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“The Will Of The Lord Be Done!”

ACTS 21:1-14

Introduction

1. I would like to share a bit of history with as we begin tonight’s lesson.
2. In 480 B.C., Leonidas the First, king of ancient Sparta, met his death at a narrow pass known as Thermopylae, only eight years after becoming king.
3. Xerxes, the king of Persia had invaded Greece with his armies.
4. Leonidas met them with an army of only six thousand at the narrow pass which ran between the mountains and the sea.
5. They held their ground for two days before the Persians found another route over the mountains and attacked the Greeks from the rear.
6. Knowing they had been betrayed, Leonidas sent most of his men to safety while he remained behind to block the advance of the Persian army at the pass with 300 Spartans and 1,100 Greeks, most of whom died in battle.
7. The Greek poet, Simonides, later composed a well-known epigram, which was engraved on a commemorative stone placed on top of the burial mound of the Spartans at Thermopylae:

“Stranger, report this word, we pray, to the Spartans, that lying here in this spot we remain, faithfully keeping their laws.”
8. The same could be said of the apostle Paul as he continued to the end of his life faithfully proclaiming the gospel of his Lord, Jesus Christ.
9. In the last chapters of Acts, we find him before governors and kings, continuing to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.
10. Even though there were faithful brothers and sisters who tried to persuade to avoid going back to Jerusalem, his resolve was to keep pressing on.
11. Ultimately, those who were with him said, “The will of the Lord be done!” (Acts

21:14).

11. As we think about these words tonight, I would like for each of us to consider our own response to God's will in our lives, wherever He may lead us.

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I. The Pressure To Turn From God's Will

A. PAUL'S LONG JOURNEY HOME

1. Miletus To Cos
 - a. From Miletus, Paul and his companions sailed the forty miles south to the island of Cōs.
 - b. Four hundred years earlier this had been the home of the Greek physician Hippocrates.
2. Cos to Rhodes
 - a. A day later they were passing the island of Rhodes where the famous Colossus, a 100 foot statue of the sun god Helios had once stood.
3. Rhodes to Patara
 - a. From Rhodes, Paul traveled another day to Patara, a prominent seaport city of Lycia.
 - b. There he boarded a larger ship for the next leg of his journey.
4. Patara to Tyre
 - a. Tyre, in Phoenicia was some 400 miles across the Mediterranean Sea.
 - b. It took him 5 days to make this crossing.
5. Tyre was one of two principal cities of Phoenicia.
 - a. It was located some 50 miles north of Caesarea, a city where Paul would later be imprisoned for some time.
 - b. The church here had been established by those Christians who fled from Jerusalem when the persecution arose after the death of Stephen.

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B. THE EMOTIONAL TUG ON HIS HEART

1. At different points in his journey, Paul encountered those who . . .
 - a. wept at the news of what awaited him in Jerusalem and
 - b. tried to discourage him from going there.
2. In Miletus,
 - a. He had told the elders from Ephesus, “I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:23)

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- b. Luke tells us that these men “began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again” (Acts 20:37-38).

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3. In Tyre
 - a. During the seven days, it took the ship to unload its cargo and prepare for the journey to Ptolemais, Paul spent time with the disciples.
 - b. Luke tells us that throughout this time “they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4).
 - c. When it finally came time for him to leave, entire families followed him out of the city and down to the beach where they knelt and prayed (Acts 21:5).
4. In Caesarea
 - a. Eventually the ship made its way south to Caesarea, approximately 60 miles south of Tyre.
 - b. There Paul stayed with the evangelist, Philip, and his four virgin daughters who were prophetesses (21:9).

- c. While Paul and Luke and his other traveling companions were there, “a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea” (v. 10).
- d. He took Paul’s own belt and tied his “own hands and feet, 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” (Acts 21:11).

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- e. Luke said that when he and Paul’s other traveling companions heard this, they “as well as the local residents began begging [Paul] not to go up to Jerusalem” (v. 12).
- f. In Paul’s response we see not only how their pleas affected him, but his own commitment to the Lord’s cause:

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“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” (Acts 21:13).

- 1) Paul acknowledged that they were tearing him apart.
- 2) What Satan and his forces had been unable to do was now happening through his brothers and sisters in the faith.
- g. In spite of their pleading, Paul renewed his resolve to continue on the path which God had directed him, regardless of the cost.
- h. Realizing they could not change Paul’s mind, Luke writes, “we fell silent, remarking, ‘The will of the Lord be done!’” (Acts 21:14).

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II. Why The Pressure?

A. WE THINK WE KNOW GOD’S WILL FOR SOMEONE ELSE

1. Those accompanying Paul and the brethren in Caesarea kept trying to dissuade Paul from going back to Jerusalem.
2. No doubt they thought Paul could do far more good for the Lord's cause in other mission areas.
3. Certainly God did not want him to go back to Jerusalem. Wasn't that what the prophet, Agabus, was trying to tell him.
4. How often are you and I guilty of knowing exactly what God wants a brother or sister in Christ to do?
5. We try to convince them that this is what is best, when it may not be God's will at all.
6. The things we know for certain when it comes to God's will for another is that
 - a. He wants them to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).
 - b. He wants them to live a faithful life before Him all their days (Revelation 2:10).

Slide 9**B. WE TRY TO MAKE GOD'S WILL CONFORM TO OUR OWN PRECONCEPTIONS**

1. Though the brethren around Paul meant well, they were trying to make God's will conform to their own preconceptions.
2. In their minds, they may have reasoned, "If Paul goes to Jerusalem, he is going to suffer, and we will be deprived of his ministry. This *cannot* be God's will."
3. Two questions people often ask themselves when considering a course of action are:
 - a. "What am I going to get out of this?"
 - b. "How will this benefit me?"
4. Too often we hear someone say, "God wants me to be happy. If I am not happy, I must not be doing God's will."
5. It is interesting that Jesus never said anything about us being happy.

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6. Instead, He said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).
7. A man by the name of Oswald Chambers once wrote a little book which he titled, *“My Utmost For His Highest”*.
8. Here is something he said,
 “To choose to suffer means there is something wrong; to choose God’s will even if it means suffering is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God’s will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not.” (p. 223).

Slide 10**C. OUR SPIRITUAL FOCUS IS HORIZONTAL RATHER THAN VERTICAL**

1. This was true of Paul’s friends.
2. Paul’s friends were no different from many of us today — they wanted to spare Him the afflictions which awaited him in Jerusalem.
3. Though their motives were noble, they were shortsighted.
4. These Christians were not seeing God’s ultimate purposes — they were looking out for Paul’s interests, not God’s
5. This happened with one of Jesus’ own disciples — Peter.
 - a. On one occasion, Jesus had asked His disciples who they believed Him to be.
 - b. Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).
 - c. After praising Peter for his declaration, Jesus told His disciples He would build His church.
 - d. A little bit later He began telling them that “He must go to Jerusalem” where He would “suffer many things . . . and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matthew 16:21).
 - e. Matthew tells us that “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him,

saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You' (Matthew 16:22).

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- f. Jesus was sharp in His reply, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (Matthew 16:23).
6. It is important that we continually ask ourselves, "What are God's interests in this situation?"

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III. How Do We Withstand The Pressure

A. CHOOSE TO BE A GOD-PLEASER, NOT A MAN-PLEASER

1. Paul was determined to carry out God's will.
2. Paul's friends may not have know that many years earlier Jesus had told Ananias, before sending him to Saul, at the time, "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).
3. Paul knew that the time he would spend proclaiming the gospel, how ever long or short that might be, would result in his suffering for the cause of Christ.
4. For this reason, he, like Peter and John chose to obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19).

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5. As he had written to the Christians in Asia minor, "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" (Galatians 1:10, NASB95).
6. Many of you may remember the movie *Chariots of Fire* which told the story of Eric Liddell.

- a. Eric Liddell was the Scottish athlete who refused to run the 100 meter race in the 1924 Summer Olympics held in Paris, France because it would take place on Sunday.
 - b. Having made his decision long before the Games began, he trained for the 400 meter event and not only won the race but broke the existing world record.
 - c. Shortly before the race an American masseur slipped a piece of paper into Eric's hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30, "Those who honor me I will honor."
7. Those are words for each of us to live by — honor God, regardless of where He may lead you.

Slide 12**B. TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY**

1. Paul believe that God knew what He was doing when He sent him to sure persecution in Jerusalem.
2. Over 700 years before Paul made this journey, the prophet Isaiah had written,

"Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker— An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' " (Isaiah 45:9, NASB95)
3. In referring to this very passage, Paul asked the Christians in Rome, "The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?" (Romans 9:20, NASB95).
4. In *My Utmost For His Highest*, Oswald Chambers wrote something about this,

"God plants His saints in the most useless places. We say, 'I should be here because I am so useful.' Jesus never estimated His life by the standard of greatest use. God puts His people where they will glorify Him, and we are not capable of judging where that is." (p. 223).
5. You and I must always trust God to know what He is doing — it is His name

we glorify, not our own.

Conclusion

1. I think all of us would agree that the words, "Your will be done," are easier said than obeyed.
2. Jesus spoke these words knowing the result would be cruel torture and death.
3. Paul's friends spoke these words after they failed in their attempt to keep him out of Jerusalem.
4. They would watch from a distance as God's will carried Paul to Rome where he would eventually lose His life for the sake of the gospel.

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5. However, this was not before he was able to communicate the gospel to the soldiers who guarded him and even members of Caesar's own household

"my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else," (Philippians 1:13, NASB95)

"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." (Philippians 4:22, NASB95)
6. Where will God's will take you? What sacrifices will it require of you?
7. Are you willing to say in your own life, "the Lord's will be done?"