

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With A Faith that is Fearless (Acts 21:1-17 – Part 2)

Acts 21:1-6

1 When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. 5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. 6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

George Whitefield, the great 18th century preacher once said,

A true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ.

How would you describe your faith? Is it active? Is it lively? Is it restless? Does it fill your heart, making you uneasy? Does it drive you to do something for Jesus Christ? If you're at all like me, then you desire nothing less than this. For you know as well as I do that a genuine faith is a working faith; a moving faith; a faith that both seeks and accomplishes something for Jesus Christ. Whitefield went on to say,

Oh let us continually keep faith in exercise, till it be entirely swallowed up in the boundless ocean of beatific vision.

For the believer, our life is to be one of the constant exercise or working of faith. Everything we do is to be inspired and motivated by faith. From our faithfulness to God and His; to the assembling of the saints, to our families, to our jobs and everything in between, our goal ought to be the seeing of everything we do and say as an act of faith. That is quite the task, but it is necessary. We are reminded in Romans 14:23, that ***“whatever is not from faith is sin.”***

How can we live such a life of faith? What does exercised faith look like? What is the pattern or template we might follow by which we can see faith in all its splendor? Our text in Acts 21:1-17 reveal to us the fearless faith of Paul. By using the adjective “fearless”, I run the risk that some of you may tune out; thinking yourselves incapable of ever exercising a faith like that of Paul's. But let me remind you; the same faith that brought Paul to Christ, is the same faith that brought you to Christ. The same faith that Paul allowed to course through his spiritual veins; is the same faith that runs in you. By fearless faith I simply mean this; that Paul was not content with simply an intellectual assent to the truth about Jesus; Paul also put into daily practice what he knew about Jesus. *Fearless faith is simply living your life as a visible, practical and continual witness of Jesus Christ.* Your life reveals the reality of Christ living in and through you.

As we look to the example of Paul and his faith; we are simply looking at a template; a visible form that shows us what faith does and; as we learn what faith did in Paul; we are called to

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imitate and emulate that faith. Like a little child mimicking the mannerisms of his dad; so too are we to mimic the mannerism of those, whose faith, according to Hebrews 13:7, has resulted in spiritual fruit. And just what did Paul do that revealed his faith? Here in Acts 21, the answers might surprise you. For while we will find Paul standing before governors and kings, testifying of the person and work of Jesus in the chapters ahead; we first find Paul’s faith being exercised in the context and presence of people; specifically in the context of the church; the gathered body of Christ.

I. Fearless faith is to be seen in our relationships with believers (1-4a)

We have already seen in verses 1-4a, that fearless faith is to be lived out in our relationships. In other words, we are to have a deep affection for the people of God. A genuine faith loves and seeks to edify the people of God; getting so entrenched in one another’s lives that a departure, that that of Paul from the church at Ephesus, feels like being torn apart. We are to cultivate deep and meaningful relationships with one another in the church. This requires a fearless faith because getting closely involved with other people can be both messy and potentially heartbreaking; either because we might get hurt by others; the risk of loving biblically; or because we will grow so fond of one another that leaving them leaves a void in our hearts.

II. Fearless faith is to be seen in our responses to others (4b-6)

Moving now to verses 4b-6, we see the second area in which the fearless faith of Paul revealed itself; and that is in his responses to others; to people and to the Lord. Let’s consider each of these:

A. Fearless faith does not live to please people (4b-6).

We read a most interesting statement there at the end of verse 4; *After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.*

The statement begs the question, “Why did these people urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem? The text indicates that Spirit of God made it clear there would be danger waiting. Because of this verse; there are some who believe that Paul actually sinned by going to Jerusalem. The argument is that Paul disobeyed the Holy Spirit’s command; most likely because he was headstrong. Some believe that this determination of Paul to go to Jerusalem despite the warning of these believers resulted in four wasted years of his life as he spent two years in custody in Caesarea, and two under house arrest in Rome.

I do not believe that Paul was in sin. What I see here; and some of this will be based upon what we learn a bit later in this text when we look at what the prophet Agabus made known, is the Spirit of God giving Paul a warning, not a prohibition. While I cannot prove this from verse 4 itself; it seem clear that the Holy Spirit was making it clear that the apostle would suffer greatly; that was the message of the Spirit; and because of this, the people did not want him to set foot in Jerusalem.

However the message was given; for most of us; to be told by other believers not to do something because of potential danger would be reason enough to change course, right? Now, before you go off and use this to counter every counsel you receive from Christians; remember that Paul had already been directed by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He was not seeking counsel as to whether or not to go to Jerusalem. He was simply preparing himself mentally and spiritually

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for what waited him in Jerusalem. Let us note Paul's Spirit-directed call to go to Jerusalem. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 19:21; after many miracles had taken place in Ephesus by the hand of Paul, we read:

Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

Now, turn over a chapter to Acts 20:16. There, when making a decision as to whether or not to stop at Ephesus to visit the church, we read of Paul's determination:

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Dropping down to Acts 20:22-23; in the midst of his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders there in Miletus, we read again of this Spirit directed call to go to Jerusalem:

22 And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

If we are not going to heed the counsel of believers; it better be because we have a clear message from God to the contrary. And since God does not generally speak to us as he did to Paul for such an important manner as this; we ought to carefully heed the counsel of faithful believers.

But this was clearly not the case for Paul. His Spirit-directed call to go to Jerusalem was clear and settled. He already knew that he would suffer and eventually die for Christ. And, by the way, Paul had been told as much on the very day of his conversion from Jesus Himself. In Acts 9:15-16, Luke records the words of Christ to Ananias; words that would be given to Paul:

15 Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.

Paul knew what God had called him to do and he was firmly settled with it. You and I have a problem at times, not having settled in our hearts and minds to live by a fearless faith; that visible, practical and continual pursuit of being a witness of Jesus Christ in everything we do. By faith, Paul could say, “I am not living for the pursuits and pleasures this world. In fact, I have already died to this world. And since the day I died and Christ took over, I have been living daily for the kingdom of God.” Can you say that? Are you living daily for the kingdom of God? Does this describe your faith? This is a fearless faith. This is why Paul could hear the well-meaning, well-intentioned pleading from the saints at Tyre to not set foot in Jerusalem and yet not be deterred. Why? Because he was not living to please people, but as we will see in just a moment; he was living to please the Lord. Now, in verses 5-6 we see what happened next.

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5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. 6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

It is clear that Paul loved these people; that Paul appreciated these people; that Paul served these people. It is clear that they all had a deep affection for one another as men, women and children escorted him to the beach and prayed with him. But Paul would not be moved from his mission simply to please people. Beloved, there is a huge difference between seeking to love and service people with that seeking to please people. When you seek to please people; you will often compromise what you know God wants you to do. When you seek to love and serve people, you will often please people; but sometimes, if loving or serving them requires correcting, reproving, or simply not doing something they want you to do; then you will not be pleasing them. We need to understand the difference between loving and serving people verses pleasing people; for until you do, your life will be a series of frustrations for both you and others.

This brings us to the second area of response to others; in this case, to the Lord. For we see that...

B. Fearless faith lives by prayer (5)

5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

Here in verse 5 we find Paul doing something that is remarkable and intimate. We see him and this entourage on their knees praying together. Now you might ask, “What is so remarkable and intimate about that?” I would like to point out to you that in the span of just eight verses; from Acts 20:36 to Acts 21:5, we find Paul praying with two very different groups of people. Yes, both groups are believers. But if you will recall, the Ephesian group of Acts 20:36 were made up of people that Paul had invested three years of his life. These were dear companions and those who had served by his side. Coming to Acts 21:5, we find those who were not longtime friends of Paul. He had just met these people some seven days earlier. But would you notice something here in the text; Luke records that they *all* came to the beach—men, women, and children—to pray with him. Paul knew that it pleases the Lord to pray with and for one another. Turning to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, by the time Paul finds himself on this beach, his letters to the Thessalonians we already about 5 to 7 years old. And what had Paul written to the Thessalonians?

16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Paul's heart was to please the Lord; to do God's will and part of that will was to pray anywhere and everywhere with and for God's people. Turning to Ephesians 6:18, just a couple years after this beach prayer meeting, Paul would write to the Ephesians saying,

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With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

And in context, the content of the prayer is to be focused on a faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It pleases the Lord as we pray for boldness for one another to make Jesus known. How is your prayer life? Do you ever wonder what to pray for? We can sometimes get ourselves lost in long lists of prayer requests; some of those requests regarding the most routine or mundane of things. Don't get me wrong; I believe we are to bring our petitions to God; but as a body; as the church; we are to be praying for one another that we might be bold witnesses of the grace of Christ. We may be sick and ailing; we may be prosperous or poor; but whether we have much or little, our continual prayer for one another is that Christ may be revealed and magnified in our lives in such a way that draws others to Him. I highly doubt that the prayer time of Paul with these believers consisted in a long prayer list of dreams, desires, need and wants; but rather was focused on making Jesus known. Looking at 1 Corinthians 2:2, I believe the mindset and worldview of Paul is clearly revealed in a short yet profound statement made to the Corinthians saying,

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

By praying with and for these believers, believers who just counseled Paul to avoid Jerusalem, we see a man whose faith led him to prayer because this is what He knew pleased the Lord. Turning back to 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6, let me remind you that Paul begins the letter by telling them his constant prayer for them. And part of this prayer included the petition for the Thessalonians to be bold proclaimers of the gospel and that such a prayer and commitment is what pleases the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 we read:

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. 3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed — God is witness — 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul's proclaiming the gospel was a result of his prayer life and his sharing of Christ was not in order to please men but to please God. We need to be praying more for one another that we would be bolder in sharing Christ. This pleases God.

Let me wrap up by having you consider with me one more aspect of this attitude of Paul's faith that seeks to please the Lord. In the world we live in, there is a false theology, one that was present as well in the days of Paul. It is a very popular theology that teaches this; "if you do God's will you can expect successful results; and, conversely, if you experience hardship you must be out of the will of God." Have you heard that theology before? A theology so prevalent in the health and wealth prosperity gospel. A theology touted by those who, because they are

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successful, use that as evidence of God's blessing; even when their teachings do not line up with Scripture. Beloved, just because something works does not make it right. Lies work; the work too often and too well. That does not make them right.

Here we find Paul being warned by the Spirit of coming danger; not so he would avoid it rather so that he would *prepare* for it. Beloved, we have been promised difficulties and trials as believers. Look with me at John 16:33, much as Jesus warned Paul as he was brought to faith; you and I have been warned and called to prepare for what is to come:

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

We have not been warned to avoid trials and difficulties; we have been warned that we might be prepared for them; to respond to them with grace and as a testimony of our faith in Christ; things which we will see as we progress in our Acts 21 text as being true of Paul. For when Paul faced his difficulties, he was ready; he did persevere. My friend, if you possess real faith, biblical faith, this fearless, visible, practical, continual faith, it will not take Sherlock Holmes to find it. It will show up, first of all, in your relationships with people and then in your responses to others.

So let me ask you; do you have faith? Faith in Christ? How do you know if you do? Is your life being affected by Christ's person and words? If not, then you may have an intellectual knowledge of Christ; but that will not save and transform you. Thomas Brookes, a Puritan preacher noted,

“Everything that a man leans upon but God, will be a dart that will certainly pierce his heart through and through. He who leans only upon Christ, lives the highest, choicest, safest, and sweetest life.”

Is your faith working? Is it producing the highest, safest and sweetest life? Pray that your faith “works” – that it is trusting and acting upon what you know about Christ. And how can you know if your faith is working? Are you growing in your affection and involvement with the body of Christ? And, how are you responding to others; to other believers; to the Lord?

Soli Deo Gloria

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