

Acts 21:13

I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

I guess it must have been in the early 70s that I most listened to my Dad's preaching

- He wasn't at all interested in pop music
- But occasionally he would have heard of some song on the radio
- And get a line from it into one of his sermons
- These lines were normally at least 10 years old by then
- But I really have done a lot better
- Because I have got a couplet from a famous song written in 1964

Now in case you are wallowing in ignorance, never having heard of this song

- I should also tell you that not only was it recorded by the Animals
- Who gave us *The House of the Rising Sun*
- But I can also mention it has been recorded by Nina Simone
- Elvis Costello, Gary Moore, American Blues Artist, Robben Ford (1995)

I'm just a soul whose intentions are good
O Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood

After reading the commentary on Acts 21 by Warren W Wiersbe

- It seemed to me that this was the perfect song for the Apostle Paul

I HIS FRIENDS MISUNDERSTOOD HIS PLANS
II THE JERUSALEM CHURCH MISUNDERSTOOD HIS MESSAGE
III THE JEWS MISUNDERSTOOD HIS MINISTRY

I HIS FRIENDS MISUNDERSTOOD HIS PLANS (Acts 21:1-16)

Paul has planned for some time to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost

- And to take the Christians there a gift from the Gentile Churches
- However, it is hard for him to leave the Ephesian Church
- And hard for them to let him go
- Luke describes this vividly with the phrase, 'torn away from them'

Chapter 20 ends with Paul and the Ephesians elders kneeling to pray

- It's easy to pass over this, as we did last time
- And I want to draw two things out of it
- Firstly, the intensity of prayer is shown by their kneeling (they normally stood)
- Secondly, it reminds us of the danger of losing a sense of awe and reverence
- In worship in general and in prayer in particular
- They were particularly emotional because they would not see Paul again

The expression 'torn away' is very similar to our word 'bereavement' (tearing)

- The Ephesians were going to be bereft of Paul and he was losing them too
- It is a feeling that we ministers have every time we move to a new circuit
- But everyone shares it in some way for God is always calling us on

Part of Christian service is being ready to do the things we don't want to do

- I doubt that Paul really wanted to go to Jerusalem
- And this was made all the more difficult by the church not wanting him to go

This was particularly the case at Tyre

- Luke says, 'Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem'
- Yet Paul still went on to Jerusalem which poses the problem
- If they had urged him 'through the Spirit' not to go, why did he still go?

It is very unlikely that Paul would have been deliberately disobedient to the will of God

- Paul was compelled by the Spirit to start his journey to Jerusalem (20:22)
- As a gesture of fellowship, he was going to take the gift to Jerusalem in person
- He knew he might have a difficult reception at Jerusalem
- Making it all the more important that he went
- Sometimes only a personal visit is enough

Paul's relationship with the Jerusalem church is such that only going was enough

- he knew that and yet some fellow Christians were telling him otherwise
- but how do we reconcile Paul's statement that he was 'compelled by the Spirit'
- with what the Christian in Tyre were saying to him
- I think it is because Luke gives us a very brief summary of what they said
- Through the Spirit they knew that Paul was heading for trouble in Jerusalem
- And that they therefore tried to persuade Paul not to go

Luke's second New Testament book, Acts, contains some parallels with the first (Luke)

- This decisive moment of heading towards Jerusalem
- Reminds us that Jesus set out for the city 'resolutely/steadfastly'
- Alongside many warnings of the suffering that would come
- Where there would be a similar plot by the Jewish religious leaders
- A handing over to the Gentiles
- Jesus was resolved to do his Father's will, Paul was similarly obedient to God

The area of guidance is a notoriously difficult one for us all

- What is God's will for me? How can I know what is right?
- Somehow we must discern the inward voice of God (prayer/study/preaching/worship)
- We should listen to what others say – but we must test that also with Word and Spirit

Things did not get easier for Paul when they arrived at Caesarea

- Here they stayed at the home of Philip the evangelist (one of the seven)
- Not Philip the Apostle (one of the twelve)
- Paul could afford to spend a little more time there than he might have planned
- For he had made good progress by ship and was now in good time
- He didn't need to get to Jerusalem as soon as possible, only in time for Pentecost

Here he met the prophet Agabus, coming down from Judea

- It was Agabus (11:27-28) who had predicted that a famine would come
- That prompted the collection from the church in Antioch

- With the belt that held Paul's outer cloak together
- He tied his own feet and hands in an act of prophetic symbolism
- Reminiscent of Ahijah tearing Jeroboam's cloak (1 Kings 11:29-39)
- To symbolise the dividing of the Kingdom of Israel
- And the prophetic symbolism of prophets such as Isaiah (20:2-6), Ezekiel (4:1-5:17)

Agabus interpreted his actions:

“In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”

(Acts 21:11)

Again, the people (including Luke 'we') pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem

- Such a response does not make it any easier for Paul
- Who says that they are 'breaking his heart'
- But Paul explains his stand – he is not only willing to be bound
- But also he is willing to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus

Obviously, we have only a brief summary of what was probably a much longer debate

- But it is worth noticing that there is no division in the fellowship about Paul's actions
- They are pleading with him not to go because they are concerned about his safety
- But they had misunderstood his plans
- He is resolute about going because he must meet the Jerusalem Church in person

Peter, often the spokesman for the disciples, was the first to recognise Jesus as the Christ

- When he affirmed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God
- Jesus began to reveal to him that his way was one of suffering and the cross
- 'No Lord,' said Peter, 'this shall never happen to you'
- Jesus immediately recognised these words as being temptation
- For the way of Jesus is the way of self-denial and the cross

It shows that people who love us most might try to shield us from the way of Jesus

- Sometimes the people who oppose us are basically good, godly people
- But their words have to weighed against the scriptures and the way of Jesus
- All of us, if we are obedient to Christ, will face the way of the cross in some sense
- For the call of Jesus is to take up the cross (self-denial) and follow him

Perhaps finally they come to understand why Paul has to go but, in any event,

- Eventually those who were pleading with Paul gave up and said,
- 'The Lord's will be done' (Acts 21:14)

Paul must now make the journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem (about 64 miles)

- stopping at the home of Mnason on the way, the next stop is Jerusalem

II THE JERUSALEM CHURCH MISUNDERSTOOD HIS MESSAGE (21:18-26)

When Paul and the others arrived in Jerusalem, Luke reports

- 'the brothers received us warmly'

- at least that shows good grace on behalf of the Jerusalem church
- and Paul was able to give a full and accurate account, of what God had done
- among the Gentiles through his ministry
- interestingly enough, the 'we' sections stop here
- and do not start again until the journey to Rome (27:1)
- suggesting that in between these times Luke was simply a bystander

Paul is also able to receive good news from the Jerusalem church

- his work among the Gentiles has flourished but so has their work among the Jews
- these new believers would probably not have met Paul before
- but they have heard of him and misunderstood his teaching

They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.

(Acts 21:21)

Paul's critics were saying the same things about him as they had said about Jesus and Stephen

- that Paul was forsaking the customs given by Moses to their fathers
- they were not worried about what Paul might be teaching Gentiles
- but they were worried about what he might be teaching Jews

The whole situation is difficult and one that is not unfamiliar to us today

- Paul warned Gentiles that they should not be involved in the old religion
- To do so would be to leave the slavery of the world for the slavery of the Law
- But Paul accepted that Jews might not want to give up their dietary laws and festivals
- They must not trust in them for salvation but they need not give them up

The nearest example to this I can think of is a person who all their life

- Has attended the Sunday services at a beautiful, historic parish church
- That person might even light a candle and perhaps say a prayer
- And perhaps believed that by going to the services and leading a good life
- That they might find the way to heaven
- But then that person attends an evangelistic service and is born again
- That person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved
- It is not the previous religion of going to the lovely church and lighting a candle
- That is the way of salvation but there is no particular reason to stop doing that

Paul did not trust in the customs of the Jews but he did not deliberately violate them

- He adapted his approach according to the people he was dealing with, saying
- 'to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews' (1 Cor. 9:21)
- summing up his approach in this way

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

(1 Corinthians 9:22)

To clarify his relationship with the Jewish converts the church leaders at Jerusalem

- asked Paul to identify with four men who had made a Nazirite vow
- it was not so long ago that Paul had made such a vow himself (Acts 18:18)
- so their request was not particularly onerous
- as Paul had returned from Gentile territory
- he had to report to the priest at the start of his seven days of purification
- and also gave notice he would provide the offerings for the four impoverished men
- to pay the charges for Nazirite offerings was regarded as an act of charity
- and would identify Paul with the Jewish people
- on the other hand, the Jerusalem leaders affirm agreement with the Jerusalem council
- regarding the requirements of Gentile Christians to keep the bond of fellowship
- in this way Paul promoted unity between Christians – not division
- his sensitive actions are a lesson in evangelism and fellowship for us all
- the unity of the church was so important it worth working hard to preserve it

As Paul went to Jerusalem for the last time:

I HIS FRIENDS MISUNDERSTOOD HIS PLANS

He needed to go to Jerusalem in person

II THE JERUSALEM CHURCH MISUNDERSTOOD HIS MESSAGE

He showed solidarity with both Gentile and Jewish believers, nevertheless:

III THE JEWS MISUNDERSTOOD HIS MINISTRY

Despite Paul's strategy of taking a vow and paying the Nazirite offerings

- Paul was not successful in winning over the Jews

Paul had taken Trophimus from Ephesus to Jerusalem and they were seen together in the city

- The Jews (not the Jewish Christians who were members of the Jerusalem church)
- Jumped to the conclusion that Paul and Trophimus were going around together
- Paul had been to the temple, therefore Trophimus would have been in the temple
- Therefore, Paul had desecrated the temple by taking a Gentile into the inner court

Now anyone can see that there are a number of jumps there – it is the logic of prejudice

- Although Paul now freely associated with Gentiles
- It would have been a serious matter to take a Gentile into the Holy Place
- For a barrier separated the outer court of the temple, the Court of the Gentiles
- From the inner part, the Holy Place, reserved for Jews alone
- The crime Paul was alleged to have committed was a capital offence

The Roman authorities upheld the death penalty for such an offence against the temple

- Luke has carefully charted the parallel circumstances
- Between Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem and that of the Apostle Paul
- Who in many ways is following, quite literally, the footsteps of Jesus
- There is the allegation that he has spoken against the law and against the temple
- The whole city was aroused and the mob try to kill Paul
- Only the intervention of the Roman troops saves Paul from further harm

The Roman commander formally arrested Paul and ordered him bound with two chains

- he thought him to be a criminal and was prepared to treat him as one

- but when he asked the mob about Paul's crime he got no clear answer
- All that the crowd can shout is "*Away with him!*"

Luke must surely have felt the significance of the fact that some twenty-seven years earlier

- another crowd had shouted, "Away with this man!" at a spot nearby (Luke 23:18)
- the Roman commander was confused about the identity of Paul
- confusing him with an Egyptian revolutionary
- but when he established that Paul spoke Greek could speak to him directly
- Paul was then able to spell out his own credentials
- He was a Jew – he had every right to go into the Holy Place
- But he was also a Roman citizen from Tarsus in Cilicia – no ordinary city
- No doubt things changed when the commander heard he was a Roman citizen
- For it would not have been good for the commander to have allowed a Roman citizen
- To have been beaten (let alone lynched) by the mob
- Now Paul is on trial but he is on trial for Jesus
- And as he said, he is ready:
- not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus