect on Paul. He said, “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?” His heart was fixed on doing God’s will, whatever the cost. Seeing Paul’s determined purpose, the group bowed to God’s will. Verse 16 says Mnason was “an old disciple.” This means he was an early disciple, perhaps having personally followed Jesus and been a part of the 120 at Pentecost.

Paul and his traveling companions had arrived in Jerusalem. This portion of Scripture tells about their meeting with the church leaders there, and Paul’s subsequent arrest and defence in the Temple. Paul and his team had brought an offering from the Gentile churches for the Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering and impoverished. The leaders rejoiced when they heard the report. Meanwhile thousands of Jews had been

converted in the Jerusalem area. Some of them seemed to have had the false impression that Paul taught that Jewish Christians should forsake the Law of Moses and not circumcise their children or keep the customs. To prove that this rumour was incorrect, the church leaders suggested that Paul join with four brothers who had taken a vow. When the time of the vow was nearly completed, Jews from Asia (perhaps near Ephesus) stirred up a violent mob who beat Paul and tried to kill him. They bound Paul with two chains, and the crowd was so violent that they carried him up the steps to the Fortress. Acts 22 gives Paul's defence. He began by stating his credentials. He was a Jew, born in Tarsus, which indicated he was knowledgeable of Greek culture, and because he was educated by Gamaliel, he was well taught in the Scriptures. Then Paul told his testimony. This is the second of three times that his testimony is given in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:1-18 and 26:9-21). His Jewish audience listened until he said the Lord had commanded him to go to the Gentiles (vs. 21). When he spoke the word "Gentiles," the violence erupted again. The chief captain ordered him brought into the Fortress and beaten. However, the centurion stopped abruptly when he learned Paul was a Roman citizen. Instead of beating Paul, the chief captain decided to have him appear before the Jewish Sanhedrin the next day to confirm the accusations against him.

## Testimony from Our Day

God's will is perfect, even when we do not understand it. Reuel Green was fifty-six years old when he suffered a massive stroke that left him paralyzed on his right side and unable to speak more than a few words. He had been a preacher, pastor, and active in many areas of Gospel work as a church leader. One day some months after the stroke, Reuel's sister was entreating God to heal him. The Holy Spirit spoke to her heart, "Do you want to bypass My purpose for this?" Her tears flowed, and she responded, "No, Lord." She still did not understand why God had allowed it, but she was fully committed to submitting to God's will, and came away from that prayer meeting convinced that He had a purpose in Reuel's affliction. Sometimes God's purposes may not be revealed to us in this life. Reuel lived twenty-six years after the stroke. Although he could not preach or converse, the Spirit of God was on his life and he continued to spread the Gospel in any way he could. He worked faithfully at the church office folding letters and putting tracts in envelopes. He prayed fervently beside those seeking God at the altars of prayer. He handed out tracts to anyone he could, including servers in restaurants and people he met as he walked along with his cane. Residents of the neighbourhood where he lived said later, "It was as if he had a light inside of him." Indeed he did, and he did not allow that light to be diminished by his lack of understanding of God's purpose. We can be inclined to think that if we are doing what God wants us to do, everything should roll along smoothly, and if we have difficulties, it must be because we are not in the Lord's will. However, that may not necessarily be true. Today's text and surrounding verses show that Paul was sure God wanted him to go to Jerusalem. Yet at many of his stops along the way, the Spirit indicated that trouble was ahead. When hard situations come, it is valuable to search our hearts. We want to be certain that we are fully submitted to God and doing what He wants us to do. Once we have that clear assurance, it is important to keep on even if doing so is difficult. Sometimes we may experience pain as we watch others suffer while doing the will of God. Reuel's sister felt this, as did Paul's friends and traveling companions in the text. It can be heart-wrenching to see our parents, children, or friends suffering while fulfilling the will of God. At such times we want to cast our cares upon the Lord and encourage our loved ones and associates in their service to Him. May our ultimate goal be like Paul's – for God to be glorified no matter what the personal cost.

## A Closer Look

Question 1	What did the believers at Tyre do when they told Paul goodbye? Acts 21:5 Why does the Holy Spirit sometimes give warning of an impending trial? Acts 21:10-14
Question 2	At the conclusion of his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he met with the leaders of the church. Soon after, opposition arose when a group of Judaizers accused him of encouraging the Jews to “forsake Moses” – to put aside the traditions of the Law. In response, what did the elders of the church ask Paul to do, and why? What are some ways we can help preserve unity among our Christian brothers and sisters? Acts 21:23-26
Question 3	How can we retain our purpose to do God’s will when times are difficult?
Question 4	In spite of Paul’s action in taking the vow, a riot was started by some “Jews which were of Asia” – the area where Paul had been so violently opposed. Paul was arrested, but the chief captain allowed him to speak to the people, and Paul used this opportunity to share his testimony. Based on the Apostle’s words in Acts 22:13-21, give a brief description of this former persecutor after his conversion.
Question 5	What part of your own testimony prompts the most gratitude in your heart?

## Take Home

Challenging circumstances may come our way in life, but we want to be in God’s will even when it is not easy. We can be assured that He has a purpose behind what He allows us to go through. Salvation makes us one of God’s children; we have a direct connection to Him. Who might benefit by hearing your testimony today?