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## Surrendering to the Will of God, Part 1

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### Acts 21:7-15

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. 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. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. 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.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. 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." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

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And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation."

The word of our Lord. You may be seated.

I want to talk to you today about the will of God. It's mentioned in both of our texts, and it's mentioned quite a bit at this portion of Acts as we're walking through this account of the unstoppable church in the world. I want to be somewhat meticulous as I walk through the text so we understand the setting well.

Before we dive into it, I want to suggest to you that I'm guessing there's about three mindsets in our congregation here today when we talk about the will of God. There are some of us who could articulate very clearly some things about the will of God and some passions that we have in it, and we could probably articulate a lot of what the Scripture says about the will of God.

I'm sure there are others among us who are wondering if God has a will, and does he have a will for me personally? And how important is it to understand the will of God? And maybe have a little bit of a

laissez faire type of attitude around the will of God. There's many people like that in the world. And there are some who react cynically to the idea that God even has a will.

And so we have this spectrum of ideas around the will of God in the world. And if we don't have some plumb line or some place to go, we just start to make things up. But the belief here at Nazareth is that God has inspired His Word to teach us and instruct us about his ways, his purposes, his plans in the world, and about why everything exists.

And so when we consider the will of God in the book of Acts today, the context is this. We are just after the time of Jesus being here on the earth. The Scripture tells us in Galatians chapter four, verse four: "When God's time had fully come, under his will, under his good plan, he sent His Son into the world."

It was God's will to send Jesus into this broken and fallen world. He was willing to do this. It was his decision to do this. John 3:16, probably the most famous verse in the Bible, says God did this because he loved us. "For God so loved the world that he sent or gave his one and only Son." And he did this to redeem us. Galatians 4:4 says from the destiny of death, to purchase us back from the snares of the evil one.

John says this: he did this so that by believing in his name we might be invited into everlasting life and be in harmony with God for all of eternity.

God, in his love, made a decision to send His Son to be an atonement for human sin, so that we could be made right with him forever. In his love, he chose to do this.

So that's the time of Jesus coming onto the earth here. And while Jesus was here and he was walking with her, he shared some of his will for us. And one of the things he said, in Matthew recorded for us, Matthew 16:18, is this: he said, "It is my will. I will build my church."

Now the word church is the *ecclesia*. "I will call people out of the world to be a part of my eternal family, and the gates of hell will not stop me in doing this," is what Jesus was saying. It's my will to call a people to myself, adopt them into my eternal family, and not even hell itself is going to stand against my purpose in doing this.

So you're seeing some of the will of God. God sends His Son into the world to purchase human beings as children of the Most High God. And then you see Jesus, when he's here, determining in his will to claim a people for himself so they could be with him as his sons and daughters and family for all eternity.

Now Isaiah says this about Jesus: it was the Lord's will, in accomplishing this, to crush him. "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in the hand of Jesus."

He will have many siblings in his eternal family. God will prosper. He will grow the Church of Christ down through history until all are brought in by his appointed good will. So God determined in his will to crush his own Son, so that his Son could then pay the penalty for human sin, so human beings could be brought into the family of God for all eternity. And it's the Lord's will to have this be a very great inheritance for Jesus.

So after Jesus was crushed, he was resurrected. The Bible tells us—we celebrate that on Easter. And while staying with the disciples, Acts begins to tell us, he, Jesus, ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

It was his will that his followers would wait in Jerusalem until the promise of the Holy Spirit would come upon them. For then they had just known the baptism of John, but now they were going to know a supernatural baptism—a baptism of the Holy Spirit. And so he said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”

Understand this: it is God's will, infusing people with power to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. The church would start in Jerusalem, go to Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And we've seen that in our walk through this text recorded for us in Acts by Luke.

Now we're to the third missionary journey. It's gone from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria. Paul is now traveling the known world. At that time, missionaries are being sent out. We have most of the record of Paul's missionary journeys, and he has found himself in Ephesus. I have it circled in red there, and he stayed three years there.

He started in the synagogue, got kicked out of the synagogue. So now he was in a public meeting place for a couple of years. He just taught about the ways of God in a public gathering place there. And then it says this, Acts 19: while in Ephesus, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, back to Jerusalem, back down to the south there, passing through Macedonia, Achaia.

“After I have been there,” he said, down, back down to Jerusalem, “I must also visit Rome.” Now I have the map back up here. So he leaves Ephesus—you see the red trail—he goes up through modern day Greece, there around Corinth, back up around, and he comes back to Miletus there, and he's on his way back down to Jerusalem at the very bottom of the map.

He decided there to go in that long journey around back to Jerusalem. And then he said, “I must visit Rome after that also.”

Paul decided to sail past Ephesus on his return to avoid spending time in the province of Asia. After being there for three years, it likely would have slowed him down with all of the connections he had in Ephesus. And so he decided to sail past Ephesus, and he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

So here he is at Miletus on the next map. He's staying in this city just down the fjord from Ephesus. He sends to some of his friends in Ephesus to come see him at Miletus. And he gathers them together. And

in Acts 20 Paul says to them, “Compelled by the Spirit”—the Spirit of God is working in Paul—“and compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are awaiting.”

Put yourself in Paul's shoes for a moment. You've learned, over the course of the past 20 years since you became a Christian, to hear the voice of the Spirit in your life. Paul is sensing the Spirit of God. The will of God for his life is for him to go to Jerusalem. But the Spirit is also telling him prison and hardships are awaiting there. That's what he knows.

But he says, “I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race or complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.”

When Paul was converted, a man named Ananias came to him because he was blinded. And God sent Ananias to Paul to take the blinders off his eyes. And in the words of the Scriptures, tell Paul how much he must suffer for the name of Jesus. God's will for Paul. But he didn't care, because his life was worth nothing to him compared to fulfilling the task or the will of God in his life.

So Luke says this: “When we had finished the voyage from Tyre”—now they've left, totally missed there, and they're heading down towards Tyre, I have this on a map—“we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day.” Now he's down here, back near Jerusalem. They unload the ship at Tyre. They go to Ptolemais, right there, just a little farther down on the water. They stay there for one day, and 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 that was appointed earlier in Acts, and stayed with him.

He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied—interesting that they would hear from God and speak for God. And then it says this: while we were staying for many days there in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. There's four prophetesses, four daughters who are speakers from the Word of God, but yet God sends another man as a prophet to Philip's house while Paul is there. Just fascinating, this whole journey.

Now they are here in Caesarea. Coming to us, Agabus took Paul's belt. And this prophet bound himself with Paul's belt, his hands and his feet, and he again, from God, let it be known to Paul what awaited him in Jerusalem: “This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt. And then they will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

Paul didn't know how he was going to get to Rome, but now he was given a hint. The text says this in Acts 21. This is Luke writing, who's traveling with Paul. And he says, “When we, Luke and Paul's traveling companions, the group that was with him, heard this, we and the people there in Caesarea urged him not to go to Jerusalem. Don't do it, Paul. You shouldn't go. Listen to what the prophet says. You're going to be bound, hands and feet. You're going to be turned over to Rome. Stay away.”

Then Paul answered. He said this: “What are you doing, crying and trying to weaken my heart, my resolve? Your empathy, your sympathy, your worry, your fear over my life—and maybe yours—could

thwart the will of God. Your soft-heartedness. What are you doing, crying and trying to weaken my resolve?”

And then listen to Paul's words: “For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Do you sense the passion here in Paul's heart? The Holy Spirit has been prompting him for miles upon miles upon miles, as he's traveling to go to Jerusalem. It's building in his spirit. He understands there might be a cost there, and he has nothing to keep him from doing the will of God. He has set his face towards Jerusalem.

We saw this with Jesus on this missionary journey earlier. Paul would write this to the believers in Rome before he would go there, and before he came to Jerusalem. He would write this, Romans chapter nine, verses one through five:

“I speak the truth in Christ, I'm not lying. My conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people. I would go to hell,” he says, “for the sake of the Jews to be saved. I would be cut off from Christ for the sake of the Israelite people to be saved.”

And then he says this: “For these are the people of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship, theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law through Moses, the temple worship through Solomon and David, the promises. Theirs is the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. From them is traced the human ancestry down through the Jewish line that God has worked through all of human history—comes the Messiah, who is God over all and forever to be praised. Amen.”

He says, I'm going to Jerusalem because I want the Jews there to find the salvation of their souls. I don't care what it costs me, he says.

Martin Luther King Jr., from this heart of Paul, would write this statement: “If you've got nothing worth dying for, you've got nothing worth living for.”

Feeling alive today, friends? I mean alive—like impassioned, stirred? Or afraid? Fearful? Maybe a little selfish? I can tell you this text has stirred me. Since he would not be persuaded, the text says, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.”

After this we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.