

**Acts 21: 1-14; “The Will of the Lord Be Done”, Sermon # 79 in the series –**  
**“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall**  
**on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.**

So we see here that after Paul had met with the elders at Ephesus, he and his traveling companions went on their way to go to Jerusalem, setting sail, and running a straight course, it says, traveling on until they came to Tyre. They stayed there seven days. And then it says in verse 5 that while they were there, that some of the disciples told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. We will see, here in these verses, that all along his way to Jerusalem, over and over again, Paul encountered brethren who loved him, who did not want him to have to go through the trials that both he and they knew were sure to come to him, if he went on to Jerusalem.

In verse 14 of our text, it says, “So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” This is the subject that I would like to bring to your attention this morning: The will of the Lord. What is this will that is mentioned here? Well, it is most certainly the will of the Lord in regard to His Providentially ordering all things concerning the apostle Paul’s ministry. That is, his being led by the Holy Spirit in regard to his fulfilling his ministry. I would like to open this up in 3 words of observation: 1<sup>st</sup> – Prayer and the Lord’s will. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Prophecy and the Lord’s will. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – Emotions and the Lord’s will. May the Lord give us His help in understanding these things better, so that we will receive all that the Lord has for us personally in this message.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Prayer and the Lord’s will.** (verses 1-5)

We saw in verse 36 of the last chapter that the apostle Paul knelt down and he prayed with all of the elders of Ephesus when he was getting ready to leave them. We see that they had, through prayer, finally come to the place where they could accept the Lord’s will that they would never see Paul again. But we also saw that it was not without a struggle. Indeed in verse 1 of chapter 21 when it says that when Paul and his traveling companions had “departed from them”, that in the original Greek it means, when they were “dragged from them”, or “when they were plucked from them”. Such was the strength of their thoughts and emotions, that this was the way they felt. It was hard for them to accept the Providential ordering of God concerning Paul’s leaving them and not ever returning.

We also find some amount of resistance to the Providential ordering of these things regarding Paul’s going on to Jerusalem, taking place in verse 5 of our text here. The disciples at Tyre, it says, told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. I find the wording here very interesting: They told him through the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit had revealed to those who were prophets among them that Paul was going to face great trials and difficulties in Jerusalem. And they did not want him to have to go through these things. I think that it is good for all Christians to understand that the Lord has a Providential will for your life in particular.

That is, the Spirit of the Lord is in your life, and He is leading you and guiding you into all the truth of being more like Christ. Whether you are the apostle Paul or whether you consider yourself the least Christian, the Lord has specific plans for your life. His purpose is that you might glorify Him by your responding to His leading, so that you will accomplish certain definite things for His name’s sake. This learning and growing up into what God would have you specifically to do for Him, will involve a certain amount of hardship, difficulty, and even suffering for His name’s sake at various points in your Christian life.

Turn over with me to Acts chapter 9, and I will show you this in relation to the apostle Paul; what the Lord’s will was for his life and his ministry. Verse 10 – “Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’” “And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’” “So the Lord said to him, Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.” “And in a vision he has seen a man

named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” “Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.’”

“And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” So Saul has been dramatically converted by a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. One minute he was the zealous Pharisee who wanted more than anything else to persecute Christians because He thought Christ was a false prophet. He thought that all those Jews who were becoming Christians were undermining true Judaism.

The next minute we find him on the ground, having been struck with intense blinding light, and he was hearing Christ’s voice from heaven, saying – Saul, Saul is it hard for you to kick against the goads? He was blinded by the light that struck him. He had to be led by the hand into Damascus. And he was three days and three nights without sight, and neither did he eat or drink anything. What is he doing now? He is praying for guidance from the Lord whom he has just come to know.

In response to his prayers, he is going to receive his commission on what the Lord would have him to do for Him. He was going to hear these words from a man who was not convinced yet that he had yet been converted. Ananias knew what kind of a man Saul was. He knew how much harm he had done to God’s saints. He thought that surely the Lord must be making a great mistake in having him go to Saul and lay hands on him to receive his sight. And so he questions the Lord about his mission to go to Saul, but the Lord says to him – No, Ananias, you go. For he is a chosen instrument of mine.

He is a chosen vessel whom I have set my electing love upon. I have saved him and I have called him with a holy calling, according to My own will and purpose. I have poured my grace into his heart. I have a great purpose in mind for him. I have great things that I want him to do for Me. He is praying for wisdom and you, Ananias, are going to help him to understand my will for his life. And then, this very revealing phrase – For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.

In this statement we understand a little more concerning the Lord’s will; what the Lord will have him to do in the future. He would have him to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel in His preaching Christ, and salvation in Him alone. Paul had caused Christians to suffer by his persecuting them in the past. Now Christ will cause him to understand how much he must suffer for His name’s sake. This will be quite dramatic in his case. What will it be in your case? Perhaps you think this way? It is good that you do.

What were you like before you were converted? What were you like by nature and practice? Well, you were a sinner according to the bent of your nature. God knows what your life was like. He knows all about what sins you pursued, and the way in which you in particular dishonored Him. But now He would have you to show forth the truth of what His grace has made you. You may have been moral before conversion, but now you tell others of how your own righteousness is like filthy rags. Perhaps you were a sensual or unclean sinner. But now you speak to people about what it means to be pure in heart by Christ’s grace. Perhaps you were an angry self-justifying sinner, but now that you are saved, you try to show people around you the wisdom of gentleness, how you are willing to patiently work through issues of disagreement with people around you.

I am trying to show you, dear Christian, that the Lord will not only have you learn the New Way of righteousness, He will be showing you, in relation to your prayers, and through His Providentially ordering things in your life, what He would have you to do for Him in your personal ministry to other people you meet, and interact with you, in your life. Every Christian has a personal gift and a personal ministry in relation to that gift. And the Lord has called you as a Christian to exercise this gift for His

name's sake. He will show you how His will can be done in a thousand situations which you will come into in your life.

Yes, He would have you to learn all of His preceptive word in the Bible. But now that He is in your life, He will be looking to see if you are willing to respond to His will for you in particular, in regard to what you do and become as a Christian. What is it that you would like to do for Him to show forth the greatness of the grace that He has given you? You may not at all have been a persecutor like Saul. But the Lord will, over time, and through circumstances which He brings you into, show you what He would have you to do for Him. Through your prayers and the prayers of other for you, He will show you by His Spirit working in your mind and heart in relation to the commandments of His word, what His expectations are, and what you can do for Him in particular.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Let's think about Prophecy and the Lord's will.** (verses 6-11)

“When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.” “And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.” “On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.” “Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.” “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.” “When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” “Now we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.”

It is wonderful, is it not, to see the great love of all the brethren for Paul here. Philip who had to leave Jerusalem when Saul was making havoc of the church back in Acts 8: 3, went and preached the gospel to the city of Samaria. He ended up settling in Caesarea, and raising his family there. His 4 virgin daughters were prophetesses, who prophesied, no doubt with their heads covered, in front of Paul of how difficult and dangerous it would be for him to go to Jerusalem. Their love for his highest welfare was evident. Prophecy as a revelatory gift no longer exists. We have the canonized Scriptures and they are enough. But the advice and counsel of godly people should be welcomed by us, even if it tests our resolve.

So the Lord even sent this mighty prophet Agabus down from Judea to see Paul, and to pictorially give him to know what would happen to him at Jerusalem from the malice of the Jews towards him, when he would come there. He bound his own hands and feet with Paul's belt, and he said that the Jews there at Jerusalem would bind Paul and deliver him over to the hands of the Gentiles. What a loving God we serve! What prudence, what love was exercised by these brethren according to the gift of God given to them, to speak to Paul of his coming trials and dangers. They were right to do this. God had brought them to Paul, and Paul to them so that he could hear these things.

It was indeed the moving of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, to try to warn Paul in this way; to try in every way they could, to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. It was because they loved him. It was because they valued him most highly as their apostle, their Christian brother, their leader, and their friend. They truly cared for his welfare. And yet it almost seems as if the Holy Spirit was indicating two quite different things to Paul. Or was He? Is it possible that the Holy Spirit really wanted Paul to make the decision about what he was going to do, rather than He Himself? Let's think about this for a moment. Does God the Holy Spirit force anyone to do that which they do not want to do? No, we cannot say that. But He does test our resolve to do what He is leading us into. The Lord wants to know whether we will, in the final analysis, do His will or our own will. The answer of Paul was quite definite. He would go on to Jerusalem.

This is not something which only happened to the apostle Paul. It happens to all of us who want to follow Jesus and fulfill the personal ministry that He has given to us according to the gift that He

has given to us, and the grace that He has given to us. Our resolve to do His will and to go forward, if necessary into dangerous or difficult situations, for Christ's sake, will always be tested to see whether we really want to do the Lord's will, or not. We may not know whether we will live or whether we will die, or whether we will find ourselves in a seemingly impossible position, in relation to doing His will. If our heart is faithful, and our spirit is willing and determined, God will be with us. He will see to it that we will be able to do all that He has called and purposed that we will do.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – Finally, let's think together of Emotions and God's will.** (verses 13 and 14)

“Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?’ ‘For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ ‘So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’ Sometimes the emotions of our nearest and dearest brethren can pull at our hearts in such a definite way, that we might be tempted to change our plans and think better of doing what we had purposed to do for God. We might not pick up our cross to follow Christ. We might not pick up the cross that He would have us to pick up in order to follow Him.

We might not be able to fulfill all the good purposes of God for our life to glorify Him. After all, it was clear that the Holy Spirit had revealed to these brethren, as well, that Paul would run into these great difficulties when he went to Jerusalem. You remember how Peter sought to deter our Master and his from going to cross. ‘Far be it from you, Lord, that this should happen to you.’ And our Lord rebuked him and told him he was setting his mind on the things of man, rather than the things of God. Here, the brethren were showing great emotion by weeping which was coming near to breaking Paul's heart.

Let us acknowledge that it was good that such love was shown to Paul as was shown here. They were not so much thinking upon the things of men, but the value of Paul's remaining with them; to teach them and help them to understand better, how to live the Christian life. But here was the greatest lesson that he was going to teach them, right here and right now at this time. Paul was more than willing to pick up his cross. He was ready, not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem. When the tug of human emotions in brotherly love was at so very great a height, Paul held on to what he knew God would have him to do to glorify Christ.

When he couldn't be persuaded to turn aside, then they all ceased trying to persuade him, and said – The will of the Lord be done. If you study the history of the church you will find many Christian men and women who did not turn aside from the will of God for them. Martin Luther before he went to the Diet at Worms, John Bunyan who would not stop preaching, J. Hudson Taylor who thought the call to China more important than marrying the girl that he loved, but wouldn't go with him. The question that each of us must ask ourselves, according to the gift and grace that God has given to us – What is it that God would have me to do for Him, and will I consider it of greater importance than anything that my earthly relatives and even my brethren might want to do – that is, to spare myself the trouble. Will I do the Lord's will and fulfill His purpose for my life? That is the question that each of us must ask. May it be that we will be able to say – The will of the Lord be done!