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## Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

### **R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: With A Faith that is Fearless (Acts 21:1-17 – Part 4)**

Acts 21:1-17

*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. 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. 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. 7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. 8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. 10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” 12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, “The will of the Lord be done!” 15 After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge. 17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.*

I am sure that over the years you have heard a number of definitions for the word “faith.” We have a fondness for small, pithy definitions, don’t we? Many have come to define faith as “belief in action.” Or, perhaps you have heard the acronym for “faith” as being our “Fantastic Adventure In Trusting Him.” Such definitions are well and good, but they often leave us without much depth; without something that inspires us to action or even by which to evaluate this spiritual gift called faith.

So let me begin by giving you a working definition for faith. I have given this to you before, but let us define faith in such a way as to give us some real direction. Faith then is **“the resolve to live one’s life as a visible; practical and continual witness of Jesus Christ.”**

Let me unpack this for you. How do you know if you are living out biblical faith? In light of our definition, are you living your life as a **visible**; that is, if your faith, your belief and trust in Christ as not only dying for your sins, but as His living in and through you by His Spirit, outward; for other’s to see? If your faith **practical**, in other words, are the principles of faith your practice; what you are known to do? And finally, if your faith **continual**, that is, if your faith an increasing custom and habit? Is your faith a visible, practical, and continual witness (testimony, proclamation, explanation) of Jesus Christ?

The life of Paul, as we have been noting all along as we have followed his ministry in the book of Acts, serves as an example for us of just such a faith. In Paul’s life we see how faith is to

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be lived out. And here, at the close of Paul’s third missionary journey, we have been challenged to both investigate and then implement the character of Paul’s faith, that which I have been referring to as a “fearless faith.”

## I. Fearless faith is seen in our relationship to believers (1-4)

What we have learned thus far about Paul’s fearless faith is how visible, practical and continual it really was. We have already seen in verses 1-4 that fearless faith; biblical faith is seen in our relationships to other believers. Paul constantly sought out and engaged other believers. All of this reminds us that faith that does not seek out the fellowship, encouragement and involvement of other believers is not the practice of biblical faith. Our desire, like that of Paul, ought to see our times of fellowship increase; not being limited to simply a few hours on any given Sunday.

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

Next, in verses 4-6 we noted that fearless, biblical faith is to be seen in our responses to others. Here Paul clearly expressed his longing for fellowship and his deep love for the brethren, but never at the expense following the will of God. Too often we are plagued with a desire to please people at the expense of pleasing God. It may be that we want to please our friends, our spouse, our children, our parents, our employers, or our teachers. That is all fine, so long as it does not come with the cost of not pleasing God. Even when the people, with sincere concern, warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem because of what awaited him there; Paul could not please the people by compliance, but was compelled by the Spirit of God to go to Jerusalem, even if it meant hardship, imprisonment or death. <sup>[slide 05]</sup> In the words of Paul, (please turn to Galatians 1:10), we are to make as our goal the pleasing of God in all things. Galatians 1:10 says:

***For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.***

All of this brings us to verses 7-17 where we come to see the next...

## III. Fearless faith is seen in our responses to difficulties (7-11)

I want to be clear as we move on that as we see how Paul’s faith was made visible, practical and continual, the point is not to marvel at Paul. We are not exalting Paul at all. Rather, the point here is to look at biblical faith; a trust, confidence and pattern of life that looks to and then reflects the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul’s faith was found in His great Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ and my contention is this; that we possess this same faith (and by the way, God only grants one kind of faith), then this faith will reveal itself. And one of the greatest places faith, your faith, will reveal itself is in your response to difficult circumstances. Here in verses 7-11 we see Paul’s response to what can only be regarded as less than easy circumstances. Let us see take note of two responses.

### A. Paul seeks out hospitality and fellowship with Philip (7-9)

First, in verses 7-9, we find Paul seeking out the hospitality and fellowship of Philip. Let us read the text again; starting in verse 7 -

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*7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais [about 25 miles], and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. 8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea [about 40 miles], and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.*

Here we find Paul staying with Philip. We have already been acquainted with Philip. Back in Acts 6 the church chose him along with six other men who were “filled with the Spirit” to care for the widows in the church. But Philip’s ministry also expanded as in Acts 8 we see him as an evangelist, a proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus Christ, proclaiming repentance from sin and salvation through Christ to a people who the Jews regarded as half-breeds, the Samaritans and then also leading an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. I love the title Luke assigned to Philip in verse 8. Did you catch it? It calls Philip, “the evangelist.” Do you know that no one else is given such a title in book of Acts?

But as incredible as all this is, I think there is something of even greater importance to note, something about Philip that makes his hospitality here in Acts 21 so significant. Let me try to paint the picture of this encounter. Philip was an associate of Stephen. Stephen and Philip served together in the church in Jerusalem. We also know that Stephen and Paul had an “association.” It was this very Paul who had instigated and approved of Stephen’s death by stoning. Paul had Philip’s ministry friend killed. And, as far as we know, this was the first time, since Stephen’s stoning back around 34 AD, that Paul and Philip had been together. Some 20 years have passed, but no doubt, this must have been an interesting meeting. Paul and Philip used to be on opposite side of a spiritual battle. But now, here in Acts 21, they are fellowshiping together. Philip invites Paul into his home. There is no mention of hard feelings or animosity.

How can we explain this? Some might say that it was just lucky that Paul and Philip were big men who could bury the hatchet. But I rather see that both these men knew they served a great Savior; who delivered them from the wrath of God due because of their own sins against God. And, having been forgiven much by God, these men could both give and receive forgiveness from one another.

What a lesson for us to learn. I have no doubt that some of you are struggling with a relationship that has been broken. I exhort you, remember the Lord Jesus Christ who has reconciled you to God. How much has your God forgiven you? Do you believe you have been forgiven much? Then believe He has forgiven you and pass that attitude of forgiveness on to others. As you pray for God to change the heart of another, ask Him first to change *you*. Beloved, Jesus came to earth from heaven to die on the cross for sinners; that He might reconcile you, bring you back to God but also to reconcile you to one another. Philip obviously extended forgiveness to Paul. To whom do you need to extend forgiveness to, thus visibly, practically and continually revealing yourself to be a witness of Christ?

So, the first difficulty Paul faced was being reconciled to someone he had hurt; but he took the initiative and sought fellowship. Let us note the second difficulty to which Paul had to respond by faith.

### **B. Paul deals with a dire warning about his future (10-11)**

Second, in verses 10-11, Paul had to deal with a dire warning about his own future. Let us read verses 10-11 again:

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10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.  
11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”

Talk about a heart-sickening message. Not only was it “declared” but it was also acted out in a most dramatic fashion. Before we think Agabus strange, let me remind you that the Bible has a number of prophets who acted out their messages from God. In 1 Kings 11, Ahijah showed Jeroboam, Solomon's general, how the kingdom of Israel would be divided, tearing his new cloak into twelve pieces and handing ten of them to Jeroboam. As a sign to Egypt and Ethiopia, the prophet Isaiah was directed by the Lord to walk around naked and barefoot in Jerusalem to picture how the youth of those countries would be taken captive by the Assyrians (Isaiah 20). The prophet Ezekiel built a replica of Jerusalem to show how the Babylonians would attack and capture the city (Ezekiel 4).

Yes, God could be creative in the way He communicated truth. That's what we find here. Not only did Agabus *foretell* of the danger that awaited Paul, he also *showed* him how it would happen, taking Paul's own belt and binding himself with it. Talk about an attention grabber! It was only after acting this out that Agabus said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”

It is important to note that in verse 11 we do not find the Holy Spirit telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but rather warning him of what awaited him once he arrived. Jumping ahead in the story, we know that this prophecy would come to pass. All of this reminds us of an important truth; if we are to live by a fearless faith, we must look at our difficulties, trials and hard circumstances differently. Why? Because the nature, depth and quality of our faith is revealed most often in our responses to difficulties.

I hope that you have heard of the missionary, David Livingstone. If not, you owe it to yourselves to pick up a biography about him. History reveals him to be one of Christianity's greatest missionaries, used by God in extraordinary ways to reach the continent of Africa. But his ministry was no walk in the park for either him or his family. His wife, Mary, was actually born in Africa, the daughter of Robert Moffatt, the missionary who had inspired Livingstone to go to Africa. The Livingstones were married in Africa in 1845, and committed themselves to preaching the gospel in Africa. But the years that followed were filled with hardship for Mary. Finally, she and their six children returned to England so she could recuperate as David plunged deeper into the African interior. But even back home in England Mary and the children lived in near poverty. The hardships and long separations took their toll on Mary who died at the age of just forty-two. Yet, even in this David pressed on with their joint resolve to reach the peoples of Africa for Jesus.

The point of all this is that if we desire to be a person whom God will use, then know that your faith will be tested. You will be tried in ways that other cannot understand, the goal of which is this, to allow you to visibly, practically and continually reveal yourself as a witness and follower of Christ. God's grace will grant you resolve, peace and assurance, but you must have faith, a fearless faith.

There is one more way in which I would like you to see how Paul lived out a fearless faith...

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### IV. Fearless faith is to be seen in our resolves (12-17)

At the age of seven, he had to go to work to help support his family. At nine, his mother died. At twenty-two, he lost his job as a store clerk. At twenty-three, he went into debt and became a partner in a small store. At twenty-six, his partner died leaving him a huge debt. By the age of thirty-five, he had been defeated twice when running for a seat in Congress. At the age of thirty-seven, he won the election. At thirty-nine, he lost his reelection bid. At forty-one, his four-year-old son died. At forty-two, he was rejected for a land officer role. At forty-five, he ran for the Senate and lost. At forty-seven, he was defeated for the nomination for Vice President. At forty-nine, he ran for Senate again and lost again. At the age of fifty-one, he was elected President of the United States. During his second term of office, he was assassinated. But his name lives on among the greats in U.S. history--Abraham Lincoln.

This is what I call resolve. But resolve is not in and of itself a Christian trait. Just because you resolve to do something does not make you a Christian. To say it another way, person, even a Christian, can have resolve and not possess fearless faith, but a person cannot possess fearless faith without exhibiting *resolve*. Faith is a commitment, a determination, a relentless resolve to be known as sold out for Christ. Biblical faith is not giving people the suspicion you are a Christian; it is making known you are a Christian. The Christian's faith is a determination not simply to be known as a good person, or a faithful spouse, or a hardworking employee or student. Anyone of any background, religious or otherwise, can do that. Christian faith is distinctively and unashamedly Christ-centered; Christ-focused; Christ-exalting. Such a faith does not come to anyone naturally, for it is supernatural. What it does require is applying maximum effort to this cause. Is this your resolve? Is this what other people see and experience when they spend any time with you? We see this kind of resolve in the life of Paul, but particularly here in his response to Agabus. In verses 12-17 we see three steps that ultimately reveal Paul's resolve to the will of God and the proclamation of the gospel.

#### A. Paul's faith caused others to have a heartfelt concern for him (12)

First, in verse 12, notice the heartfelt concern of those who heard this prophecy of Agabus. We read, *“When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.”*

Talk about peer pressure! Notice Luke's use of “we” in our text! Talk about peer pressure! This whole group, a group that included such prominent people as Luke himself, Timothy, Aristarchus, Sopater, other co-workers from the Gentile churches, this local church which would also consist of Philip and his daughters, all begged, pleaded, exhorted, came along side of Paul, urging him not to go to Jerusalem. This whole scene is gut-wrenching as the people express their love and concern for Paul. So how does Paul respond?

#### B. Paul's faith cause him to resolve to do the will of God (13)

Second, in verse 13 we read of the resolve, this determination to do the will of God on the part of Paul. The text reads, *Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

This serves as a reminder for us that the will of God is never to be determined by majority opinion, but rather upon the authority of the Word of God. Remember that Paul had already been told by the Spirit that he was to suffer and go to Jerusalem (Acts 9:15-16; 19:21; 20:16; 22-23).

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Yet here are at least eight godly church leaders who urged Paul not to go, but he was resolved, ready, come what may, even if it meant to die, to go anyway. Why? Obviously his friends were concerned *for him*, but Paul was concerned for the glory of God. His was a resolve to do the will of God. There are a couple lessons for us here if we are doing to live out the resolve of a fearless faith.

### 1. *We must be realistic about what faith in Christ means.*

Charles Spurgeon kept a plague on his bedroom wall that had the words of Isaiah 48:10 on it: **“I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”** In connect with this, Spurgeon commented, *“It is no mean thing to be chosen of God. God’s choice makes chosen men choice men...We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice.”*

Some people and Christians are naïve. They have come to believe that following Christ is easy and makes everything else easy. Paul, however, was not naïve. He didn’t go to Jerusalem with the false notion of positive thinking, saying, “Everything will be okay; everything will be just fine.” Rather, Paul knew his friends were correct. He was heading for hardship, but he did not give up. He knew that to follow Christ in this life meant there would be trouble, but in light of the blessings of the life to God, such hardship was but momentary light affliction.

If you think following Christ is supposed to make everything easier, then you do not have a realistic expectation regarding faith. Paul had to stand alone. There will be difficulties, but remember that Jesus, in John 16:33, also promised His joy in the midst of earthly trials. Not only must we be realistic about what faith in Christ means, but also...

### 2. *We must be certain about what we are living for.*

Many professing Christians do nothing more than simply “add” Jesus to their lives, to their agendas. Nowhere in the gospel did Jesus say, “Just add Jesus.” And there is nothing in Paul’s life that suggests that he merely added a little Jesus to his life. Rather Paul resolved to *live for Jesus*. Pleasing Jesus, serving Jesus, proclaiming Jesus, teaching Jesus, studying Jesus, praising Jesus, all these things took priority in Paul’s life above personal comfort and convenience, above family, and even above life itself.

Look at the end of verse 13 again. What did Paul say? He said, *“For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Can you say that, that you are ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus? And do not say to yourself, “But pastor, Paul was simply an exceptional person.” Paul was exceptional, but no more exception than anyone who has the Spirit of the Risen Savior indwelling him. Turn with me to Luke 9:23-26. According to Jesus, this living for Jesus even if it means dying for Jesus is Basic Christianity; it is Discipleship 101. Is that true? Indeed! In Luke 9:23-26 we read of what Jesus states as being the most fundamental attitude in following Him. In Luke 9:23-26 we read:

*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. 25 For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

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Does this attitude bleed through into your life, in everything you do; your friendships, your marriage, your parenting, your schooling? We need to repent of compartmentalizing our faith; for biblical faith is a visible, practical, continual resolve to be a witness for Christ.

In other words, this fearless faith of Paul, biblically speaking, is to be the rule, not the exception! Paul’s faith revealed itself with a willingness to go to Jerusalem and die for Christ is necessary. Some of you struggle to come to church consistently at times. What is the problem? It is a simple one. You have not as yet settled the issue of what; or better yet, *who you are really living for*. Some of you play church; it’s something you do if it suits you. You are really living for your own agenda. Some are living for money, burning the proverbial candle to that you can obtain higher standard of living. Some of your are living for things that are good, like for your family for children; but beware naïve Christian; for when a good thing becomes more important than Jesus, it has become an veil thing; something the Bible calls, idolatry.

If Jesus evaluated your life, would He conclude that you were really living for Him? Would He conclude that you would be ready to die for His name? If you want to say that, which ought to be the desire of every truly born again believer, you must first *repent* of anything or anyone else that you have put before Jesus. If your prayer life; your Bible reading, if your meditating and memory work of the Word, if your telling others about Jesus; if your involvement in fellowship with other believers is lacking or is constantly being pushed out by other things in your life; then repent. Resolve to give Jesus, and Jesus alone, first place in everything. Anything less is hypocritical. Paul knew who he was living for and he knew what living by faith really means. Finally....

### C. Paul’s faith encouraged others to trust in God (14-17)

Finally, Paul faith caused him to encourage others to trust in God. We see this in two ways. **First**, notice how Paul’s faith encouraged submission to the will of God. We read in verse 14, *And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, “The will of the Lord be done!”* With these words Paul’s friends come to realize something. As much as they wanted to keep Paul from harm; and what good friend would not want that; they came to see that this was not about what Paul wanted or what they wanted, but rather about what God wanted. So often we strain and stress to get things to work out the way it seems best to us. Then, when we are at the end of ourselves because things fail, we say, “Oh well, may the Lord’s will be done!” But that should not be the ending place for the believer; fearless faith starts with such a submission to God. Because of Paul’s example his friends submitted to God.

**Second**, Paul’s faith was robust enough that his friends were willing to face danger with him. We read in verses 15-17, *15 After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge. 17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.*

Paul and his contingency made the journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem, some 60 plus miles on foot. Everyone knew Paul was a marked man; that as they walked into Jerusalem, they too might become victims of the Jews hatred toward Paul. Imagine the courage of Mnason, opening his home to Paul as well as to at least eight Gentiles. How could they all do this? Beloved, fearless faith is contagious! If we would catch fire for the Lord, then that fire will spread! Will you be a flame for Christ, burning with fearless faith? To be sure, Paul was a fire, and

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example that caused other people to look trust in God, to look to God, to serve God. That is fearless faith. Beloved, Christ is looking for, and our community needs those who will exhibit fearless faith, a visible, practical and continual resolve to be a witness for Christ in everything! But where does such a fearless faith begin? Let me close with just two questions that seem obvious perhaps, but must be asked and answered.

**First**, do you truly believe God? The question is not, “Do you believe about God?” As James 2:19 tells us, even the demons believe in God and tremble. But do you truly, deeply, visibly, practically and continually believe God? Believe what? Do you believe that He is the one true God? Do you believe that He sent His own Son, Jesus, to save you from your sins? Do you believe He has a purpose for your life, a good purpose, one that may involve suffering for Him, but with the promise that such suffering that will be worth it all when you see Him? Do you believe He is sovereignly orchestrating the very details of your life? Do you believe He has given you a roadmap for this life called the Bible and are you placing your confidence in what *He* says rather than in the counsel of the ungodly?

I trust that you will settle this issue this morning. If you do believe, affirm it in your heart afresh the moment. And if you are struggling in your believing, simply admit that to Him, as did the father who said to Jesus, “I believe, but help my unbelief.” *Do I really believe God?*

**Second**, I need you to ask yourself, “Am I truly doing God’s will in every area of my life?” Jesus is no half Savior; His intention is to transform every area of your life and make it obedient to God. For Paul, he was willing to do the will of God even if it meant losing his life. Let me ask you, what is there that you know to be God’s will that you are refusing to do? Repent and pray, “Lord, by Your grace I will do *Your* will in my life. Not my will. Not the will of my pastor, parents or peers, but *Your* will.” This is the seed of a fearless faith that will bring glory to God; a faith that is a visible, practical, and continual resolve to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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