

10-31-21

Acts 21:1-14.

During a football game a coach can ask the referee for a clarification, or how many time outs they have left. Sometimes you just want to tell them you disagreed with a call. Usually you get an answer, most of the time it isn't what you want but it's an answer.

Do you ever wished you could call a time out and ask God for an explanation or clarification on certain things?

We may never know or understand God's plans, direction on this side of heaven. Often, we don't have a clear picture of what to do in certain circumstances. And if we are followers of God, we need to be careful that we aren't looking so hard for answers that we misinterpret things.

We must be careful that we are not trying to read the tea leaves in our and especially in other people's lives. I can remember when Kim was facing federal time and all the helpful advice/thoughts we heard.

It's perfectly ok if we say we don't know what God is doing. We don't have to know, understand, or agree with what God is doing. He is under no obligation to explain himself to us. Our part in all of this is to stay faithful and obedient through it all.

Not everyone agrees on how to interpret **Acts 21**. Some see this as an example of Paul's bravery while others see this as a grave mistake on the part of the apostle, arguing that Paul went against the Holy Spirit's clear directions not to go to Jerusalem. Paul was of course human and made mistakes, but I do not see this as a mistake on the part of Paul.

Paul had just experienced a heartrending farewell with the Ephesian elders. This experience was intensified by Paul's statements to them that they would never see his face again (**20:38**). The Holy Spirit had previously revealed to Paul that the road ahead held "**chains and tribulations.**" (**20:23**).

Knowing that danger lay ahead, he trusted in God and did not fear the consequences.

Read Acts 21:1-4.

Verses 1-4 take us from Miletus, where Paul met with the Ephesian elders, to Tyre, where Paul and his party look up the believers and stay with them for seven days. It is here that Paul gets his first advice, and I would like for you to notice three things about advice.

1. Sometimes Good People Can Give You the Wrong Advice.

- What is some bad advice you have been given?
- Seize the moment. Remember all those women on the Titanic who waved off the dessert cart.
- When Paul landed in Tyre he went looking for some Christian companionship. We are told that these brethren warned Paul, "**through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.**"
- The word "through" (dia) is not the word used previously (13:4, hupo) to speak of the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. Here it is better understood as "in consequence of the spirit," that is because of what the spirit said. The Holy Spirit had not forbidden Paul to go to Jerusalem but according to Acts 20:22 had constrained Paul to go. [Ralph Harris. Ed. The New Testament Study Bible: Acts. (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1991) p. 503]

- The Holy Spirit had revealed that Paul would undergo suffering for Christ. The Holy Spirit did not tell them to inform Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit predicted persecution for the apostle and their love for him caused them to beg him not to go.
- We are just as inclined to give advice today as they were in Paul's day. Unfortunately, often the advice which is given today is well-intentioned, but wrong.
- Paul obviously did not heed the advice offered him, because when the ship was ready to sail, he was on it.

2. Sometimes the Advice We Offer Others Can Be Based More on What We Desire Than What the Will of God Is.

- Beginning in verse five we travel with Paul from Tyre to Caesarea (70 miles), where Paul and the others will stay at the home of Philip the evangelist.
- **Read verses 5-12.**
- A man by the name of Agabus predicted Paul's immediate future in a rather graphic way, he tied himself up with Paul's belt. What Agabus did not say may be as instructive as what he did say. There is no evidence that Agabus interpreted this prophecy or gave Paul any instructions as to whether he should continue his journey to Jerusalem.
- But Paul's friends sure did. The text says in verse twelve, **"Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem."** It appears from the use of "we" that even Luke joined those who were pleading with Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.
- Why has Paul received these warnings? There are several possibilities.
 - a) These warnings are intended to convince him not to go to Jerusalem and in pressing on he is "out of God's will.
 - b) These warnings are to prepare him for what awaits him in Jerusalem.
 - c) These warnings are intended to test his resolve and his pressing on is a sign of his obedience and faith.
- It is my belief that these believers are right in their understanding that Paul would be imprisoned in Jerusalem but wrong in their conclusion that Paul should not go. Please note that these saints were wrong, even though they seemed to be unanimous in their conclusion.
- As Americans we even think democratically, you go with the majority. But the majority can be wrong. Right?

3. Sometimes Our Advice Rather Than Encouraging People To Follow the Will of God, Discourages It.

- **Read verses 13-14.**

- The pressure on Paul must have been considerable. For Paul acknowledged that they were tearing him apart by saying in verse thirteen, “Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? “Breaking the heart was a phrase used to mean breaking the will, weakening the purpose or causing a person to ‘go to pieces’ so that he could accomplish nothing.” [Ralph Harris. Ed. The New Testament Study Bible: Acts. (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1991) p. 509]
- Paul is saying, “Why are you doing this to me? I need your encouragement to follow the Spirit’s leading. Instead, you are crippling me with your grief.”
- Sometimes we need godly encouragement, even when it makes no sense to us.
- But Paul revealed his determination not to be deterred from following what God had revealed as His will for Paul’s life. **“For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (13b).**

Philippians 1:20-25, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

- Paul says, **“For I am ready.”** In fact, three times in scripture Paul says about himself that he is ready. In **Romans 1:15**, he says he is **ready to serve**. In our text we see that he is **ready to suffer**. In **2 Tim 4:6** he states he is **ready for sacrifice**. But the question is, “Are we/you ready?”
- How can Paul face eternity and death without fear? Paul was not afraid of death because he knew that his sins had been forgiven. Paul affirmed this in his first letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:54-58, So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

- Paul did not argue or spend time discussing divine guidance he simply followed what he knew to be God’s will for his life. It is only after Paul courageous statement of purpose that his friends were able to say what they should have been saying all along.
- **Read verse 15.**

Conclusion

- While we may wonder about Paul’s friends and their advice, we should take the time to reflect on how we should both give and receive advice.

- Paul's friends demonstrated the common inclination of being quick to point out God's will for someone else's life.
- Although Paul's friends no doubt meant well, they were trying to make God's will conform their preconceptions.
- Paul's friends in urging him not to go to Jerusalem were being used by the enemy to discourage him in following the Lord.
- We have no trouble following the guidance of the Lord if it is leading through blessings and ease. But we cannot imagine that God's will leading us or anyone we love through difficulties or trials. The truth is that neither the present nor absence of trouble is an indicator of God's will.
- There could be difficult trials coming and we may have to make decisions that go against our personal desires and comfort.
- I can give you the best advice, have Jesus as your savior!