

## Refuge City Church — September 25, 2022

### “Essential or Not?” [Acts 21]

#### Introduction

- **Today:** Paul finally arrives in Jerusalem, despite many warnings from various believers.
- **Think:** What are you holding on to as ‘essential’ in how you practice your faith, and are you using that against other believers?

#### Verses 1-6

- The final trek to reach Jerusalem and report to the ‘mother church’ all that has happened in Asia and Greece [Paul arrives in Tyre; roughly 130 miles northwest from Jerusalem]
- **Verse 4:** “And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul [NASB “...and they kept telling Paul] *not* to go on to Jerusalem.”
  - **CLARITY:** “*Through* the Spirit”—doesn’t mean they were told by the Spirit to keep Paul from Jerusalem.
  - But rather that they were in tune with the Spirit’s leading of Paul, and their human response was to protect him from harm. [Isn’t that our response to danger?!]
    - **Acts 9:16**, “...For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”
    - **Acts 20:22**, “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there...”
- Paul’s obedience to the Lord outweighed this human warning.

#### Verses 7-16

- Moving south to Caesarea, he stayed a day with Phillip [one of the original deacons (Acts 6:5), appointed by the Apostles in Jerusalem]
  - Phillip is the evangelist to Samaria, and to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.
  - **Acts 8:40**, “...and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.” [remaining in there for the last 20 years]
- **Verses 10-11:** “While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 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.’”
- The prophet Agabus returns [Acts 11:28; famine prophecy] to let Paul know how he will be arrested.
  - This is not prophetic warning, keeping Paul from Jerusalem. Rather it served as confirmation of what the Holy Spirit already revealed to Paul.
- **Verse 12:** “When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.”
  - Again, the human response is to avoid persecution. But when that conflicts with obedience to the Lord, we ought not listen to human reasoning.

- Thus Paul's response in **verse 13**: "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."
- So the people respond, "Let the will of the Lord be done."
- **Comparison: Luke 22:42**, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."
  - Noticeable comparisons to Paul's final steps towards Jerusalem and Jesus' final moments.
  - *Journey towards Jerusalem*: prayer, warnings, and release to God's will.

### Verses 17-26 [Jews vs. Gentiles...again]

"When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 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, 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. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 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. 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." 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."

- We should not forget the agreement made at the Jerusalem Council [Acts 15].
  - **Verse 5** [the issue]: "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."
  - **Verse 11** [gospel solution]: "But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will... Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,"
  - **Verses 28-29**: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."
- Paul arrives into Jerusalem a controversial subject amongst the Jews, even the ones who came to faith in Christ.
  - Paul's message to the Gentiles had gotten misconstrued.
  - **Main point**: All that believe in Jesus as Christ are saved by grace through faith.
    - *Jews*: keeping the Mosaic law was not wrong, unless they believed it was necessary for salvation.

- *Gentiles*: Did not need to commit to the Mosaic law to find salvation in Jesus, but should do away with certain practices that were not in alignment with faith in Christ.
- The Elders of the Jerusalem church believed Paul needed to show that he was not ‘anti-Jew’, in order to maintain unity and peace in Jerusalem.
  - **1 Corinthians 9:20**, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.”
- **Unity, not division. Freedom, not legalism.**
  - **QUOTE**: “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity/love. [Attributed to St. Augustine]
- **What are the ‘Essentials’?** [not complete by any means]
  - You must be born again [**John 3:5**, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”]
  - Jesus is our Savior [**John 3:18**, “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.”; **John 14:6**, “No one comes to the Father except through me.”]
  - Salvation by faith alone, not works [**Ephesians 2:8-9**, “For by grace you have been saved through faith...”]
  - The good news of the gospel [**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, “...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...”]
- **What are “Non-Essentials”?**
  - Anything we are going to hold on to as a part of our faith in service & practice, apart from the essentials of salvation.
  - **Romans 14:4-8 NLT**, “Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord’s help, they will stand and receive his approval. In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. For we don’t live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it’s to honor the Lord. And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”
  - The key is to understand what Paul was saying is found in verse 5, “You should each be *fully convinced*...”
    - **Romans 4:20-21**, “No unbelief made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”
  - Whatever each of us holds on to in the “non-essential category” is between us and the Lord. Not to be held as “essential” to those who disagree with what you do or how you serve the Lord.
    - *Life Examples*: Vegans vs. Carnivores. CrossFit vs. Gym members.
    - *Church Examples*: Speaking in tongues [supernatural gifts], Communion & Baptism [how it’s done], Worship [contemporary vs. traditional], the church building

[size, lights, etc.], Preaching/Teaching [expository vs. topical], End Times Interpretation, Women as pastors, and the list goes on forever...

- **Key Importance:** Whatever you hold on to, *is not license to sin* against the Lord, and/or to pass judgment on those who practice differently than you do.
- **QUOTE:** [Responding to those with whom we disagree] “Be genuine, be accepting, and be understanding; which requires listening.” [Fitz Ridenour]
- **In “All Things” Charity/Love!** [an essential of every Christian!]
  - **1 Corinthians 13:1-8**

### Verses 27-36 [summarize]

- Assumptions are made, a riot ensues, chaos takes over, and Paul is dragged out of the temple and beat.
- He is arrested by the Roman guard to find out who he was and what he was doing wrong to cause such a commotion.
- **Comparison:** [vs. 36] “Away with him!”: the Jews wanted Paul dead, just as they did Jesus close to 30 years prior.
  - **Acts 22:22**, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”
  - **John 19:15**, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!”
  - *Actions in Jerusalem:* Arrest, beating, and cries for execution.

### Conclusion

**Colossians 3:12-15**, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

- Consider what you hold on to in faith.
  - Knowing and believing in the essentials, that is where we hold our ground, unwavering, without compromise, *yet do so in love*.
  - If it’s non-essential, listen to those around you, show grace and understanding, knowing that we all operate in the freedom God has given to us, and that we will all stand before the Lord who is our Judge.
    - If you’re unsure of what others are doing in faith, *look to God’s Word!*
  - In all things, operate in love for all, both in and out of the church.