

**“THE LORD’S WILL BE DONE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Texts for the Sermon: Acts 21:1-16**

**Introduction.**

My brother and his wife left yesterday from Seattle for a 10 day road trip down through some national parks in Utah on to the Grand Canyon then back up through California visiting two of our aunts and finishing up with the Redwoods and Crater Lake.

He has created some sort of spread sheet with every day on it, the hotels, sights to see, down to the best gas stops chosen by Gas Buddy. I appreciate attention to detail as much as anyone, but somehow this seems a bit over the top to me.

I wonder if Luke was of a similar bent. We have before us Luke’s travel diary as he journeys with Paul and he includes some small details that seem unnecessary. It raises some questions.

What is the point of details like this taking up space in the Bible? Why is this sort of thing divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit?

*First*, it is in keeping with Luke’s commitment to give an orderly and faithful account of what happened and how God moved the Gospel from place to place. Our faith is built on the foundation of real people in real places that can be traced on a map. This is not fiction.

He is showing us the hand of God moving the apostles, moving the church, moving the kingdom of God as it spreads out to the ends of the earth. Luke shows us how the seed of the Gospel has taken root and borne fruit. They found disciples of Jesus in Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea.

*Second*, Luke shows us the heroic bravery and courage of Paul who went on numerous dangerous journeys traveling hundreds of miles over land and sea for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. He was not concerned to lead a quiet, peaceful life for himself.

He knew what he was called to do and he knew at what cost, but he was resolved to be faithful.

We who are Western world Christians, Evangelicals living in relative ease in the United States and especially in Lynden need to ask ourselves who and what are we living for? What sacrifices of our time or personal comfort or financial security would we be willing to make in the name of Jesus? And I am not necessarily talking about persecution.

How might the Spirit take us out of our comfort zones for the sake of the Gospel? How about talking to a friend about Jesus? How about volunteering to serve as a greeter or usher or make cookies or care for precious children in the nursery or pray for a SERVE volunteer or host them for a shower and breakfast on Sunday morning? How might Paul inspire us?

Luke has written this both to encourage us and to inspire us. As Luke takes us along on this journey, I am going to be like a tour guide as we travel along through the text and make five stops to point out some of the highlights of this journey.

**Milepost one is Acts 21:4, urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem.**

*“Through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.”*

What is going on here? Something doesn't make sense. In his speech to the elders at Ephesus Paul said, “I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit” (Acts 20:22).

Is the Spirit contradicting Himself? Has the Spirit changed His mind? Is Paul now free from going? Was Paul being bullheaded, was he wrong to press on to Jerusalem despite the Spirit's warnings?

The Spirit is using them to warn and prepare Paul for what awaits him so he is not surprised or caught off guard, and so that he will be strengthened in mind and spirit to better endure what comes and more willingly suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

The Spirit said Paul would suffer, the love of the people interpreted the Spirit to be saying don't go. This is a common mistake among Christians. If it is painful it must not be God.

*Following Jesus has always been dangerous.* In our country it has not been so much so for a long time, but we are all aware that is changing. If Roe v. Wade is overturned it may become much more so for Christians and Christian churches. We know from the news that Catholic churches have already been attacked. May we not be surprised, but strengthened.

**Milepost two, Acts 21:5, kneeling on the beach with friends, their wives and children.**

*“They all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed.”*

What a beautiful passage, what a wonderful small detail for the Spirit to include in the travel diary of Luke. What a testimony of their great love for Paul, a testimony of their loyalty, of their honor for this great servant. This is the whole church sharing life, tears, hugs, heartfelt prayers.

We see the saints making a common practice of praying, especially where there is danger, especially where the devil may try to hinder and interfere. How much more specific do you

think their prayers were knowing Paul's resolve to go to Jerusalem and the Spirit's warning of danger?

Do you make a practice of praying before you depart on trips? Do you ask for God's blessing, protection, provision? Decades ago we were visiting friends in San Antonio, we piled into their van to see the sites, and before we drove off, they prayed. That struck me. It was just a trip around town, no big deal. But they prayed.

You have heard the statistic that most car accidents happen within 10 miles of your home. And of course you know about the guy who heard that so he decided to move.

Our friends had chosen to live life *corem deo*, before the face of God, in the presence of God. They were practicing the presence of God like David Watson talked about two weeks ago Sunday evening in the Ecclesiastes sermon series. Make the presence of God more real, more conscious. Make His glory and grace tangible and practical, daily.

Remember Pastor Mike's sermon on youth Sunday, when you rise up, when you go about your day, when you lie down? (Deut. 6). Take opportunities to bring the spiritual and eternal into your daily, earthly activities.

### **Milepost three, Acts 21:8, Caesarea and Philip's house.**

Philip was one of the original seven deacons in the church in Jerusalem before the great persecution stirred up by Paul, forcing Philip to flee. What stories they could tell. Now Philip's enemy is in his home as a brother in the Lord.

I want to pause here and highlight the power and importance of forgiveness. You cannot maintain a significant human relationship without forgiveness. If you are in a significant human relationship and you have not asked for forgiveness recently then something is missing.

You aren't paying attention. You are sinning and making messes and not cleaning them up. You are poisoning the well of your relationships.

If you love the people close to you, you should ask them, is there anything between us?

Have you been hurt or offended more than the murderous threats Paul breathed out against Philip that drove Philip from his home and friends in Jerusalem?

Philip was able to forgive Paul and receive him into his home and extend gracious hospitality. This is the beauty and power of the Gospel, of the blood of Jesus, that differences that once divided are gone, no longer important. Forgive as Christ has forgiven you.

It grieves my heart when I hear of Christians who are not getting along, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents and children, church members, co-workers. Some are estranged,

not speaking. Sometimes you do all you can to make peace and have to leave the rest to God. But it doesn't mean you aren't sad, grieved by it.

May the Lord use our enemies in our lives for our greater good, and may the Lord turn our enemies into friends.

#### **Milepost four, Acts 21:10, Agabus' prophecy concerning Paul's suffering in Jerusalem.**

Two times groups of Christians, knowing Paul will be persecuted, bound, arrested, imprisoned, drew the conclusion that it was not God's will Paul should go to Jerusalem.

We are seeing the challenge for us in making decisions and determining the will of God. Their concern is both genuine love for Paul, and a selfish motive to want to keep Paul around.

They are good and honorable men and their actions are praiseworthy, after all they know the great value and service Paul is to the church and they don't want that lost. We see their great affection for Paul, and fully understand their desire to keep him alive.

These are fallible Christians expressing love. Godly Christians can disagree.

One senses from Paul's words that they are having an effect on him, they might be weakening his resolve, causing him to start entertaining thoughts of quitting his trip.

He loved them and cared about them and is torn, but he can't go against his conscience and what he knows God has called him to do. It breaks his heart that he has to so firmly deny their request.

I recall so clearly when we accepted the call to come here from OKC our son Marc came to us and asked if he could stay in OKC to finish his senior year. That tugged on our hearts, we knew how hard it was for him to leave. We had to weigh all the factors carefully and prayerfully to hear God's voice, His will, His best for each of us and all of us. We denied his request.

We don't always have the whole picture. They couldn't see God's perfect purposes. Paul will be arrested and bound, and then brought back to Caesarea where he will be held for two years, but with complete freedom to visit with his friends and the church there. They would have much more time with him than if he were never arrested.

It is possible for us to let our own emotions and desires interfere with God's master plan. We must be careful when we are trying to persuade someone to do something we want them to do.

The Spirit is showing us Paul's faith and courage, he is undeterred and all the more resolute and determined to go of his own will. He is fighting the good fight of faith and he is not running from the fight. He is offering himself up to his enemies for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

There is something worse than not following the will of God and that is wishing you had. For Paul the will of God renders everything else of less importance. When you are not afraid to die in the Lord's service, there is no fear. To live is Christ, to die is gain, what can anyone do to us?

**Milepost five, Acts 21:14, thy will be done.**

*“Let the will of the Lord be done.”*

They are wise to submit to the will of God. They don't accuse Paul of being bullheaded, stubborn, rash, foolish. They don't dismiss him and say “fine, go ahead, have it your way, but if it all goes bad, don't say we didn't tell you.?”

Thy will be done. This is our bottom line in our prayers. The will of God softens every trial, every hardship, every heartache.

Brothers and sisters, trouble is coming, trouble is coming to the church of Jesus Christ and to her ministers, missionaries, servants. The day will come when we will face the same issue they faced here. Should we seek safety, comfort, ease, should we be silent to avoid controversy or conflict or trouble, to save ourselves? Or do we stay the course, preach and teach the truth, uphold the Gospel, call people to repentance?

When we see trouble coming will we be prepared so we can face it without fear? Can we face it knowing it is part of God's will and His will is His wisdom? Let Him do with us what He knows is best and will bring the most good out of.

Is our love for Jesus strong enough to prepare us to risk our lives for Him, as He did for us?

As one ancient pastor put it, “Christianity shows its greatness when it is hated by the world” (St. Ignatius of Antioch).

The world hated Christ and still does, it hates us because we follow Christ.

The world hates Christianity for holding firmly to the Truth.

The darkness always hates the light, darkness loves lies and sin, the ungodly hate God.

**Conclusion: Knowing the will of God for our lives.**

How do we know and discern the will of the Holy Spirit?

*You can follow the classic Four Councils.*

*The council of the Word of God*, spend time regularly. Paul knew God's revealed will. For him that was the word of Jesus spoken at his conversion. For us it is the Word of God. “You are in error because you don't know Scripture.”

*The council of the Holy Spirit*, seeking and listening in prayer. Paul constrained by the Spirit.

*The council of our conscience* (conviction, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit).

*The council of others*, trusted, godly spiritual advisers chosen wisely and carefully. But from Paul's experience we must be discerning if their advice contradicts the other three councils.

We must guard against being horizontally focused and not vertically focused. Their motives for Paul were well-intentioned and loving but short-sighted. They were missing the big picture. They were looking out for Paul's best interests, not God's interests.

We must guard against trying to make God's will conform to our perceptions. "If Paul goes to Jerusalem he will suffer, suffering is bad, so it can't be God's will. God wants us to be happy and not have pain."

Realize His will may not be your will or what you want. God's will should not be just because it is hard or painful. Finally, when you know God's will do it.

If God wants you to forgive, forgive. If God wants you to admit you are wrong, do it. If God wants you to speak up, speak up. If God wants you to service someone, get going. If God wants you to be a witness, an example, do it. If God wants you to volunteer, or help, or reach out to someone, go with His blessing.

May we have such a clear sense of the will of God that nothing can put us off the course. May God's will always have the upper hand in our hearts, minds, and lives.

May we like Paul give God's will the highest priority over anything or anyone else. May we be able to stand for convictions, conscience, truth, the name of Jesus. May we be as resolute to stand against compromise, against fear, doubt, Satan's lies.

Lord, your will be done. What you will, where you will, when you will.