

Main Idea: There’s a great need today for gospel perseverance. In Acts 21:1-17 we see a vivid illustration of what it looks like, and how it shows up in three areas of our lives.

- I. Gospel perseverance shows up in our relationships (1-6).
 - A. Paul appreciated people (1-4a).
 - B. Paul didn’t live to please people (4b-6).
 - C. Paul lived to please the Lord.
 1. That’s why he prayed so much.
 2. That’s why he persevered.
- II. Gospel perseverance shows up in our responses to difficulties (7-11).
 - A. Paul fellowshiped with a former enemy (7-9).
 - B. Paul received a message about future danger (10-11).
- III. Gospel perseverance shows up in our resolve (12-16).
 - A. Paul heard the counsel of men (12).
 - B. Paul chose to do the will of God (13).
 1. We must face our fears.
 2. We must be willing to stand alone.
 3. We must know what we’re living for.
 - C. Paul encouraged others to look up (14-16).
 1. His friends submitted to God (14).
 2. His friends faced the danger with him (15-16).

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these questions...

1. Do I really believe God?
2. Am I really doing God’s will in my life?

Intro to Service: Today we are observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. We believe that human life is sacred because we are created in the image of God. To use a phrase we’ll develop in today’s message, in today’s world this message is *on trial*. We thank the Lord for ministries like CRADLE. Let’s listen to a video testimony by the executive director, Mandy Arthur, and then have special prayer for this ministry and the unborn.

Intro to Sermon: Every Sunday there’s something special that brings us together in this room. We gather *because of a message*, a message about *glory*, and it goes like this:

G – God created all things for His glory.

L – Life is meant to be lived, and joy comes, when we live for His glory.

O – Our problem is sin, which is living for something short of His glory.

R – Redemption is what God has provided through Christ to rescue a people for His glorious purposes.

Y – You can now live for the glory of God, by grace alone, through faith alone in the gospel of Christ alone.

This is the message that we believe, that we cherish. And this is the message that we preach because there is salvation in no other name. And it is this message that is on trial in the world today. It’s all about, *who gets the glory?* And here’s the rub.

Rational people (as they see themselves) refuse to believe a message that exalts some being they cannot see. Why? The reality is, they are already consumed with the glory of another being. To them, the gospel we cherish is an outdated, dangerous message created by delusional people. And here’s the inevitable result of this conflict.

The gospel has gone to court and is on trial. In West Lafayette, IN, it’s the proposed city ordinance 31-21, which if passed would ban any attempts by biblical counselors to

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2003.

speak biblical truth in love to minors wrestling with sexual orientation or issues of gender confusion.²

For our brothers and sisters up north, it's Canadian Bill C-4, an LGBTQ-related law that went into effect January 8. Many pastors there fear that the vague wording of Bill C-4, which passed unanimously, could "criminalize Christianity."³

What goes on trial is often not the gospel message itself, but the foundation of the gospel (like the existence of the Sovereign Creator, and the authority of the Bible), or the implications of the gospel (such as matters of gender identity and sexuality).

This is nothing new. I've seen the same thing in countries like Ukraine, Romania, and Albania, where for decades the gospel was placed on trial and rejected by communist authorities.

The reality is, it goes back to the beginning of the church, as the book of Acts reveals. The gospel is *believed* in Acts 1. The gospel is *preached* in Acts 2-20. And then the gospel *goes on trial* in Acts 21-28. And it's this last segment that's the timely text for our current series.

In this final section of Acts there are (according to my count) eleven trials. We see...

- Paul on trial before a Roman tribune named Claudius Lysias (23:26) in ch 21
- Paul on trial before a Jewish mob in ch 22
- Paul on trial before the Roman tribune again in ch 22b
- Paul on trial before a Jewish council in ch 23
- Paul on trial before Governor Felix in chs 23b-24
- Paul on trial before Governor Festus in ch 25
- Paul on trial before King Agrippa and Bernice in chs 25b-26
- Paul on trial before a Roman centurion, a ship captain, and crew in ch 27
- Paul on trial before local inhabitants on the island of Malta in ch 28a
- Paul on trial before Jews in Rome in 28b
- Paul waiting for his trial before the Roman Caesar himself as the book ends in ch 28

I've entitled our series, "*The Gospel Goes on Trial.*" I could have called it, "*The Gospel Goes to Court,*" or even, "*The Gospel Goes to Jail,*" for this is typically what happens when the gospel goes on trial in Acts. There is a penalty to pay, often an unjust jail sentence to serve. But ironically, instead of being a setback, the Sovereign Lord actually uses the world's opposition to advance His mission of rescuing lost sinners.

And it's not simply the gospel message itself that's scrutinized, but the *implications* of the gospel message. For instance, in the book of Acts, the heated debate in several courtroom situations had to do with questions regarding whether a person needs to keep the Jewish law in order to go to heaven.

Similarly, today's debate isn't always about the gospel in direct terms. It has to do with the question of human autonomy, whether we have a right to live the way we choose. What's hated and attacked is the outlandish notion that we must live under someone else's authority, namely a sovereign God, and are accountable to Him for what He says in a particular book.

That's the message that's on trial, for that message cannot co-exist with the message of modern man (or as I should say, modern "human" or "person" since the term "man" itself is fraught with unacceptable bias). This is the message of the day...

I have the right to do what I want with my own body. I have the right to marry whomever I choose to marry. I have the right to call myself whatever I want to call

² <https://www.freedomlafayette.org/>

³ <https://churchleaders.com/news/415151-pastors-canadian-law-conversion-therapy.html>

myself, to express myself however I choose to express myself, to say something is acceptable and beautiful because I say it is acceptable and beautiful.

Of course, to all of this the gospel message says, no. God alone is the Lord who determines what's acceptable and beautiful. This means that God alone has absolute rights, not us. And rather than being autonomous, we are accountable to Him.

It is this message that is on trial in the world. It was in the middle of the first century. It is today, and will be until Jesus Christ returns.

So what does it take to live as a follower of Jesus in hostile times? We're going to find out as we walk through this relevant final section of the book of Acts in the weeks ahead. In today's text we'll see that what's needed is a certain mindset modeled by Paul.

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:1-16

There's a great need today for *gospel perseverance*. That's the premise of today's message. In Acts 21:1-17 we see a vivid illustration of what it looks like, and how it shows up in three areas of our lives.

Gospel perseverance. The gospel makes it possible. The gospel makes it essential.

There's an anemic type of "faith" that's prevalent these days. "Faith is personal," we're told. "You can believe whatever you want to believe, but keep it to yourself. A person's faith isn't supposed to offend others." And on and on the rhetoric goes.

The problem is, what I have just described isn't true of genuine, biblical faith. God-pleasing faith is radical. I didn't say it's reckless nor rude. It's certainly not flippant nor insensitive to others. But it is *radical*. To put it another way, it's marked by gospel perseverance.

On a humorous note, *Reader's Digest* told the story that illustrates what radical faith is *not*. Three pastors got together for coffee one day and found all their churches had bat-infestation problems. "I got so mad," said one, "I took a shotgun and fired at them. It made holes in the ceiling, but did nothing to the bats." "I tried trapping them alive," said the second. "Then I drove 50 miles before releasing them, but they beat me back to the church." "I haven't had any more problems," said the third. "What did you do?" asked the others, amazed. "I simply baptized and confirmed them," he replied. "I haven't seen them since."⁴

So what is gospel perseverance? In Acts 21:1-17 we see a vivid illustration of what it looks like, and how it shows up in three areas of our lives.

I. Gospel perseverance shows up in our relationships (1-6).

As Acts 21 begins Paul's third missionary journey is coming to a close. In Acts 20 he gave a farewell charge to his dear friends, the Ephesian elders in Miletus. When it came to relationships for Paul, three things were true.

A. Paul appreciated people (1-4a). The account begins with a stunning statement in the NIV, "After we had *torn ourselves away from them*, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos." When was the last time you had to "tear yourself away" from someone? Most of us don't know that kind of interpersonal depth. We tend to be surfcy, even our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Not Paul. When he later wrote, "Make every effort to keep the *unity of the Spirit* through the bond of peace (Eph 4:3)," he meant it. He spent time with people. He wept over and with people. He *appreciated* people.

When Paul and the Ephesian elders parted company, they believed they'd never see each other again in this life. The apostle was heading to Jerusalem to deliver a

⁴ *Reader's Digest*, July, 1994, p. 64.

benevolent offering to the needy brethren there. The Ephesian elders were heading back home to resume their shepherding duties with the church. The pain of parting was real.

In the following narrative, Luke gives the details of Paul's journey (verses 1-4): "The next day we went to Rhodes [about 70 miles] and from there to Patara [another 70 miles]. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia [a distance of about 400 miles], went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus⁵ and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days."

If you'll look at a map you'll discover that Paul followed the coastline in a south by south-east course to reach Jerusalem. He probably sailed on a small ship from Miletus to Patara. Then he switched to a larger vessel to head into the open seas across the Mediterranean. The danger in open sea travel was greater, but so was the capacity for speed—and remember, Paul wants to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Later on Paul's return trip across the Sea en route to Rome, he traveled on a ship that carried 276 people (Acts 27:37), and this one may have been similar in size.

Notice all the places in the text: Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Cyprus, Tyre, just to mention a few. Luke gives the names of at least ten locations. Why does the Bible include all these geographic details? Here's one reason. Remember our mission, the one Jesus gave us in Acts 1:8? What does our mission include? Geographic details! Jesus said to go and testify of Him, where? In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). To achieve our mission we must go to real places, like Paul did.

Did you ever think about how many different beds or mats Paul slept on in his life? In this passage alone, I count at least four different places where he lay his head. Gospel perseverance. He was constantly on the move.

By the way, one of the things we see as we move through the book of Acts is *progress*. Jesus said, "Go." And the early church *went*. We see the progress in a variety of ways in Acts.

We see people witnessing and people being converted in city after city. We see the church sending out missionaries. We see church members giving sacrificially to help one another. We see the disciples growing in their knowledge of the Word. In less than thirty years, the church took the gospel to city after city throughout the Roman Empire.

This kind of progress didn't just happen. It involved intentional, sacrificial, Spirit-led effort. Gospel perseverance, it showed up in their relationships.

Notice again verse 4. What's the first thing we see Paul doing upon arrival at Tyre? Luke says he *sought out the disciples*. Paul didn't start the church in Tyre and may not have even known these believers. In fact, the people who started this church were possibly the Christians who fled persecution in Jerusalem following Stephen's death (Acts 11:19)—and do you remember who instigated this persecution? Paul did!

If there was a town where he might have skipped church to avoid embarrassment from the past, it was this one for Paul. "Oh, so you're the guy that killed my father!" But Paul didn't skip church, even if he had to face up to some unpleasant memories. He *sought out the disciples* in Tyre.

What does that tell us? When faith is real, it shows up in relationships, specifically in a firm commitment to local church relationships. Wherever Paul went he sought out fellowship with the believers there. If there were no believers present, he did evangelism until there were believers and then helped them organize a local church.

Let this sink in. When Paul got to Tyre, he found the disciples there. That was his first course of action. Church in the book of Acts wasn't a one-day-a-week thing, nor

⁵I wonder if Paul thought about Barnabas, who was from Cyprus (4:36). The two parted company in ch 15.

should it be for us. Church isn't where we go on Sunday. It's supposed to be who we are seven days a week. If we know Christ we are part of a body. If we know Christ, we need the local church and the local church needs us.

So Paul appreciated people. Having said that, this too is true.

B. Paul didn't live to please people (4b-6). Notice the end of verse 4 (NIV), "Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." Interesting. Why did the people urge Paul *not* to go? Because the Spirit made it clear there would be danger waiting.

Some say that Paul was wrong for going to Jerusalem in Acts 21. They say he disobeyed the Holy Spirit because he was headstrong, a decision that caused him to waste four years of his life (two in custody in Caesarea, and two under house arrest in Rome). I disagree. What the Spirit gave Paul through these brothers was a warning, not a prohibition. *You will suffer greatly.*

For us, that would be reason to stop. If we knew danger was around the corner, most of us would change our course. Not Paul. He'd already settled the issue that he would suffer and eventually die for Christ. On the day of his conversion, he heard this message from Jesus Himself, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings...I will show him *how much he must suffer* for my name (Acts 9:15-16)."

Just a few days before this warning Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24)."

In fact, right before that declaration Paul himself shared why he was going to Jerusalem, "And now, *compelled by the Spirit*, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city *the Holy Spirit warns me* that prison and hardships are facing me (Acts 20:22-23)."

To have this kind of gospel perseverance, we must settle this fundamental reality, as Paul had. Paul could say, "I'm not living for this world. In fact, I've already died to this world, and since Christ entered my life, I'm living, not for my safety and comfort, but for His kingdom." Can you and I say that?

This is why Paul could hear the well-meaning pleading from the disciples at Tyre and not be deterred. He appreciated people, but he didn't live to please them.

Verses 5-6 tell us what happened next, "But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home."

Proverbs 29:25 says (KJV), "The fear of man bringeth a snare: But whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." Love people? Yes. Appreciate people? Yes. Fear them? Live for their approval? Gospel perseverance says, no. There's the approval of another we are seeking.

C. Paul lived to please the Lord. That's the key to gospel perseverance, the determination to please an audience of one. But let's be careful. This determination isn't something we manufacture. What the gospel necessitates, the gospel also produces.

Here's where prayer enters the picture. Consider Paul again.

1. *That's why he prayed so much.* What do we see him doing in verse 5? We see him on his knees praying. And remember, these aren't long time friends as was the case with the Ephesian elders. These are people he'd just met seven days earlier, but the text says they *all* came to the beach—men, women, and children—to pray with him.

The power for living to please the Lord comes from the Lord! That's why Paul prayed so much, as must we. Furthermore...

2. *That's why he persevered.* I don't think the Spirit warned Paul of coming danger so he would avoid it, but so he would *prepare* for it. As it turned out, when it came, he was ready, and he persevered.

My friend, is the gospel shaping the way you relate to people? I've struggled with people-pleasing all my life, it seems. But I'm learning, and I hope you are too, to live in light of this gospel reality. I believe in the *Lord* Jesus Christ. To say He is *Lord* is to affirm that it is His honor, His will, His pleasure, that is now my supreme pursuit. And this is the amazing part. He has given me His Spirit who provides the power to make that pursuit a reality day by day.

Gospel perseverance shows up, first of all, in our relationships with people.

II. Gospel perseverance shows up in our responses to difficulties (7-11).

I would remind you that the purpose of the book of Acts isn't to glorify Paul, for Paul was just a man. But Paul believed in a great God, and when a person truly believes in this great God, it shows up in this very compelling way. In our *responses to difficulties*.

Watch Paul's responses in the next two scenes. First, Luke tells us that...

A. Paul fellowshiped with a former enemy (7-9). "We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais [a distance of about 25 miles], where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea [a distance of another 40 miles] and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied."

Who did Paul stay with? Philip. Remember Philip? We first see him in chapter 6 when the church selected him and six other Spirit-filled men to care for the widows in the church. Then we see him doing evangelism in chapter 8, preaching the gospel to Samaritans and leading an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. Now we see Luke giving Philip the title, "the evangelist," a title given to no one else in Acts.

But there's something else about Philip that makes his hospitality in Acts 21 so significant. As Wiersbe puts it, "Since Philip had been an associate of Stephen, and Paul had taken part in Stephen's death, this must have been an interesting meeting."⁶

Indeed it was. Paul used to be Philip's enemy. Literally. Now they're breaking bread together. No hard feelings. No cold shoulders. Should we attribute this to the fact that Paul and Philip were such great guys? Is that how they could bury the hatchet? No. The reason they're together in that house is because they both served a *great God*—and they really believed in Him.

Perhaps you're struggling with some relationship that's gone sour. Look to the Lord, my friend. Through His cross, He reconciles us to Himself, no matter how great our sin. And also to each other. So ask Him. And then believe Him. And watch Him work.

This is the power of the gospel. God sent His Son, Jesus. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died for sinners. He died to set sinners free. He died to reconcile sinners to Himself *and* to each other. Put your trust in Him and He will give you the power to treat that former enemy the same way He now treats you, as a friend.

Next we see gospel perseverance in Paul's response to a second difficulty.

B. Paul received a message about future danger (10-11). "After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

⁶ Wiersbe, p. 489.

This isn't the first time in the Bible that spokesmen for God illustrated their messages. For instance, when Ahijah wanted to show Solomon how his kingdom would be disrupted, he rent his new cloak (1 Kings 11:29ff). When Isaiah gave the message that the Jews would be carried into captivity by the Assyrians, he walked around naked and barefoot (Isa 20:2ff.). To show how the Babylonians would capture Jerusalem, Ezekiel made a replica of the city and gave a visual demonstration of the attack (Ezek 4:1ff).

There's more than one way to teach God's truth, isn't there? Agabus did something similar. He didn't just *tell* Paul danger was coming. He *showed* him what it would be like, taking the apostle's belt and binding himself with it. That action surely got everyone's attention! As did the words that followed: "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."

Again, the Holy Spirit didn't say to Paul, "Don't go!" He just said, "You can expect danger." And as always, He would be right.

Brothers and sisters, when we're living in light of the gospel, we will view difficult situations, not as obstacles to avoid, but as opportunities to see the Lord work.

You've probably heard of the great missionary, David Livingstone. God used him in great ways to reach the continent of Africa. But ministry was not easy for him or his family. Mary Moffatt Livingstone, David's wife, was born in Africa as the daughter of Robert Moffatt, the missionary who inspired Livingstone to go to Africa. The Livingstones were married in Africa in 1845, but the years that followed were difficult for Mary. Finally, she and their six children returned to England so she could recuperate as Livingstone plunged deeper into the African interior. Unfortunately, even in England Mary lived in near poverty. The hardships and long separations took their toll on Mrs. Livingstone, who died when she was just forty-two.⁷

I'm humbled by the sacrifices others have made to make the saving message of Christ known to the perishing. And their examples remind me that if I want to be a person that God uses for His honor, I must exhibit gospel perseverance. Again, where does this come from? Within me? No. It is *gospel* perseverance, which means, it is the gospel itself that produces this perseverance that's so necessary.

Frances Havergal wrote a hymn that shows us how meditating on the gospel generates perseverance.

*I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou mightst ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou done for Me?
I gave, I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou done for Me?*

*My Father's house of light,
My glory-circled throne
I left for earthly night,
For wanderings sad and lone;
I left, I left it all for thee,
Hast thou left aught for Me?
I left, I left it all for thee,
Hast thou left aught for Me?*

*I suffered much for thee,
More than thy tongue can tell,*

⁷ *Today in the Word*, MBI, January, 1990, p. 12.

*Of bitterest agony,
To rescue thee from hell;
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,
What hast thou borne for Me?
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,
What hast thou borne for Me?*

*And I have brought to thee,
Down from My home above,
Salvation full and free,
My pardon and My love;
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,
What hast thou brought to Me?
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,
What hast thou brought to Me?*

There's one more way that gospel perseverance shows up in Acts 21, in Paul's life, as it will in ours. First, in our relationships. Second, in our responses to difficulties.

III. Gospel perseverance shows up in our resolve (12-16).

Woodrow Wilson could not read until he was ten years old. But he ended up becoming the twenty-eighth President of the United States. How? It took many things for sure, but one was resolve.

Johnny Fulton was run over by a car at the age of three. He suffered crushed hips, broken ribs, a fractured skull, and compound fractures in his legs. It did not look as if he would live. But he would not give up. In fact, he later ran the half-mile in less than two minutes. That's resolve.

Shelly Mann was paralyzed by polio when she was five years old, but she would not give up. She eventually claimed eight different swimming records for the U.S. and won a gold medal at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia. That's resolve.

In 1938, Karoly Takacs, a member of Hungary's world-champion pistol shooting team and sergeant in the army, lost his right hand when a grenade he was holding exploded. But Takacs did not give up. He learned to shoot left-handed and won gold medals in the 1948 and 1952 Olympics. That's resolve.⁸

I don't know the spiritual condition of these individuals. In reality, a person can have resolve and not have gospel perseverance (he or she may not even believe the gospel). But a person cannot possess gospel endurance without exhibiting *resolve*.

We see Paul's resolve throughout this chapter, but especially in his response to Agabus. Notice three responses of Paul in verses 12-16.

A. Paul heard the counsel of men (12). "When we heard this [that is, the prediction of Agabus], we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem."

Notice the "we." That includes Luke the writer. It apparently includes Timothy, Aristarchus, Sopater, and the other co-workers from the Gentile churches. I would assume that included Philip and his daughters. They all pleaded with Paul not to go. And Paul heard them. However, having heard them...

B. Paul chose to do the will of God (13). "Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

Know this. The will of God isn't determined by majority opinion. At least eight godly church leaders urged Paul not to go, but he went anyway. Why? They were concerned *for him*, but he had a higher aim.

⁸ Source unknown

There's something vital here for us, three lessons we must heed if we're going to exhibit the kind of resolve that accompanies radical faith.

1. *We must face our fears.* On a wall in his bedroom Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 on it: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." "It is no mean thing to be chosen of God," he wrote. "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."⁹

Don't think of this as being naïve. Paul wasn't naïve. He didn't go to Jerusalem under the guise that "Everything will be okay; you're just overreacting." No, he knew they were right. He knew he was heading for trouble. But he chose to face his fears. And so must we, by the grace of God.

2. *We must be willing to stand alone.* There's no indication in the text that anybody agreed with and supported Paul in this decision. Nobody he could see, that is.

3. *We must know what we're living for.* Many professing Christians sort of "add Jesus to their lives." Paul didn't "add" Jesus to his life. He *lived for Jesus*. Pleasing Jesus ranked above personal comfort, family, even life itself. "I am ready to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," he said.

You say, "Well, Paul was an exceptional person." Granted he was exceptional, but what he did here *shouldn't* be exceptional. According to what Jesus said in Luke 9:23-26, this is Discipleship 101. Listen to what the Master:

"If *anyone* would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If *anyone* is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Gospel perseverance should be the norm, not the exception. Paul was willing to go to Jerusalem and die. Some of us struggle to go to church at times. What's the problem? It's a fundamental one. We have lost sight of what—or *who*—we're really living for. Are we living for security, or comfort, or money, or family? When a good thing becomes more important than Jesus, it's called idolatry in the Bible.

So who are we living for? Can we say, like Paul, "I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die for the name of Jesus.?"

This resolve produced one final response for Paul.

C. Paul encouraged others to look up (14-16). We see two evidences of this...

1. *His friends submitted to God (14).* "When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'"

Do those final words indicate that they knew it was the Lord's will prior to this, but just wanted so badly to prevent Paul from harm that they sought to avoid it? You can't blame Paul's friends from wanting to protect him. A true friend would do no less. But notice how Paul's example helped them to *look up*. "It's not what *I* want that matters, friends. It's not what *you* want that matters. It's what *the Lord* wants. May His will be done!"

So often we fight to work things out the way it seems best to us. Then when those plans fail, we say passively, "Oh well, may the Lord's will be done!" That's where we need to be from the start, beloved, in submission to God. Because of Paul's example his friends submitted to God.

⁹ W. Wiersbe, [Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers](#), p. 223

2. *His friends faced the danger with him (15-16).* “After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.”

So the group made the final leg of the trek, apparently walking the distance of some 64 miles. Think of the courage it took for Paul’s teammates to accompany him, a marked man in Jewish circles, to the lion’s den of Jerusalem. And think of what it meant for Mnason to house at least eight Gentiles and this man who was considered an enemy of the Jewish law. Why did they do it? Because gospel perseverance is contagious! Spend time with someone who is on fire for the Lord and you just might catch fire, too!

Take Inventory: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *Do I really believe God?* Not, “Do I believe *about* God?” But do I believe that He alone is God?

My friend, do you believe in the One He sent to save you from your sins? Do you believe He has a purpose for your life, a good purpose, one that involves suffering for sure, but suffering that will be worth it all when we see Him? Do you believe He is 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?

Friends, the gospel is going on trial. And this means we must all settle this issue right now. If we do believe, let’s affirm it to Him right now. And if we’re struggling, let’s admit that to Him, as did the father who said to Jesus, “I believe, but help my unbelief.”

2. *Am I really doing God’s will in my life?* Paul was willing to do the will of God even if it meant losing his life. Is there anything that you know to be God’s will that you are refusing to do? Let’s settle that issue as well, my friend, even now.

“Lord, by Your grace I will do *Your* will in my life. Not my will. Not the will of my parents or peers, but *Your* will.” By your grace, I will exhibit gospel perseverance.

Closing Song: #482 “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” (all four verses)

*Am I a soldier of the cross,
A foll’wer of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause
Or blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flow’ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign:
Increase my courage, Lord;
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy word.*

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*The Need for Gospel Perseverance.*" Take time to read again today's text, Acts 21:1-16. What stands out most to you from this passage?
2. What is perseverance? How is perseverance demonstrated in this passage? What does perseverance have to do with the gospel?
3. What did the prophet Agabus do and say to Paul in verses 10-11? What effect did this have on Paul's friends in verse 12? What effect did it have on Paul in verse 13? When the friends heard Paul's resolve, how did they respond in verse 14? What's the point of this dialogue for us?
4. What's the hardest challenge you've ever faced as a Christian? What did you learn about perseverance through that trial? How did the gospel help you? Take time to share your answers with the person seated next to you. As time permits, share these answers with the whole group.
5. This morning we concluded our time together by singing, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" What difference will it make in our lives this week if we see ourselves as a soldier of the cross?