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Staying The Course

ACTS 21:10-14

Introduction

1. On more than one occasion as I been preaching through Acts you have heard me reference some of Paul's last words which he wrote to Timothy.

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2. As he sat in a prison cell, awaiting his execution, he wrote these words with which many of us have become so familiar,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

3. There are a number of brothers and sisters who, recently, have finished their course.
4. However, there are also those who have given up the fight, dropped out of the race and are no longer keeping the faith.
5. This is exactly what Satan wants every person who has ever put on Christ to do.
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. Three weeks ago, I preached a sermon which I entitled “Finishing The Race Set Before Us.”
10. You might consider this morning's lesson as part two of that lesson.
11. In that lesson I spoke of what each of us must do if we are to finish the race which the Lord has set before us.
12. This morning, I would like for us to consider how we can sometimes discourage

our fellow Christians in their efforts to finish their own course.

13. At the same time, if you are on the receiving end of that discouragement, I want to help you stay the course and receive the crown.
14. As we begin, I would like for each of us to recognize the pressure put upon Paul by his own brethren to turn from God's will.

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I. The Pressure To Turn From God's Will

A. PAUL'S LONG JOURNEY HOME

1. In the last three verses of Acts 20, Luke tells us of the tearful departure which Paul had from his meeting with the elders from the church in Ephesus:
 - a. After his prayer with them, these men all wept and then embraced him.
 - b. They grieved over the fact that they would never see him again.
 - c. Finally, they accompanied him to his ship and saw him off.
2. Luke gives us a port to port account of Paul's long journey home.
 - a. Our tendency is often to jump over this section of Scripture in an effort to see what happens to Paul in Jerusalem.
 - b. However, I want you to take a moment and walk through it with me.
 - c. Every person who has done any mission work has vivid memories of the places they have gone and the people they have met (i.e., El Salvador).
3. Miletus To Cos (v. 1a)
 - 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 (v. 1b)
 - 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 (v. 1c)
 - a. From Rhodes, Paul, Luke and the other men with him traveled another day to Patara, a prominent seaport city of Lycia.
 - b. There they boarded a larger ship for the next leg of their 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.
 - c. On their way, they sailed to the south of Cyprus, the island to which Paul and Barnabas went at the beginning of their first missionary journey.
5. They finally arrived at Tyre, one of two principal cities of Phoenicia.
 - a. This seaport city was located some 50 miles north of Caesarea, the 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)
 - 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).

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 the 50 mile journey south to Caesarea.
- b. There Paul stayed with the evangelist, Philip, and his four virgin daughters who were prophetesses (21:9).
 - 1) You may remember that Philip was the one who first preached the gospel in Samaria, and the great success he had there.
 - 2) He was also the man who preached Jesus to the treasurer of Ethiopia and baptized him.
 - 3) No doubt, Philip wanted to know all about Paul’s work.
- 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 Do We Pressure Others To Change Course?

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.

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6. The things we know for certain when it comes to God’s will for another is that . . .
 - a. He everyone 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).

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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.
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).

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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. When Jesus asked His disciples in Caesarea Philippi who they believed Him to be, Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).
 - b. After praising Peter for his declaration, Jesus told His disciples He would build His church.
 - c. 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).
 - d. 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).
 - e. 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 Others May Put Upon Us?

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 known 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).
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. Over one thousand years before Paul wrote these words, a man of God was sent to the priest Eli in Shiloh with a blistering message.
7. Of the many things this man spoke to Eli that day, there is one statement we should all remember: "those who honor me, I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30).
8. These are words for each of us to live by — honor God, regardless of where He may lead you.

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B. TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

1. Paul believed 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. You and I must always trust God to know what He is doing — it is His name

we glorify, not our own.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5–6, NASB95)

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?”