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When It Gets Hard Acts 21

While Lou Little was the head football coach at Georgetown University one year he had a player on his team of average ability and rarely got any playing time. But coach Little liked the guy and was particularly touched by the way he and his dad would walk through the campus commons arm and arm. The week before the big game with Fordham, the boy's mother called to tell him the news that his father had died that morning of a heart attack. The student went home with a heavy heart but returned three days later. Coach he pleaded. Will you start me in this Saturdays game against Fordham? I think that is what my Father would have wanted. Coach hesitated then agreed but only for a play or two. The coach backed up his words and put the boy in...but he never took him out. For 60 minutes that young man ran and blocked like an all-American. After the game the coach congratulated him on his fine play. What got into you? Son you have never played like that before. Well replied the boy, "you saw me and my dad occasionally around campus, he was totally blind and today was the first time he ever saw me play."

His desire was to please someone he loved. His father was physically present, but it made all the difference knowing he was watching. The apostle Paul lived life wanting to please God. He served Jesus and all he did was done all out for Him. He walked in obedience to God's will even when it was difficult, even when it became uncomfortable, even when it didn't make a whole lot of sense...because Paul believed that faithfulness to God was better than even life itself.

The story of Acts is far more than a travelogue. Far more than a story about traveling from town to town in the Ancient Near East. Acts is a story of people who followed God and did so even when it was

confusing, even when it was frustrating, even in the face of terrible odds, even in the shadows of suffering. It's about real people who had fears and failures just like you and I, who took each step of faith in following God, one sandal at a time. Acts is a story about God and how He sovereignly arranges events that only make sense when we can look at them in reverse. God never being one to send someone into something He has not first approved of, or first has strengthen and prepared for.

We tend to think of Paul as some super saint that never messed up, never struggled, rarely sinned. But Paul wasn't perfect. He made mistakes. He said things he shouldn't have, in fact there are many good Bible teachers who believe that is what happened here in Acts chapter 21. They say this is an example of a forceful man's ambition out of control and his abandonment was reckless and needless. We may have to wait until heaven to find out if that is true or not, but we certainly can't fault Paul's wholehearted devotion to God and desire to see salvation come to his people.

We know that back in Acts 9 where God finally woke Paul up to his spiritual senses and Paul came belief in Jesus as Savior, God made it very clear to him that 9:16 he would "show him how much he must suffer for Christ's name sake".

We will be studying Acts 21 this morning. I will not be reading all of these verses but hit the highlights and fill in for you. In the first few verses of chapter 21 we continue to see Paul on a fast course to get to Jerusalem. Ever since 19:21 we see this spirit urged purpose "I must go to Jerusalem and then must go to Rome" In 20:22 we see him "bound in spirit on my way to Jerusalem in every city he stops he is continued to be propelled forward to Jerusalem, even while knowing full well that bonds and afflictions await him" After a meeting with the Elders from Ephesus and challenging them with final words of goodbye, he heads down the Mediterranean coast. Paul stops at several costal towns along the way. I

am struck by how in every city there seems to be Christians. The gospel message has been spread far and wide.

Stopping for a week in Tyre 21:4 the disciples there kept on urging him through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. This is the verse that many point to saying, “It must be that Paul missed it here and simply refused to listen to the Holy Spirits promptings through other believers and just barged right on ahead in sinful ambition. They argue that God could have taken Paul to Rome in a different way that was far less filling with imprisonment. Paul was simply being unteachable and bullheaded and he suffered not for Christ, but for his own stubbornness.

However, I believe that Paul was not violating God’s will for several reasons. One on two occasions before, in chapters 19 and 20 we have heard Paul talk about being urged on and drawn by the spirit to Jerusalem even in the face of suffering. I don’t think Paul was one of those guys who loved pain. 39 lashes with a scourge, come on bring it on. Take me out of town and pelt me with stones. Ahhh that’s more like it that is where I start to really feel alive. No Even though Paul seemed to get more than his fair share, I don’t think Paul enjoyed the suffering and rejections and beatings. Oswald Chambers wrote, “to choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God’s will even if it means suffering is a very different thing” It is probable that the words “in the spirit” mean that they knew through the spirit that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem and because they loved Paul and were concerned for his safety, they tried to dissuade him from going on to Jerusalem.

Actually before we go on to v.7 look at v.6 “we went on board the ship and they returned home again.” I think that little verse was included to remind us that God has a different journey for each of us. We are not all called to go to a place where we know it will mean terrible pain and hardship and imprisonment. God puts us in different places and that is where we are called to live. Some got on board the ship and continued to Jerusalem and others went back home. Serve in the place where God put

you. I think there are times that God places his saints in what seems like the most useless places. We may think “I should be over in that place or position or area. I could be a whole lot more useful over there. But God simply places his people where they will glorify him the most and we are not capable of judging where that is” (Oswald Chambers)

Read with me starting in v.7-16 (READ) I see the repeated warnings of the suffering that awaited Paul in Jerusalem, serve to highlight Paul’s’ obedience in the face of suffering. If there were only one warning we might be tempted to gloss over and miss it. This was an area where even his friends tell him. Paul this looks a whole lot like reckless abandonment...don’t do it. But this faithfulness even in the face of difficulty is one of the heart messages he wants the leaders of the church to understand.

When Paul’s ship pulls into the port at Caesarea he looks up a man named Phillip. Remember Phillip? Think back to when the church was having an internal conflict over the unequal distribution to the poor widows and they appointed seven deacons. Phillip was one of the seven. He was the evangelist who ignited a revival in Samaria and then the Spirit of the Lord told him to leave that thriving ministry and head to a place in the middle of the desert. There he had a divine appointment with a high government official from Ethiopia, leads him to the knowledge of the truth and then gets zapped away by the spirit of the Lord and finds himself in a place called Azotus. There he preaches the gospel all the way up the coast until he ends up in Caesarea. Here we find out Phillip is still there. He married and has four daughter who have the spiritual gift of prophecy.

While at Phillips house a prophet named Agabus shows up. We have seen him back in Acts 11, 15 years prior as the one in Antioch who prophesied a widespread famine. He stated the facts as revealed to him by the spirit that Paul’s would be imprisoned. He prophesies in vivid illustration in the spirit of an Old Testament prophet. He prophecy is

true, Paul will be bound in Jerusalem. He is not saying Paul don't do this. He is simply saying Paul this is what will happen.

But what follows in v.12 is that now even Paul's friends assume that capture and suffering are a bad thing. Even his trusted friend Luke is in on the action "we" heard this and began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul's friends did what many of us would do. They begged him not to go do this hard thing. Paul don't go. Paul there is a lot of effective ministry that you could be doing right here without getting locked up. Why go to Jerusalem and get killed? Why go some place where the cost is going to much higher. Paul you are not well-liked in Jerusalem. We can understand their concern for his safety. We can understand their protest. They liked Paul. But they were mistaken about ministry. We think. If it is going to be tough and will hurt and if we are fairly certain to get beat on and a hunk of our heart and flesh will be exacted from us...then why go? Why do it? We have a wrong belief. We have wrongly thought that if I am following God that it shouldn't be this hard. Where did we ever get that idea? We are reacting like Paul's friends, if it hurts, if its hard then don't do it. I believe that Paul's friends were encouraging him in a direction that was safer, more comfortable but it wasn't God's plan. They had been told by the spirit that it was going to be hard for Paul and then assumed that God would not ever want it to be difficult.

Look at v.13 Paul answers, What are you doing weeping and breaking my heart? Paul's heart was breaking. What was it that was causing fissures of brokenness? That the friends who knew and loved him well were simply not getting it. They didn't understand. They were shooting far too low. Paul looked around the room and saw no one who understood what it was that God had been calling him to do. It isn't going to be an easy thing. You ought to be applauding as I do what I feel like God is calling me to do. It has got to be tough when not one person is standing with you if you believe this is what God is calling you to do.

I think Paul's heart was broken because friends around him were just not getting it, but there was something far more that was driving the brokenness of his heart. Something at the core that seem to always drive Paul. Think about someone you love. Picture that person. It could be your children, your parents, a friend, your husband, wife. You love them. What is the worst thing that could happen to them? I would suggest that Paul is demonstrating here that the worst thing that could happen to the one you love is not that life would become unhappy for them, the worst thing is not that life would be difficult for them or uncomfortable or lack some sort of enjoyable part of life. No the worst thing that could happen to someone you love is that they would fail to love and obey God. The worst thing is that when life gets difficult they would forget and reject God. The worst thing that could happen is that when God calls them to something that will be extremely hard and challenging that they simply escape and walk away.

Folks the worst thing that could happen to your kids is not that they will not grow up and fail to get a great job that pays big bucks. The worst thing that could happen to your child is not that they won't get chosen for the baseball All-star team, or the varsity cheerleader, or district wrestling. The worst thing that could happen to them is that they would not live a life that honors God. If my highest goal for my kids is that "I just want you to be Happy". If that is it, then we have tragically missed it. Do we not know that sometimes to live a life that honors God means that it will make me very unhappy. I've heard many times people justifying divorce by saying, "I know God doesn't want me to be unhappy" Oh? Is that true? We had best not be raising our kids to think that happiness is where its at. Paul's heart is breaking because he sees that his friends are just not getting it. They needed to know and live out that faithfulness to God is better than all the comforts that life has to offer...even life itself. As Paul continues in v.13 "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem."

We do not sign up to become a junior high youth leader and expect that ministry is going to fulfill and complete us or even dare to make us happy. We don't preach to gain significance or satisfaction. We do not teach Sunday school or sing on the worship team. We don't even come to worship expecting to leave happy. Often I hope it does, but just as often it ought to leave us disturbed, uncomfortable, challenged.

Paul says in v.13 "Guys your breaking my heart". I don't think Paul was mainly heart broken because some of his friends wouldn't agree with him or get on his team. Paul had long since given up being a people pleaser "Galatians 1:10 "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." Paul wasn't about pleasing men. Paul was committed to please Christ, and Paul had never gotten over what Jesus had done for him. Paul had never gotten over the sacrifice, never recovered from the love, never gotten over the mercy and grace. Have you?

A friend of mine, Jay Moser preached on this passage during the time God was making it increasingly clear that it was time for him to leave his youth ministry of 10 years. Logically it made little sense for him to leave. Especially since the place he was called to was a small hurting church with very little resources to pay a pastor. It made no sense to leave a place where there was much effective ministry going on by him. It made little sense to leave a place where he was well-loved and cared for and resourced. Many, many people begged him, Jay we love you don't go. I can hear Jay telling some of them, don't guys your breaking my heart. I want what God wants. God is telling me to go, and that is what I need to do. That is what God has impassioned me to do even if the place I am going to demands a far higher cost then here. Jay knew that following God even when its tough is the right place to be.

In his sermon he also mentioned three similar questions that have stuck with me. What breaks your heart? Jay says that what breaks your

heart will bend your will. What draws your heart? That which draws on your merits your sacrifice. These are the affections that call out to us and we are compelled to follow. What captures your heart? Whatever captures your heart will control your life. Are you enamored with the pursuit of happiness? Has a financial portfolio captured your heart? Houses? Land? Stock? Family? Is the only thing that makes you weep is when you lose big money when the market tanks? Is that you lose a big client? What breaks your heart will bend your will. What captures, truly captures your heart is what merits your sacrifice? Leisure? Outdoors? Fishing? Hunting? Are those the only things you are willing to sacrifice time and money for and get up at 3am? You will only cheerfully sacrifice for that which you love. Sure you will sacrifice for that what you have to, keeping a job etc. But you will only cheerfully sacrifice for that which you really love.

Paul's decision was that he would rather be uncomfortable than disobedient. He knew that he would be paying a price that was more than he was currently paying. But he believed that faithfulness is better than even life itself. V.13 "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." That is cheerful sacrifice. Where am I at?

Let me explain what happens in the rest of the chapter 21. Paul arrives in Jerusalem and came to the leaders and reported to them all the great things that God had been doing among the Gentiles. V.20 they first responded by giving glory to God, then an amazing reversal in the very same verse, very same breath. That's wonderful praise God...brother we have a problem with you. In order for us to understand this passage we need to see the huge division in the early church between the Jews and Gentiles. Two completely different cultural background, Music, language, world views were worlds apart. And God wants these two groups to be put together as one. John 17:20-23 Jesus prays "I desire that they may all be one...that the world may believe that thou didn't send me... that

they may be one even as we are one.” We think we have a problem of division and disunity in the church today. It was a huge problem back then.

The Jerusalem leaders tell Paul in v.20. Here’s the deal, there are many Jewish brothers, thousands, and “they’ve been told” that you are preaching to Jews, “get rid of the Law...stop being Jewish”. They’ve been told....rumors, misunderstandings, half-truths. Aren’t you glad that Christians don’t believe and spread rumors anymore? Ha ha. That could be another whole sermon. It simply is amazing to me the rumors that I hear in this town of the evil things that I have said and done. These Jewish guys heard rumors that weren’t true and they believed them.

The leaders tell Paul this is what I want you to do. If you want to have any chance of saving your reputation and skin, take these four guys who are going through a Jewish purification rite and pay out of your wallet all their expenses. Now this was not a cheap thing. Each man need to bring a lamb as a sin offering, a ram as a peace offering, a meat and drink offering, a basket of unleavened bread. And spend 7 days at the temple. Paul was to be their sponsor to show that he really, really did affirm the Law of Moses and was not telling people to divest themselves of being Jewish. Pauls’ message was we are not saved by all that ritual, it all points to the true savior Jesus Christ by whom we are saved by grace through faith. You may think that you have paid for the unity of the church. Well here we see that you aren’t the first one. Don’t you wish it were that easy. Here’s 50 bucks now get on with it. Most of the time when we pay for the unity of the church it’s a whole lot more costly. We have to say no to our preferences in order to maintain the unity of the church. We have say no to the way we want things to be done in exchange for the unity of the church. We have to listen to music that grates our ears or bores us to tears for the unity of the church. Some of us may have been raised in a church where most everybody was the same and there were little disagreements about how things ought to be

handled, but that is not a New Testament church. Go ahead and study it. The New Testament church was a church filled with differences, strife and division...far more than we have today. God speaks into that situation and says, "get together" you're brothers and sisters in Christ, get over it. The church ought to be the one place in society that get it right."

Paul is teachable, he submits to the leaders plan and it backfires. He is accused by the Jewish people of the town to be a blasphemous breaker of the law. He is accused wrongly of bringing Gentiles into the inner court of the temple. Read on through the chapter and Paul identity is mistaken for an Egyptians assassin. He keeps getting blasted and misunderstood left and right.

And yet Paul continues on. Even in the face of an angry mob he attempts to calmly explain himself. Paul has submitted his heart to Gods will and it naturally flowed out of him. It affected every decision and action of his day. He practiced the truth that following God was right even when unjustly attacked, mistaken and misunderstood. It cost him dearly, but he did it because he was convinced that was what God wanted him to be about.

How about you and me? If you are much like me you will find that the struggle is not so much about knowing the right thing to do...as it is to do it. Most of the things that we struggle with on a day to day basis are things that we have known for years the right thing to do...but it's a struggle, its uncomfortable, its costly.

So what are you going to do when it gets hard? As homework this week I want us to think before God about those three questions: God what truly does break my heart? What has draws and captures my heart? For that which breaks your heart will bend your will. That which draws your heart merits your sacrifice and that which captures your heart will control your life. God what area is it that I need to submit my will to yours? Where do I need to have the Holy Spirit drive the word of

God deeply into my heart. Where do I need to be broken so that you can make me whole?

Acts 21

Kent Hughes p.283 Martin Luther come to the Diet of Worms knowing the possibility that burning at the stake like his friend John Hus was a very real possibility. 1521AD. April 14th. "Though Hus was burned, the truth was not burned and Christ still lives." Martin Luther knew God's will and did it. He knew it was right for him to go to Worms and declare the truth to the world. He knew it and did it.

Kent Hughes p291 Football player whos blind father died. Put me in coach. Plays great. Difference? First time he ever saw me play. Paul lived fought and died with the abiding conscience that he was doing it all for God. He served a rison savior that saw his every move. Paul wasn't perfect. He argued fought and sometimes made poor relational decisions,

some commentators think Paul made a mistake here by going to Jerusalem.

Holy spirit says the same thing to Paul as to the people but there seems to be different response. But Paul through the spirit kept telling Paul not to set foot in Jerusalem. Why would the spirit not tell Paul not to go just like the spirit told them.

v.4 what do you do with “it was through the spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem?”

The things that God has planned for me are valuable even if its difficult. We think pain is bad, stay away...but that may not always mean. Paul and the other believers agreed that the HS promised suffering if Paul went to Jerusalem, but they differed as to what the Spirit wanted Paul to do in light of the warning.

Why do you think we interpret the Spirits guidance differently? From the hindsight we see that Paul was right, but what should the others have done?

The spirit told them Paul would suffer. The spirit did not tell them the Paul was not to go to Jerusalem. That was what they assumed should happen because we naturally assume avoiding persecution and suffering is what God would want and they had a deep concern for Paul. It was the people love of Paul and desire to protect him from harm that caused them to beg him not to go.

Oswald Chambers “To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose god’s will even if it means suffering is a very different thing.”

We don’t preach just because we enjoy it. We preach because we believe it is God’s will That is what He wants us to do. Not so that is will complete or fulfill us or make us happy. Working with Junior High teens.

Paul’s friends demonstrated their love and loyalty, but showed their focus was more horizontal than vertical their motives were shortsighted in not seeing or looking for God’s ultimate purposes. They were looking out for Paul’s good, but not God’s.

Paul was not a man pleaser.
Paul trusted in God’s sovereignty.
Oswald Chambers “My utmost for His highest”

God plants His saints in the most useless places. We say, "I should be here because I am so useful. God puts His people where they will glorify him and we are not capable of judging where that is." Hughes p289

Paul had the peace of God.

God's plan. God's will in the most important thing. There is not a single maverick molecule in the universe.

We may not like the outcome. Death, moving. It's still more important to want God's will regardless of the outcome.

What about pursuing things in the spirit?
Paul values their input as it breaks his heart v.13

There is no a cookbook to determine. But seek the HS prompting. Listen. Don't give up just because it's hard. Pray regularly to God and expect that he will give you an answer.

A truth to pursue the Holy Spirit. V.5

v.5 Kneeling to pray seems to be significant 20:36 why?

We all have places we are called to live for Christ. Some got on board and continued to Jerusalem, others went back to their homes. Tears on departure but for the Christian, absence isn't forever.

v.7 Ptolemais greeted the brothers in Tyre. Point made there are Christian witness in just about every town now.

v.8 Phillip the evangelist. He is one of the first seven deacons in Acts 6 This is the guy in chapter 8 who 25 years earlier gave up a thriving ministry in Samaria, revival breaking out, because the spirit of the lord told him to go out to a desert road. He happened to meet a high Ethiopian official and told him about Jesus. He gets zapped away by the spirit of the Lord. Finds himself in Azotus. Okay where am I at the nearest gas station. He did wherever he found himself, preached gospel in all the cities until he ended up in Caesarea and that is where he still is. Married with 4 daughters, not yet married but also have the spiritual gift of prophecy.

v.10 Agabus. We have seen him before 15 years earlier in Acts 11:28 as one in Antioch who predicted a widespread famine. He predicts Paul's capture and is a visual way and it was true, but he assumes that capture is a bad thing...God doesn't think so. So again we

hear more begging of Paul not to go to Jerusalem. (common thread here that people think that capture, suffering and persecution are always bad things.)

Why the repeated warning to Paul about going to Jerusalem?

To make sure the reader understood the importance? To highlight Paul's bravery and faithfulness?

In Paul's life there were times he ran from trouble to escape danger. Over the wall in a basket etc. other times he faced danger head on. Other times he wanted to face danger as in Ephesus at the theater and was warned not to go in and didn't go. He followed the spirits leading in each circumstance. Strategic thinking told him to go preach the gospel in Asia, but the spirit says, no Paul I want you in Macedonia.

What would it take for you to lay aside the counsel of spiritual men and women in order to go forward in a certain area?

v. 13 Ala 20:24 Faithfulness is better than life. I'm ready to die if that is what it takes or God wants.

Ultimately we must rest in v. 14 and fall silent to "The Lord's will be done"

When you're tempted to get angry about something that is hard it may be an opportunity for me to say, God help me see your plan in this regardless of the outcome. The will of the Lord be done.

There will be times that reason and argument won't resolve the situation. You've given godly advice and yet they go and make the choice and it's different than what you said. Sometimes we just got to let go of it. Be silent and let God's will be done. (young couple you say wait to get married...but they go on)

v. 17-26

v. 19 Paul reports to the mother church leaders all that God has done and the response is that they glorify God. Isn't it encouraging to hear how God is working?

When we report God's work, be sure that it gets directed toward what God has done.

How do you deflect the praise? How do you encourage, build up the person as done in a godly way. II Timothy. It ought not to be done to build an ego.

We are taught to encourage people. Oh that ministry is great. I'm taught to build you up. We ought to build each other up. I don't often hear people say to Paul great sermon Paul you were really moving today. Give God the credit and praise to whom God does it all.

They didn't perceive Paul accurately. Jews though Paul was telling the Jews to turn away from Moses and not to circumcise children. Not Paul. He was saying that salvation is not through the circumcision. People have heard that he is a bad nasty law hater so the elders say go show them. Did it work? No.

v.23 Lets show them that you are not against the Law. Go down and do the ritual of Jewish law and show them. Even that gets twisted and misunderstood. People hear and see what they want to hear and see. V27 Paul tried to do right and went out of his way to clear up misunderstanding but it served to only enflame it.

If someone is angry with you, he will go out of his way to misunderstand. If there is any possible chance of looking at it in a negative way, he will see it.

Its unlikely that Paul brought any gentiles past the outer court or court of the gentiles as the accusers did not seize the alleged Gentiles. At the gate to the inner courts is a low barrier and sign warning any Gentile who entered had himself to blame when he was instantly killed.

v.25 Just so everyone remembers we are not going back to what was before in regards to the Gentiles we are sticking by our original agreement that they keep pure and not eat meat and blood strangled animals.

Repetition of lower the cultural barriers so you can communicate.

Paul keeps trying to communicate his heart. They aren't getting it and Paul still thinks he can explain it.

Repetition of Ephesus mob scene calmed by a pagan government official. A la chapter 19 and a'la Jesus "away with him"
Mistaken identity. I thought you were that Egyptian assassin.

Josephus wrote that an Egyptian false prophet led 30,000 men to the mount of olives in order to take Jerusalem. His followers were all killed but the leader escaped. The Romans assumed that Paul was this man back in town. The egyptian followers were called sicarii; terrorists because they used a short dagger called sica to assassinate powerful jews who corroborated with Rome. These sicarii eventually led to the

revolt in AD 66-70 where Rome met it with power and wiped out the town. Even now in AD 57 they were considered highly dangerous.

Paul reaching out to be culturally sensitive to communicate message

Paul protected providentially by pagan official.

Circumcision

Being misunderstood by Jews.

Pulls out his Roman trump card late again. How does he prove he is a Roman citizen? Does he have a card? A tattoo? Do they simply take his word for it as this is something no one would dare lie about for if he is found out not to be it would be swiftly punished. He's careful when he whips it out. He doesn't use it as a crutch. He's patient. He listens to God as to when to best use it. Some of us have position, friends in high places, skills gift, bank accounts. When ought I to strategically use these things.

Are there certain, Jewish, Catholic American, African ethnic or religious customs that a believer may take part in? Are there some that he ought not to take part in? How do you decide?

v.23 As an expression of gratitude toward God, Paul gave money to four Jewish Christians who were taking the Nazarite vow in the temple. They had abstained from eating meat, drinking wine and cutting of hair. The final seven days were to be spent in the temple courts. At the end offering would be made of a lamb as a sin offering, a ram as a peace offering, a meat and drink offering and a basket of unleavened bread and cakes. Is it any wonder a sponsor was needed to pay for their expensive offerings and time away from work? Paul participated with this as an outward sign of affirmation of the law of Moses to all who were confused.

The strategy for reconciliation backfired. They had seen Paul in the temple, but they had also seen Paul around Jerusalem with a man from Asia named Trophimus. They put the two things together for untruth.

Swindoll p.63 What should I do Lord? Wouldn't it be great to have audible instruction from God just like happened in the Old Testament? March around that girl's house 7 times, pop the question, her defenses will crumble and she will agree to marry. It sounds good, but it can complicate matters. Sometimes counsel no matter how well intentioned conflicts with God's will.

- 1) We may receive erroneous advice from our own consciences. Jimmy Crickett may remind us to listen to our conscience from childhood, but it may not always be trustworthy. God told Moses

- from burning bush to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt. Response? It reminded him of past failure. I can't do that Lord 40 years ago I killed an Egyptian.
- 2) Might get faulty advice from other people.. Prov. 11:14 "In abundance of counselors, there is victory" but People can be deceived. Nehemiah was told by God to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem, are you on crack he was told? Are you rebelling against king? Questioned his motives.
 - 3) We may receive poor advice from tradition and logic. Tradition told Jonah, "Don't ever associate with pagans like these Ninevites" But God said, "Go to Nineveh".

So how do we know what God wants us to do?

Why was Paul convinced that he should go to Jerusalem? 20:22 bound in spirit in every city. He sensed that the HS was driving him there. First verses of 21 continue this sense of urgency.

The spirit was merely predicting what would happen to Paul in J, but the disciples were misinterpreting those predictions as prohibitions. The warning was divine, but the urging "kept on urging v.4" was human.

Even Luke got into the advice after Agabus gave his gripping prediction. V.12 "we as well as the other residents begged him not to go up." Now Paul's close friends and fellow ministers were begging him with tears. Not one person was saying, "you obey God no matter how difficult it is, I'll stand with you if that is what you believe God wants you to do." Galatians 1:10 "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ"

Points to think on:

- 1) if you seek advice, be discerning. Counselors can be essential, In a sports event, we need the advice of a wise coach. But be careful to go to the right sidelines. Get advice from those on your team. Go to the coach not to the waterboy. Go while the game is still in progress, don't wait until the game is over to seek advice. The timeout available are unlimited. J. Grant Howard (swindoll p.68) We go to the wrong sidelines when we seek books, TV shows radio movies that are filled with worldly advice. Swindoll p71
- 2) If you give advice, be wise. Wise counseling always begins with attentive listening. Get into the other persons shoes. Understand your friends perspective. Step back and look at it from God's perspective. Give Word oriented counsel and it will be instructive. Give experience oriented counsel and it may be nothing more then just opinion.
- 3) If you decide against advice, be careful; remember the Proverb 16:9 "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

Ever been misunderstood?

Ralph Waldo Emerson "To be great is to be misunderstood" Noah the ark builder people called him crazy. Joseph the dreamer, he's got his head in the clouds. To be misunderstood is no proof of greatness. The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure criticism without resentment." Ultimately then our reaction to misunderstanding says much more about our character than whatever action triggered it.

Swarming insinuations infest the church like buzzing bees, "did you hear about....well my cousin's sister was in Corinth and He has gone too far Did you hear about the latest on Paul? Shameful.

Though Paul felt free from the Law, he agreed to the plan in order to try and clear up misunderstanding.

Exaggeration, "he telling everybody everywhere"

Suspicion: They "supposed" he brought Trophimus into the temple

Overreaction:

Realities about misunderstandings: they thought Paul was a Egyptian terrorist. They thought he was a blasphemous teacher. Rumors were flying everywhere saying that Paul was telling the Jews to forsake the law of Moses

The reality of it is inescapable. The reason for it is unpredictable, Even if we have the best of intentions, our words, actions can and will be misunderstood...its inevitable. But when it comes to our response, that is what will illumine the truth about our character. We might be tempted to put on a martyr's sackcloth and sulk, or pull on battle fatigues and prepare for war. But the right response is to face accusers with a loving heart that option is only possible if we cast ourselves into the nail scarred hands of Christ who knows all about what its like to be misunderstood.

The local church seems to be one of Satans favorite seedbeds for growing a weedy crop of misunderstandings. Throw in a shovelful of good intentions of protection, a bag of prejudice a few pellets of pride. Scatter an accusing word here and there, an inflammatory word, a sentence that if your listening wrong can be misinterpreted and just wait for it to germinate. Swindoll (from matches in boys pocket to marijuana p.79)

Pauls' plan:

- 1) He didn't retaliate, but took positive steps to clear up misunderstanding
- 2) When made aware of misunderstanding, he didn't allow emotions to blur his judgment, he listened and agreed to a plan to correct the peoples thinking

- 3) His attitude was not vindictive, but loving. He wanted to help the people resolve their anger and trust Christ
- 4) He didn't run from his accusers, he faced them directly
- 5) Whatever the outcome, he had a settled confidence that God was in control.

Jay Moser's sermon:

The struggle to do right even when its hard. Acts is more then a travelogue. It's a story of people who put one sandal ahead of the other at a time. Its real people walking in a fragile and sometimes frustrating walk of obedience in following God.

God does not send his children into hard times that He has not approved of. Known that He will walk through it with you and give you strength.

God let Paul know early on that his life would be filled with suffering. When he was converted in chpt 9 he was told be God "he will suffering much for my sake"

Agabus stated the facts you go to Jerusalem and you will suffer. He is not saying Paul don't do this he is saying Paul this is what is going to happen. His friends did what many of us would do. Paul there is a lot of effective ministry right here. Why go to Jerusalem and get killed. Why go some place where the cost is going to higher. I understand there protest they liked Paul. Its going to be tough. They hate you there, don't go. But they were mistaken about ministry. If its going to hurt why do it. We wrongly think if I am following God it shouldn't be this hard should it? Where did we get that idea. We react like Paul's friend, if it hurts don't do it. V.15 is key. His friends were encouraging him in a direction he knew was not God's plan.

What are you doing weeping and breaking my heart? What was it that was going to break Paul's heart. Think of someone you love. The worse thing that could happen to someone you love is not that they will be unhappy or uncomfortable or lack some enjoyment in life. The worst thing that could happen to someone you love is that they fail to love and obey God even at great cost. The worst thing that could happen to our kids is not that they will fail to make the money that we think they deserve, not that they won't get chosen for the all star baseball, or cheerleader or make varsity wrestling. The worst thing that could happen to them is that they not honor God. We have said to them "look I just want you to be happy" Is that the highest goal you have for you kids? You are shooting way too low. Do you know that sometimes to honor God will make you very unhappy? We had better not be raising our kids to think that happiness is where its at.

Paul's heart was breaking because he was talking to his friends that were just not getting it. They were shooting far too low. You ought to be applauding as I do what I feel God is calling me to do.

What is it that breaks your heart. What breaks your heart will bend your will.

Paul never got over the cross. Never forgot how much he had been saved from. Have you gotten over the cross? In the upper room he told his followers to remember him. Why was it about getting the facts right? No so that our heart would be right. Song Beneath the cross of Jesus I faint would take my stand. She died young at age 39. from my broken heart two wonders I confess, the wonder of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

What draws your heart merits your sacrifice. The affections that call to you.

What captures your heart will control your life. V13 I am ready to be bound and die at Jerusalem.

Are you enamored with a financial portfolio, houses, land? Stock options?

You will only cheerfully sacrifice for what you love. You will sacrifice for what you have to, keep your job etc. Parents for kids. Us coming to Yacolt.

Paul's decision of the will that he would rather be uncomfortable than disobedient. I know I'm going to be paying a price that is more than I'm paying right now.

v. 19 He came to the leaders. Told them what God had done. Deep division in early church division between Jew and Gentile. Huge division. Two world views, background, music, culture. Worlds apart. And God says put them together. V.20 Response. First part they glorified God and then they kept going. 180 degree turn. You see brother, there are many, thousands of believing Jews, "they've been told" Aren't you glad Christians don't believe rumors any more? I've heard some things about you? I believe it. These guys are ready to believe in and kill a man. Paul if you want to save your skin this is what you need to do. Pay up out of own checkbook to help these men do a Jewish thing. You may think you have paid for the unity of the church. You aren't the first one to do it. Don't you wish it was always that easy. Here's 20 bucks now get on with it. Most of the time when we pay for the unity of the church it's a lot more costly. We say no to our preferences for the unity of the church. We may have been raised in a church where most everybody

was the same, but that is not a new testament church. Go ahead and study it. That was a church filled with differences. Far more then we have today. Nationality, races, background, music studies. God says, get together. You're brothers in Christ get over it. The church ought to be the one place in society that gets it right.

Paul had submitted his heart to Gods will and it affected his choices day to day. So Paul can say "I would rather be uncomfortable then disobedient." His will was submitted to God and it cost him dearly.

Have you ever found that the struggle is not so much knowing the right thing as it is to do it? Most of the things we struggle with from day to day we have known for years the right thing to do but it's a struggle. Uncomfortable, OK. Higher cost? Fine. Follow Jesus in obedience.

God this area in my life I need to submit my will. I need to have your spirit drive your word deep in my heart. I need to be broken by the message of the cross.

Jesus message of unity from John 18:20-23 "I pray that they be one and brought to complete unity."