

The Book of Acts

Lesson 25: To Jerusalem: Farewell, Arrest, and Defense -- Acts 20:1–23:35

Paul is heading toward Jerusalem, and he senses that suffering awaits him there. Along the way, in Troas, the believers gather on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul, leaving the next day, preaches long into the night. A young man named Eutychus, perched in a window, drifts off to sleep and falls three stories to his death, but Paul goes down, embraces him, and God restores his life. The church is comforted, and they continue in worship and fellowship until dawn.

At Miletus, Paul calls the elders of the Ephesian church for a farewell that breaks the heart. He reminds them that he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God, and he charges them with a solemn duty: pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. He warns them that fierce wolves will come, even from among themselves, and he commends them to God and to the word of His grace. Then they kneel on the beach, pray, and weep, knowing they will not see his face again.

The closer Paul gets to Jerusalem, the louder the warnings grow. The prophet Agabus takes Paul's belt, binds his own hands and feet, and declares that this is how Paul will be bound. The believers beg him not to go, but Paul's resolve is unshaken: I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. When they cannot persuade him, they fall silent and say, the will of the Lord be done. And the will of the Lord unfolds: in Jerusalem a mob seizes Paul in the temple, beats him, and would have killed him but for the Roman soldiers who drag him to safety.

From the barracks steps Paul tells his story to the raging crowd, his life of persecuting the church, his meeting with the risen Christ, his commission, but at the word Gentiles the crowd explodes again. Brought before the Sanhedrin, Paul cries out that he is on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead, and the council dissolves into chaos. That night the Lord stands by him: take courage, for as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome. When forty men vow to kill him, God uses Paul's young nephew to expose the plot, and a Roman guard spirits him away to Caesarea. Through danger and betrayal, the Lord is bringing His servant exactly where He intends.

Group Discussion: When the believers could not talk Paul out of going to Jerusalem, where suffering awaited him, they finally said, the will of the Lord be done (v. 21:14). How hard is it to truly pray those words when God's will may involve suffering, and what does it take to mean them?

Personal Reflection: Paul said he was ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 21:13). What would it look like for you to hold your own safety, comfort, or plans more loosely for the sake of Christ? Where is that hard for you right now?

Read Acts 20:1–23:35

Study Questions

1. Luke notes that on the first day of the week the disciples gathered together to break bread, and Paul taught them (v. 20:7). What does this verse reveal about the pattern of the early church's worship, and why is the first day of the week significant?
2. The early Christians gathered on the first day of the week to worship and break bread together (v. 20:7). How do you regard the weekly gathering of the saints and the Lord's Supper? Is it a priority and a delight, or has it become routine or optional?
3. Paul told the Ephesian elders that he did not shrink from declaring to them the whole counsel of God (v. 20:27). What does it mean to declare the whole counsel of God, and why is it important not to leave out the hard or unpopular parts of His word?
4. Paul faithfully taught all of God's word, including the parts people did not want to hear (v. 20:27). Do you welcome the whole counsel of God, including the convicting and demanding parts, or do you tend to embrace the comfortable truths and avoid the rest? Where is God's word challenging you right now?
5. Though warned repeatedly of suffering ahead, Paul pressed on, and the believers finally said, the will of the Lord be done (vv. 21:11-14). What does this teach about surrendering our will to God's, even when His will may involve suffering?
6. Paul held his own safety loosely, ready to suffer or die for the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 21:13). What would it look like for you to hold your safety, comfort, or plans more loosely for Christ? Where is God calling you to pray, sincerely, the will of the Lord be done?
7. Before the Sanhedrin Paul declared, it is with respect to the hope and resurrection of the dead that I am on trial (v. 23:6), and the Lord then stood by him, promising he would testify in Rome (v. 23:11). What does this teach about the centrality of the resurrection hope and about God's sustaining presence with His servants?
8. The Lord stood by Paul in danger and assured him of His purpose, and even a murderous plot could not stop God's plan (vv. 23:11-22). When you face danger, uncertainty, or opposition, how do you draw courage from God's presence and purpose? Where do you need that courage now?
9. Paul charged the Ephesian elders to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood, and to guard it against fierce wolves (vv. 20:28-31). What does this teach about the preciousness of the church, the work of elders, and the duty to protect the flock from false teaching?
10. Looking back over this whole passage, the gathered worship, the whole counsel of God, the surrender to God's will, and the blood-bought church, name one specific way the Lord is

calling you to grow, in devotion to His church, surrender to His will, or courage in His purpose, and what is one step you will take this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, giving on the first day of every week as the church gathered; Hebrews 10:23-25, not neglecting to meet together but encouraging one another; 1 Peter 5:1-4, elders shepherding the flock of God as undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd; Hebrews 13:17, obeying and honoring those who keep watch over our souls; Luke 22:39-42, Jesus praying not my will, but yours, be done