

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 21

Saving the Best For Last

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

I. Introduction

- A. Most of us when we were children were told at the dinner table to always eat things on our plates that were the least enjoyable first, and save the best for last. The principle is good, even though most of us never did it.
1. Paul, since becoming one of the greatest soul-winners there ever was, had started probably a hundred churches, seen thousands of Gentiles become born-again, and covered almost all of the entire free-world of that time with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. But his efforts now increase as he turns back home to Jerusalem and the Jews for one last attempt to see them turn back to God. He has saved his best for the last.
- B. So far we have covered:
1. Chapter 13 “God's Call to Service”
 2. Chapter 14 “Suffering While Serving”
 3. Chapter 15 “Settling New Testament Salvation”
 4. Chapter 16 “The Second Missionary Journey”
 5. Chapter 17 “Searching the Scriptures”
 6. Chapter 18 “Spiritual Overdrive”
 7. Chapter 19 “The Securing of Ephesus”
 8. Chapter 20 “Saying Farewell”

II. Lesson - "Saving The Best For Last"

A. Paul Leaves Miletus - Heading South - Next Stop Jerusalem (21:1-14)

1. Sails through Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Phenicia, past Cyprus, into Syria at Tyre, where he stays for seven days with believers (21:1-4). They, AS EVERYONE ELSE HAS, tell Paul that it was not God's "perfect" will for him to go to Jerusalem.

NOTE: Paul's motive was love for his people (1 Cor 13:1-8)

PRINCIPLES:

- a. Three areas of God's will (Rom 12:1,2):
 - 1) _____ - All things work together for "good" (Rom 8:28)
 - 2) _____ - Pleases God, but is not the best
 - 3) _____ - God's clearest, and best will
- b. Two primary categories of God's will:
 - 1) _____ Will - What God allows
 - 2) _____ Will - What God wants
- c. God is going to allow Paul to go through with this desire of his (to go to Jerusalem) because He knows Paul's heart motive (Rom 10:1).
2. Paul comes to Ptolemais and finds believers - They're everywhere! (21:3,4) What a testimony if that would be true here in Ireland soon!
3. They have an *open-air prayer meeting* - no preaching or music, just PRAYER (21:5).
4. Arrives at Caesarea (21:8)
 - a. Meets Philip the _____ (Acts 6:5; 8:12, 35) - soul-winner!
 - 1) An evangelist wins people to Christ
 - 2) A discipler (teacher) trains those new Christians
 - 3) A Pastor feeds the entire group of Christians
 - 4) Every Christians needs to become evangelists (soul-winner)
 - 5) When a Christian wins someone to Christ, they need to then become disciplers, to train them
 - 6) The Pastor coordinates everything, and keeps everyone operating together in unity and for God's glory.

- b. Philip had four daughters that did _____ (21:8)
- c. Does this mean that we should have "Women Preachers?"
- 1) Women **DO** prophecy (1 Cor 11:5) - declare the future before the New testament was completed. They also have a "sixth-sense" about things that ought to be listened to!
 - 2) Acts is a _____ book. God used lots of people to bridge the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament.
 - 3) God said that a day would come when He would "*pour-out his Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your _____ shall prophecy*" (Joel 2:28,29) But notice what the rest of those verses say, "*dreams... visions... wonders in the heavens and in the earth... the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible DAY OF THE LORD come.*" Second Coming of Christ! (See Rev 6:12 for the fulfillment of Joel 2).

NOTE: Paul is getting near Jerusalem, and all throughout history, you have seen that Jews always require a **sign**, whether it be tongues, prophecy, or "a word of knowledge."

- 4) Notice that God only used women when there weren't any men available (which was sometimes often):
 - a) _____ & Balak (Judges 4)
 - b) It is not God's perfect will to use a woman in a place of spiritual authority, but God has had to do it. See how God had to use a Samson (Judges 13-16)
 - 5) God puts several restrictions on these "women preachers" (See 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14)
 - a) They are to teach _____ - most important (Tit 2:3-5)
 - b) They are to teach _____, along with their husbands
 - c) They are to present the Gospel like all other Christians
 - d) They just **cannot** assume *authority* over men in the church. They have equal input, but not final authority.
- d. Here comes the real prophet - _____ (21:10,11; also 11:28).
- 1) Gives an object lesson using simple cloth - shows the _____ (prison terms) that Paul will go through.
 - 2) This is the **forth** warning to Paul in the last four months.
 - 3) He says, "Paul, you are going to go to the Gentiles where you are supposed to be whether you like it or not." Paul's primary mission was to reach the Gentiles - but his heart was for the Jews, and just "had" to be in Jerusalem at a "Jewish" feast!
 - 4) Paul had over-ruled what he knew was best, for what he thought would be *better*.

PRINCIPLE: We are just the same, constantly attempting to do what we think is better, when we should be doing what God wants. We think that we can improve on God's plan!

- e. Paul was "*willing to ___ at Jerusalem*" (21:12-14) - WHY?
- 1) He remembers _____ death at Jerusalem (Acts 7:58).
 - 2) He also remembers all the _____ who died there as well (Lk 13:33,34).
 - 3) What Bible-believing Jew, if he had to die, would not want to die "at Jerusalem"? That is where king David is buried. That is where Christ was crucified and buried and rose again from. That is where 3,000 were saved in one day on the day of Pentecost. Now, we are talking about one of the greatest Christian who ever lived, and we see that he is not perfect, as only One is perfect, Who always obeyed the perfect will of God - Jesus Christ.

B. Hello Jerusalem (21:15-26)!

1. Here in Jerusalem, the "brethren" received them _____ (but you had better watch out!) You will notice that things really haven't changed here in Jerusalem since Chapter _____. Everything is *stagnated* because:
 - a. They were too ____ - 30,000 Christians had become bogged down as a huge church instead of being smaller churches.
 - b. They were too _____ - focused mainly on themselves, and not on the world they were to be reaching (Acts 1:8).
 - c. They had grown tired of "being _____" than the culture (Jewish) around them.

PRINCIPLE: People don't like it when Christians are different that the world. Christians don't even like it when other Christians are spiritual! Everybody just wants everyone the SAME!!! Yet God says "Come ____ from among them, and be ye _____ saith the Lord" (2 Cor 6:17; Rom 12:1,2; 1 Pet 2:9).

2. A meeting is immediately called, with _____ (the pastor of the church at Jerusalem - not the apostle; Acts 12:1,2) and all the elders:

- a. Paul reports first (21:19). Things are going great! People are getting saved, towns are closing down liquor stores, idol sales are way down, churches are being built instead of sports arenas, and so on...!
- b. Then James speaks (21:20-25)

- 1) That's fantastic Paul... but, things haven't been going so good here in Jerusalem.
- 2) The Jews aren't getting saved like they used to - everyone has settled back down for the emphasis on the ____.
- 3) And, there are some bad _____ going around about you teaching the Jews everywhere to forsake Moses:
 - a) No need to circumcise the Jewish children
 - b) No need to retain the Jewish customs

FIRST PRINCIPLE: The first thing is that James should not pay attention to rumors! The second worst sin of Christians (beside losing your first love; Rev 3:15,16) is that of gossip - talking about each other instead of the Lord!

SECOND PRINCIPLE: Circumcision does nothing anymore (it did under the Old Testament), and Jewish "customs" (i.e., ways of doing things that were distinctly Jewish, not necessarily Biblical) were not important anymore!

- 4) James then says, "YOU have got to do something Paul about those rumors to prove them false!"

PRINCIPLE: Paul didn't waste one minute of his time worrying about what other people said or thought about him since he was doing what God wanted him to do. Therefore, don't waste your time worrying what other people say or think about you. Worry about what **God** says and thinks about (see Job and how God talked about him!)

- 5) Go with four Nazarites into the Temple (see Num 6:13,15) and show everyone that you are a "good little Jew", and that you "keep the Law".

NOTE: James has a "double-standard": He still believed the Jews must "keep the Law" to be a good Jew, while the Gentiles just have to only believe in Christ!

EXAMPLE: A Roman Catholic becoming born-again and then going back and attending one Sunday Mass so that his parents won't think that he has denied the Virgin Birth, or the authority of the Pope!

- c. Since Paul has gotten himself this far in, he will now have to go all the way through (21:26), so he accepts their proposal without a word.
- d. Paul even pays for an offering to be made for him! (21:26)

NOTE: Paul believed that NO OFFERING would do any good anymore now that THE sin offering had been paid! People still think that they can "pay off" or "impress" God by doing something "religious."

C. Goodbye Jerusalem! (21:27-40) Paul's time in Jerusalem is cut short!

1. The unbelieving Jews spot Paul in the _____ (21:27-31)
 - a. His mug-shot was in the local Barber Shops, and the Post Offices, as one of the ten most wanted criminals!
 - b. These Jews go fanatical as they kick Paul OUT of the Temple:
 - 1) Begin lying about Paul teaching "against" Jewish things. (always thinking preachers are negative):
 - a) Against the people of Israel (Cf Rom 9 and 10)
 - b) Against the law (Cf Rom 7)
 - c) Against the Temple!
 - 2) Lie about Paul bringing Greeks into the Temple - a violation of the holiness and sanctity of that place (yet Paul believed they COULD go right into the holy of holies)!
 - 3) These good, God-fearing, religious, zealous Jews set out to "kill" Paul! Real "godly" men! It is always the "religious" that have no problem killing their enemy. Paul is severely beaten by this mob!
2. The chief captain of the Roman army division there ran down and grabbed Paul before they tore him apart (21:31-40).
 - a. Paul is bound *with chains* because the captain believed that he must be dangerous. He then is hoisted up in the air since the people were so intent on killing him!

NOTE: The people treated Paul just like they treated Jesus, and said, "*Away with him!*"

- b. Paul requests to address the crowd in _____ - This is his best, and this is *his last chance* to turn the hearts of the Jews to their Messiah! (21:39-40)

VI. Conclusion - Review of the Principles

IV. Study Questions