

9/18/16

Acts 21:1-16

Pain and Purpose

After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara.² There we boarded a ship sailing for Phoenicia. ³ We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship was to unload its cargo.⁴ We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including women and children, left the city and came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed, ⁶ and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.⁷ The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed for one day. ⁸ The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.¹⁰ Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. ¹¹ He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ¹³ But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."¹⁵ After this we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Some believers from Caesarea accompanied us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, a man originally from Cyprus and one of the early believers.

(Pastor prays)

"Worldview" is a fairly recent concept that has worked its way into the Christian vocabulary in the last few years. It's an important phrase, because your worldview is a

prism from which you interpret events big and small, and your worldview dictates everything from how you vote to your thoughts on HB2 to who you will marry and even how you actually view marriage.

We all have a worldview. It's our interpretive lens. It helps us process information, helps us categorize world events. Our worldview determines how we make life choices. And for a Christian, our worldview is saturated with the cross and framed by the Bible. And a Bible-framed, cross-saturated worldview has God's glory through the Gospel at its center. And it's that Gospel-centeredness that enables us to make difficult decisions and endure unthinkable hardships and to face each day with real hope for the future.

In the text, we are following a man named Paul. He is closing out the events of his Gospel ministry in Acts but he has a mandate from God to go into a dangerous mission point. And in the story we watch as his close friends who love him dearly worry about his safety; and in worrying about his safety, they talk almost talk him out of his Gospel call.

This story is about a lot of things, and one of the prevailing truths is how the Gospel works to give purpose to Paul.

Let's walk through it together and I will point out some things and then try to make a few points of application. I will read the passage and insert some comments.

You see how driven Paul was and how dominated he was by a Gospel call and that Gospel domination must become who we are as a people and a church so we don't waste one day or one opportunity to live the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel does a whole lot but in this story we find out that...

The Gospel Gives Purpose to Pain

In so doing, notice a couple of things here.

The Gospel Turns Strangers into Brothers

Chapter 20 ends with an emotional goodbye. The emotion extends to Chapter 21 v. 1 when Luke describes being torn away from his friends.

By the time you get to v. 3, they've docked in Tyre and it's important to slow down in v. 4-6 and notice the immediate worship Paul had with the people he never met before. (It's) Real fellowship that is anchored in Christ. They're in a strange city and the first thing he did was search for other Christians and, finding these other believers, they develop such a kinship in one week that the Christians in Tyre beg Paul not to go to Jerusalem because they know if he goes there, he's going to get hurt.

Paul knew what God's will was for his life. He knew God's direction. He said so back in Acts 20:22-23, and now it is worth reading again. *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.*

In v. 4, his new friends are begging him not to go because they know what going to happen. They love him. They don't want him to get hurt. They just don't understand that Paul is a dead man walking. He's died to safety and worry and the American Dream. He's put his eyes on something bigger: the death of Jesus on the cross for sinners and His resurrection from the dead have gripped Paul and changed his worldview -- and we will get to that -- but what I wanted you to see here was the love these people had for a guy they didn't even know. Only the Gospel does that.

Look at v. 5-6,⁵ *When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including women and children, left the city and came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed,⁶ and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.* After only one week of being together, the Christians in Tyre -- whole families -- go to say goodbye and pray together on a beach. The Gospel of Christ has the transformative power of knitting our hearts together so that we love each other. We pray for each other -- even for people we hardly know. Those of you who have been on short-term mission trips have felt this, that when you are bound by the blood of Christ, strangers-- people you don't know-- become brothers and sisters. The Gospel turns strangers into brothers.

But going a little further you'll see...

The Gospel Turns Enemies into Friends

As Paul and his group traveled, notice where they ended up. It's there in v. 7-8. ⁷ *The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed for one day.* ⁸ *The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.*

He's at Philip's house who I identified as an evangelist. He is one of the seven. As an Evangelist, Philip is the one who baptized the Ethiopian eunuch and was responsible for taking the Gospel into Samaria.

As "one of the seven," he was in the first group sent out by the church in Acts 6. He was in that group with a friend of his named Stephen. Acts 6-7 tells the story of Stephen's sermon, his brutal murder, and a young man named Saul participates in the savagery and then leads a persecution that drove Philip out of his home and landed him in Caesarea.

And now, this man called Paul was at his doorstep, this man who murdered one of his best friends and destroyed all he had, this man responsible for the most traumatic event in his life, a guy he had every reason to hate. And yet, because Philip not only *preached* the Gospel, he *believed* the Gospel -- because of that, he was able to forgive somebody he had every reason to hate.

This act of forgiveness was not lost on Paul. Later in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Paul will say, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* ¹⁹ *that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Sinners, saved by grace, are united in Christ and obligated to forgive. The Gospel turns strangers into brothers. The Gospel turns enemies into friends.

The Gospel turns Pain into Purpose

I want to show you something that was happening everywhere Paul went. It happened in Tyre in v. 4. *We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.*

It happened at Philip's house in v. 8-12. *The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.* ⁹ *He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.*¹⁰ *Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea.* ¹¹ *He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.'"*¹² *When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*

People who loved Paul, even Luke includes himself, didn't want Paul to get hurt so they were trying to talk him out of going to Jerusalem. They loved Paul dearly but they misunderstood him profoundly.

Listen to Paul's frustrations in v. 13. *But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus."* This is God's will for his life.

Don't you remember when he was converted back in Acts 9:15-16? Remember what the Lord Jesus said about Paul in v. 15-16. *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."*¹⁶ *For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."*

Paul's suffering was by design to show the power of the Gospel. And we get derailed from our purpose when all we do in life is try to avoid pain. If you're not careful, you can confuse the American Dream with God's will. Look, your destiny might not be from one success to the next great success. That wasn't Paul's destiny. Spending your life looking for that breakthrough miracle...That's "Bush League" Christianity...that's sandlot flag football in a full-contact world.

If all you can think about is you getting a "breakthrough," you're fighting with capguns and snowballs in a world full of nuclear weapons. To choose to suffer is masochism. I'm not saying that. To choose God's will --even if it means suffering-- is a completely different thing, and the only place to transform suffering and confusion into purpose is at the cross of Christ.

He suffered for sinners so that suffering is not God's punishment in your life. Suffering is now where you display the Gospel of Jesus so that you can say with Paul: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." I want to know the power of His resurrection and fellowship of His suffering. It started at the cross.

(Pastor shares the Gospel message and prays)