

LOVING OTHERS ULTIMATE FREEDOM IN CHRIST
MORE THAN LOVING OUR FREEDOMS PURCHASED BY CHRIST!
ACTS CH21:17-26



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Who can remember the film "Bridge over the River Kwai" or "Escape to Victory" or even "Moana"? What do the 3 films have in common? Well, in each film, a person is asked to return to a situation that they have escaped from, for the benefit of others! ***The Apostle Paul, is about to be asked to do something similar, to seek the ultimate freedom of others, through Christ, rather than to enjoy his own freedoms purchased by Christ!***

John Stott says "So far Luke has portrayed his hero on the offensive, taking bold initiatives under the leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize most of Asia and Greece. But when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, his whole career abruptly changed. He was assaulted, arrested, bound and brought to trial. He found himself on the defensive. Following his three epic missionary journeys Luke describes the five trials he had to endure. The first was before a Jewish crowd at the Northwest corner of the Temple area (22:1), the second before the Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1), the third and fourth in Caesarea before Felix and Festus, who succeeded one another as the procurator of Judea (24:1; 25:1), and the fifth, also in Caesarea, before King Herod Agrippa 11 (26:1).

These five trials, including in each case Paul's defence speech, together with the circumstances of his arrest (21:8), take up six chapters in our Bibles and nearly 200 verses." (Cited in John Stott's Commentary on Acts pg 335)

Why?

MINISTRY UPDATE! V17-20a

Who were the team (Ch20:4-5) going with Paul to Jerusalem?

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------|
| Sopater the son of Pyrrhus | - | Berea |
| Aristarchus + Secundus | - | Thessalonica |
| Gaius (probably the same person Ch19:29) | - | Derbe |

Timothy	-	Lystra (Asia)
Tychicus	-	Asia
Trophimus (Acts Ch21:29 + 2 Tim Ch4:20)	-	Ephesus (Asia)
Luke (Ch16:10-16 + Ch20:5-Ch21:18)	-	Philippi (Macedonia)

Why were they going? Romans Ch15:25-33 and 1st Corinthians Ch16:3-4 inform us that Paul intended that local representatives from the planted Churches he had founded should convey the money collected for the poor Christians in Jerusalem!

First day in Jerusalem, the brothers there, presumably whilst at Mnason's house, greet Paul, his team and the Christians from Caesarea! The next day Paul and the Christians with him, meet with James (Jesus's half brother and the leader of the Jerusalem Church – Ch15:13-21) with the Jewish Christians Elders. **Two very different people groups separated by culture and traditions but brought together in love by Christ and His Gospel!**

Paul provides a very detailed report of his 3rd Missionary journey (Ch18:22 – Ch21:17), his preaching of God's Word and church planting in Asia, Macedonia and Greece. This must have taken quite a time but is greatly received by the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem v20b! Paul gives God the glory v19! The Jewish Christians heard from Paul what God had done and were able to meet some of the Christians that were from those planted Churches! No doubt the "gift" collected from the Churches would also have been given (even though not mentioned until Ch24:17).

MINISTRY COMPLICATIONS! V20b-24

Similar to Paul's report of the work of God's grace in the Gentile world, God too has continued to work in Jerusalem. V20b - **"You see brother how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed. They are all zealous for the law."** Oh, oh! These Jews are clearly born again, we would call them Christians, but they are still being sanctified and at present still hold tightly to the Law, Jewish traditions and Jewish customs! These do not make them any more **"righteous"** than the Gentile Christians, as righteousness with God can only come through Jesus Christ, His Death and His Resurrection and our faith in Him as God's atoning sacrifice! However, there is clear evidence of ministry complications.

V21 – False reports! There have been Jews, non-Christians who have constantly been opposed to the Gospel that Paul was proclaiming! These false reports have been circulated throughout Jerusalem accusing Paul of abandoning Moses (The Law) and telling people to not circumcise their children or follow the customs of the Jews! We want to remember that Luke sees a parallel between Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, recorded in his first Book (Gospel of Luke) and Paul's journey to Jerusalem, recorded in Acts, his second Book!

1. Jesus travelled to Jerusalem with His disciples – Luke Ch10:38, Paul travels with disciples Ch20:4!
2. Jesus was opposed by hostile Jews - Luke Ch6:7, Ch11:53-54, Ch22:1-2, Paul is opposed by hostile Jews Ch20:3!
3. Jesus made 3 successive predictions of His sufferings - Luke Ch9:22, Ch9:44, Ch18:31-32, Paul does likewise Ch20:22-23, Ch21:4 and Ch21:11!
4. Jesus declared His readiness to lay down His life - Luke Ch12:50, Ch22:19, Ch23:46, Paul does also Ch20:24 and Ch21:13!
5. Jesus was committed to completing His mission - Luke Ch9:51, so too is Paul Ch20:24 and Ch21:13!
6. Jesus expressed His abandonment to the Will of God - Luke Ch22:42, the same is of Paul Ch21:14!

Although part one of Paul's mission is complete, because he is now in Jerusalem, his arrival is not without complications. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, ministry complications arise!

So the question arises v22 – "What then is to be done?" Even more complications! So Paul is advised by Jesus' half brother and the leader of the Jerusalem Church v23-24, to sponsor 4 poor Christians who have taken some kind of version of a Nazirite vow (Numbers Ch6), and if Paul is willing to follow these instructions, the Jews will be able to see that the reports about him are false!

A Nazirite vow, would generally include a specific time, and abstinence from grapes, alcohol, being separated and from cutting ones hair during that period, and at the end of the fixed time, followed by 3 offerings, burnt, sin and peace offering and the shaving of ones hair! Usually undertaken when you are crying out to God for something, need to be purified, or thanking God for His intervention!

So why is Paul willing to do this?

MINISTRY OBEDIENCE! V25-26

Although being free in Christ is important, more important than enjoying our freedoms, bought and purchased by Christ, is to love others so that they can gain the ultimate freedom purchased by Christ, **remember the three films!!!** We can do this by showing certain sensitivities in relation to non-Christians and what are important cultural traditions and customs for them, the early Church demonstrated this:

1. Abstention from food sacrificed to idols! V25 (Ch15:20+29)
2. Abstention from drinking blood! V25 (Ch15:20+29)
3. Abstention from eating meat from animals that had been strangled! V25 (Ch15:20+29)
4. Abstention from sexual immorality! V25 (Ch15:20+29)

Although in Ch15:20 + 29 have a different ordering, **the main thing is keeping the main thing, the main thing**, abstention from these 4 things, and in doing so, showing that cultural sensitivity, which was so vital to reaching the lost and enjoying peace with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ! The application for us, **is the principle in allowing our love for others to be paramount, rather than our freedom bought by Christ!**

What do we know about Paul?

A.D. 5-10?	Born in Tarsus as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin and a Roman Citizen (Acts Ch22:3; 28; Rom Ch11:1; Phil Ch3:5) raised in either Jerusalem (Acts Ch22:37) or Tarsus
15-20?	Trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel 1 (Acts Ch22:3; 26:5; Gal Ch1:14; Phil Ch3:5-6)
30/33*	Death, resurrection of Christ
31-34	Present at Stephen's stoning, persecuted Christians (Acts Ch7:58, 8:1; 22:4a; 26:9-11; 1 st Cor Ch15:9; Gal 1:13)
33/34*	Converted, called and commissioned on the way to Damascus (Acts Ch9:1-19; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; Gal 1:15-16)
33/34-36/37	Stays in Damascus a short time (Acts Ch9:19b); leaves for "Arabia" (i.e., Nabataean Kingdom; 2 nd Cor Ch11:32; Gal Ch1:17); returns to Damascus (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:20-22?); Jews and the governor under King Aretas try to arrest and kill him, Paul escapes through the City wall (Acts 9:23-24; 2 nd Cor 11:32-22).
36/37*	Meets with Peter (and sees James) in Jerusalem (Acts Ch9:26-30; Gal 1:18; Hellenists seek to kill him and he flees to Tarsus (Acts 9:28-30; Gal 1:21)
37-45	Ministers in Syria/Cilicia (2 nd Cor Ch11:22-27?)
42-44	Receives his "thorn in the flesh" (2 nd Cor Ch12:7-9)
44	Herod Agrippa dies (Acts Ch12:20-23)
44-47*	Spends a year ministering with Barnabas in Antioch (Acts Ch11:25-26) Second visit to Jerusalem ; Time of famine (Acts Ch11:27-30; Gal 2:1-10)
46-47	First Missionary Journey (Acts Ch13:4-14:26) 1.5 years?
48*	Paul and Barnabas spend "no little time" in Antioch (Acts Ch14:28;cf. Gal 2:11-14); Paul; writes letter to the Galatians
48-49*	Returns to the Jerusalem for the Apostolic Council (Acts CH15); Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (Acts Ch15:30-33), but a dispute over John Mark causes them to part ways (Acts Ch15:36-41)
48/49-51*	Second Missionary Journey (Acts Ch15:36 – Ch18:22): 2.5 years?
49	Edict of Claudius (Acts Ch18:2). Paul and Silas travel to southern Galatia through Asia Minor, on to Macedonia (notably Philippi - 1 st Thess Ch2:2; Thessalonica - 1 st Thess Ch2:2; Phil 4:15-16; Berea – Acts Ch17:10-15, Achaia notably Athens - 1 st Thess Ch3:1 and Corinth - 2 nd Cor Ch11:7-9)
49-51*	Spends 1.5 years in Corinth (Acts Ch18:11); Appears before Gallio (Acts Ch18:12-17); Writes 1+2 Thessalonians
51	Returns to Jerusalem? (Acts Ch18:22)
52-57*	Third Missionary Journey (Acts Ch18:23-Ch21:17); 5 years?

52	Travels to Antioch, where he spends “some time”; then travels through Galatia and Phrygia (Acts Ch18:23)
52-55	Arrives in Ephesus (Acts Ch19:1; 1 st Cor Ch16:8); ministers there for 3 years (Acts Ch20:31) and writes 1st Corinthians in the spring, near the end of his ministry there; makes brief, “painful visit” to Corinth (2 nd Cor Ch2:1), then returns to Ephesus and writes “tearful, severe letter” (now lost) to Corinth (2 nd Cor Ch2:3-4; Ch7:8-16)
55-56*	Travels North to Macedonia, where he meets Titus (Acts Ch20:1; Cf 2 nd Cor Ch2:12-13); writes 2nd Corinthians
57*	Winters in Corinth (Acts Ch20:2-3; Cf 2 nd Cor Ch9:4), writes letter to the Romans from Corinth; travels to Jerusalem for the fourth time and is arrested (Acts Ch21:27-36)
57-59	Imprisonment transferred to Caesarea, where he stays for 2 years (Acts Ch24:27)
60*	Voyage to Rome; shipwrecked for 3 months on the Island of Malta (Acts Ch28:11); finally arrives in Rome
62*	Under house-arrest in Rome (Acts Ch28:30-31), writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon
62-67	Released from house-arrest in Rome, extends his mission (Spain?), writes 1st Timothy (from Macedonia?) and Titus (from Nicopolis): is re-arrested, writes 2nd Timothy from Rome shortly before his execution
64-67*	Martyred in Rome

According to 2nd Corinthians Ch11:23-28

- Flogged more severely!
- Flogged on 5 separate occasions!
- Flogged a total of 195 times!
- Three times beaten with rods!
- Almost stoned to death!
- Shipwrecked three times!
- 24hrs in the sea!
- Danger from rivers, bandits, his own countrymen, from false brothers!
- **What an example!**

Just like the Gentile Christians back in Ch15 and here are advised about what to do, to win converts and to keep building on the peace purchased by Christ, so Paul is now advised to do something similar!

“Coming from abroad Paul would have had to regain ceremonial purity by a seven day ritual of purification before he could present at the absolution ceremony of the four Jewish Christians in the Temple. This ritual included reporting to one of the priests and being sprinkled with water of atonement on the third and seventh days. To imagine that Paul was here taking upon himself a seven-day Nazirite vow conflicts with Jewish law because thirty days were considered the shortest period for such a vow. What Paul did was to report to the priest at the start of his seven days of purification, inform him that he was providing funds for the offerings of the four impoverished men who had taken Nazirite vows, and return to the Temple at regular intervals during the week for the appropriate rites. He would have also informed the priest of the date when the Nazirite vows of the four would be completed and when he planned to be with them. To pay the charges for Nazirite offerings was considered an act of piety and a symbol of identification with the Jewish people.” (The Bible Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Richard N. Longenecker, pg 520)

APPLICATION

What could be similar complications for us? Clothing, Sabbath, Tattoos, Drinking alcohol?