

Acts 21–22 (ESV)

Paul Goes to Jerusalem

21 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many 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, "Thus

says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged 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 imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

¹⁵ After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

Paul Visits James

¹⁷ When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children

or walk according to our customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." ²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

Paul Arrested in the Temple

²⁷ When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." ²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had

brought him into the temple. ³⁰ Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵ And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, ³⁶ for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

Paul Speaks to the People

³⁷ As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek?" ³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" ³⁹ Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." ⁴⁰ And when he had given him permission,

Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:
22 "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

² And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸ And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ And I

said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'¹¹ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

¹² "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,¹³ came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him.¹⁴ And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

¹⁷ "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'¹⁹ And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.

²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed

him.' ²¹ And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Paul and the Roman Tribune

²² Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."

²³ And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. ²⁵ But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" ²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." ²⁷ So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." ²⁸ The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." ²⁹ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

Paul Before the Council

³⁰ But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he

unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

There's been times in my life, when I've had decisions to make, and I've really appreciated the input from other, mature Christians, and they've given me good advice, and Godly advice.

But then there's been other times, when I've felt God giving me a specific direction, and I know that, if I follow Him, it's going to be costly:

- that it would cost me financially;
- that it would cost me physically;
- that it would cost me relationships;
- ... that it would cost me... in so many ways, and probably for the rest of my life...

And I've been certain, that it was a definite call of God, and yet other Christians have said "Don't do it – it's too costly – don't do it – consider the ramifications..."

And then I've read in God's word, where Peter said ^{Acts 5:}
²⁹.... "We must obey God rather than men..."

And so, I went against the advice of those Christians, who I respected. And yes, it did turn out to be costly. And yes, it's still costing me today... Did I do the right thing? I believe I did, because I believe I was following God's will.

The men's Bible Study have just begun the Bible study:
"Experiencing God – knowing and doing the will of God"...
I've done it before, and this study has helped me (like no
other), to know how to recognise God's voice, to discern the
will of God, and to follow it...

{encourage them to get involved}.

And in it, Henry Blackaby says, he doesn't go setting his own
plans, because he's afraid to. He doesn't set goals and
objectives and strategies, for the fear that he will achieve
them, and never have done, what God **wanted** him to do in the
first place.....

I was going to say "sometimes", but I'm going to change that
word to "often",... "Often, the Lord will lead us in a
direction, where human reason would **never** have us go."

And so sometimes your brothers and sisters in Christ, will
give you good, Godly advice, and then at other times, out of
concern for you, they'll give you human advice, which is
actually contrary to God's will...

And we saw a bit of that happening in today's reading.

Paul knew the Lord was leading him to Jerusalem, and
eventually to Rome.

And people with the gift of prophecy were telling him,
"You're going to be in trouble when you get to Jerusalem"...
And that was God's word on the matter... But then out of
concern for him, other Christians added their own advice
"Don't go... Don't do it – it's too costly... Don't go."

And yes, it would have gone easier for Paul if he'd taken their advice....

But if Paul had taken their advice, and **didn't** go to Jerusalem, then about half our New Testament would never have been written. – you know, a lot of the letters that Paul wrote, he wrote while he was in prison... Yes, it would've gone easier for Paul, but God's will would not have been done.

So, there's a very short lesson for today, and I want you to consider it from both sides:

1. Firstly, from the perspective, of when the call of God is on you.

Paul said: **What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus**

When you are certain of the call that The Lord is putting on your life, don't let anything deter you – no matter how great the cost, and matter how concerned others are about you.

2. and Secondly, I want you to consider it from the perspective of when someone you love and care for, is called to a costly path.

Robyn and I have some very good friends. And their eldest daughter (in her mid 20's) feels that the Lord may be leading her, to be a missionary in the Middle East – in a muslim

country... And that's a very dangerous place, to be a Christian missionary....

How would you feel, if your son or daughter, told you, they felt called to that sort of ministry??? ... Would you try to talk them out of it??? Or would you support them to do it???

It's a tough call, isn't it???

Wives: What if your husband was to tell you, that he believed the Lord was calling Him to go into full time ministry – to end his career, sell up the home, and go to Bible College... Would you try to talk him out of it?

If the Lord called you, would you give up the farm? Would you give up your security? Would you give up your dreams and ambitions – not just for you, but also for your children???

When they saw that Paul was sure of the direction that the Lord had set for him, they said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."....

And I guess, this is where the rubber hits the road... Is obedience to God, of more value than life itself????
Absolutely.

What an amazing blessing we have in Christ. Jesus loves us so much, He died for us. He gave us eternal life... And what

an opportunity we have – to serve God... Don't ever be
diverted from it.

Amen.