

Knowing And Doing God's Will

Acts 21:1-16

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At the end of Acts 20, as I've already mentioned, Paul is in this little coastal town of Miletus. It's about 20 miles south of Ephesus, this big place of many churches or at least a church with many leaders. He has been meeting with them and, as we studied from Acts 20:17 to the end in verse 38, Paul called the elders of the church or the pastors. He talked about his past ministry, present ministry, and his future. They were warned about wolves and so forth. When you come to Acts 21, it's a continuation. He's leaving those pastors on that spot on the beach in Miletus, and he's going to be continuing his journey to Jerusalem. The big picture is that Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem by Passover, and his passion was to go there to share the good news with the Jews that Jesus died for our sins. The whole focus of Acts 21, you actually begin to come to the end of the book wherein it focuses on Paul going to Jerusalem, being arrested, sent to Rome, and ends up in prison in Rome at the end of the book.

Follow with me in Acts 21:1. "And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them," the "them" there is a reference to the pastors, the elders, the bishops, or the overseers as he prayed with and ministered to them. Notice that we begin also what is known in Acts as the "we" sections. It says "that after we were gotten from them." That is a reference to Luke himself, the author of the book of Acts. Whenever you have the "we" sections, it indicates that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, is now traveling along with Paul. So, "after we were gotten from them," that is, the pastors in Ephesus, "and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes," which is the island there in the Mediterranean, "and from thence unto Patara: 2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3 Now when we had discovered," or when we saw, "Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria," this is the Syria where Paul came out of on all three of his missionary journeys. It's kind of the home base there. He says, "and landed at Tyre," which is along the northern coast of Israel, "for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

Verse 4, "And finding disciples, we," Luke speaking, "tarried there seven days," it took seven days to unload and reload this merchant ship, so Paul used this time to find believers to fellowship with. It says there were believers "who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. 5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. 7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

Verse 8, "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. 10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle," a better translation is belt. You might read that and think, What is Paul wearing a girdle for, "and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12 And when we heard these things," Luke includes himself here, "both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

I'm going to stop right there. Paul has been meeting here in Miletus with the pastors from Ephesus. The journey started out in Antioch. This is known as Antioch of Syria, and they went across Galatia, modern Turkey, sailed from Ephesus to northern Greece, which is Macedonia, Philippi, Berea. They did the ministry here and came all the way down to Corinth. We have the letters to the Corinthians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and then they sailed back, covered through a little isthmus here and sailed across this top corner of the Aegean Sea back to Troas, Assos and came down by coast and ended back up into Miletus. So, tonight in the first three verses, they sailed by this little island of Cos, they're hugging the coast. They go by the island of Rhodes. I've been to Rhodes a couple of different times. It's just a beautiful, beautiful little Greek island, and then they sail along the Mediterranean back to what is known as Israel, but this is the northern area today of Lebanon, Tyre, and then travel down to Caesarea. Then, they're going to go to Jerusalem where Paul is going to be arrested. That's going to constitute the third missionary journey in the travels of Paul.

You really ought to familiarize yourself with the geography of the Bible and the travels of Paul. I know that may seem kind of boring to some people, but it helps to get kind of a feel for the areas that Paul has traveled. So, in verses 1-3, as I showed you on the map, they're sailing by Cos and come down by the island of Cyprus. Then they come to this area of Tyre. "And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit," now this is a section that Bible students go a little crazy on. They have a lot of fun debating this big issue, (and I kind of got into it again today and all these years I've gone over it) but the issue of was Paul in the will of God in going to Jerusalem even though the Spirit had warned him and what might look like, in this English translation, that the Spirit was telling him not to go to Jerusalem. Some people conclude that Paul was out of the will of God. Paul, why would you go to Jerusalem if everywhere you go the Spirit is warning and telling you that bonds and afflictions are waiting for you? Would you go into a certain town if the Lord made it clear to you that when you got there you were going to be beat up, arrested, and thrown into prison? You'd probably go the opposite direction, right? But, we're not Paul the Apostle.

I believe that Paul knew that it was the will of God, and that he was in the will of God, he was trusting God to work out His plan for his life. I see in these first 16 verses (we haven't quite gone to verse 16 yet, we stopped at verse 14) I see some important lessons that we're going to see about the will of God and discerning the will of God, and that the will of God can involve suffering, hardships, a cross, and difficulty. It says, "And finding disciples," there, so they came (verse 3) to Tyre, which is on the northern coast of Israel in modern day Lebanon. It says

(verse 4), “And finding disciples,” that little phrase in verse 4 “finding disciples” indicates that they looked for them. They sought them out. It may sound basic and elementary, but I want to encourage you to look for Christians, look for believers, seek them out, and become a part of them.

Whenever I’m talking to a young believer, and he’s wanting to know: How do I grow in the Lord? How do I walk in the Lord, and how do I live the Christian life? I’m always encouraging him, “Come to church. Be in fellowship. Get into a part of a small group, a discipleship group, and meet other Christians. You can’t do it alone. You can’t do it in isolation from other believers. We need one another. We need to encourage one another. We need to, as the Bible says, provoke one another to love and good works. We usually just provoke one another. We’re to provoke or stimulate or encourage one another to love and to good works. You need to be around Christians and fellowship with Christians.

The phrase, “we sought them out,” as I said indicates they found them, they sought them out. It indicates that they went looking for these believers, so I believe that Paul didn’t know any Christians there and went looking for them. The minute he found them, they probably hugged, smiled, embraced, talked; and the moment they started sharing together, their hearts were knit together in Christian love. Have you ever had that experience? You meet a Christian somewhere and all of the sudden you just, “I found a brother in Christ!”

My dad served in the Coast Guard in WWII. He was stationed in the Aleutian Islands. As a boy growing up, he would always tell me his Aleutian Island WWII stories. He was a Christian on this ship, and he didn’t have any Christian friends. He was all alone. It was just him and his Bible, but he always told me about whenever he would come into port that all the guys would get off the ship and would head right for the places to drink and the houses of ill repute. They would go do their thing, and he would go alone walking through town looking for a church that might be having a service or looking for Christians or looking for believers because he wanted fellowship. His heart was starving for fellowship. He said, “There were those times when we would come into port and I couldn’t find any other believers. I’d go back to the ship all alone and pray, cry, read my Bible, and talk to the Lord.” You know, when you’re isolated from other Christians, your heart gets hungry. I don’t know about you but even as your pastor, when I haven’t been in church in a week or so or I have to miss a Sunday because I’m somewhere else, I can’t wait to get back to this place. I can’t wait to worship and study the Word with you, pray with you and encourage one another in the Lord. Sometime, do a study of the one anothers in the Bible. I’m going to do a sermon series someday, Lord willing, on the one anothers of the Bible.

The Bible says that we love one another, that we forgive one another, that we pray for one another, that we wash one another’s feet, that we bear one another’s burdens. It’s kind of hard to do the one another’s if there are no others, right? So, don’t be a lone ranger. Find a church. Not only find a church but in all my years of pastoring, I’ve seen the benefit of finding a home church—a place where you call home and you’re being fed, taught, you’re serving and giving, praying, participating, and you’re part of the fellowship. The word is koinonia. It means joint

participation in our fellowship with God and with one another. So, I love this picture of Paul. He's bound and determined to get to Jerusalem, but he's not so busy that he can't take the time to stop and to seek out (verse 4) finding disciples. What an awesome thing that is.

Verse 4, "...we tarried there seven days," which would indicate that they probably gathered on the Lord's day. They were there on Sunday. Many believe that it was seven days because it took that long for them to unload. He was on a commercial ship, and they would unload the cargo and then load more cargo; and Paul spent that time there with them. "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us," they brought Paul the Apostle, Luke, and the others in the company down to the beach or harbor where they were going to see them get on board the ship and see them off. There's another beautiful fellowship beach scene where they gathered together. It says, "we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

Isn't that a beautiful picture? Notice that this is family fellowship. This is the wives and the husbands, the boys and the girls, and the children all gathered together. What did they do with Paul as they gathered on the beach? They prayed. I want to encourage you tonight when you're with Christians, stop and pray together. Pray before your time together, pray during your time together, pray at the end of your time together, and as I read that today, I want to encourage you too when you come to church, pray before service starts. Pray at the end of service. I love when the church service is over and instead of just people running for their lives...sometimes it looks like rats fleeing a sinking ship, you know, "Thank God I'm free at last!" The doors open and SHWOOP! they go flying out. Maybe the sermon is too long or boring, I don't know, but they just want to get out of here!

There are others that kind of want to linger, you know, in the afterglow. We almost have to kick 'em out of the church and turn the lights off to get them out. I love that! I think that's awesome! I love seeing little groups of Christians praying around the sanctuary. After service is over, if you're with somebody say, "Oh, let me pray for you this week, for your week," and "Let me pray for you, and you pray for me," and pray for one another. Take the lead. Grab some other Christians and pray the message and what you heard through the Word and what God spoke to your heart. Get little prayer groups and pray one for another. That's the picture I see here, all the husbands and wives and all the kids, kneeling and praying on the beach. I wonder how they prayed. I wonder if they didn't pray selfishly and say, "Lord, we just pray that maybe Paul will change his mind and stay a little longer...that maybe the sail will break on the ship and they'll have to spend a few more days so that we can fellowship a little longer together. Lord, we just pray that Your will be done, though." They prayed for Paul, and he prayed for them. It doesn't say it in the text, but I'll bet you anything that there were tears. They cried and wept.

What they heard in verse 4 is that Paul, through the Spirit, should not go up to Jerusalem. I'm going to say more about this in just a moment, but this is the one point in the book of Acts where people are thrown for a curve because in the English translation it says that they said through the Spirit, "that he should not go up to Jerusalem." When you read that, you conclude,

“Well, there the Holy Spirit is telling Paul not to go,” but in the Greek, in the grammar and in the construction of that, and it supports what I believe to be the other references to the problems that Paul would get in Jerusalem, I believe that what is happening is the Spirit showed and told them that Paul was going to be arrested and persecuted in Jerusalem, but the Spirit didn’t tell them to tell Paul not to go. Grammatically, when you study that, it ties in with some other passages we’re going to get in just a moment; but when he gets to Caesarea and Agabus prophesies that he’ll be bound in Jerusalem, Agabus doesn’t tell him not to go. Agabus doesn’t say, “Thus saith the Lord, thou shalt not go to Jerusalem.” I think that what is happening is that God—listen to me carefully. I’m going to tie all these loose ends together tonight—is showing Paul what’s going to happen when he gets there. That doesn’t mean it’s not God’s will. I want you to think about this for a minute. You can be in the will of God and suffer. If you wrote that quote down and got nothing else but that tonight, that’s worth the price of coming to church—whatever gas it costs you to get to church tonight. You can be in the will of God and suffer.

Now, you may not like to hear that, and that might not get you all excited. Nobody’s jumping up and saying, “Amen!” right now. “Amen! Preach it, brother!” It’s not what’s being preached. It’s not what’s popular, but I believe that it’s what’s in the Scripture. I’ll say it right now, and I’ll come back to it again. When Jesus Christ was crucified on a cruel cross, He was spit upon, whipped, beaten, arrested; and by the way, a great parallel between Paul setting his face to Jerusalem and the Bible tells us in Luke’s gospel that Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, and He would not be deterred. When Jesus died on the cross, was He in the will of God? You betcha He was! God had predetermined before the foundations of the world that Jesus would die on a cross. What makes us think that if the Son of God, in the will of God the Father doing His work, had to suffer and die that we get to avoid or that we might not experience that? The issue isn’t does it make me happy or does it make me comfortable. The issue is not even do I think that it’s where I’ll be most useful or fruitful. The issue is: Is it God’s will for my life? If it is God’s will for your life, nothing should deter or distract you from being obedient to God’s will.

So many times, even the little things, we don’t want to do God’s will. “Well, I know it’s God’s will for me to be honest on the job, but if I am, I’ll lose my job.” Lose your job and be in the will of God. “If I’m in the will of God and I do what God is calling me to do, I’m going to be persecuted or laughed at, mocked, or ostracized.” I’d rather be in the will of God and suffer than be out of the will of God and prosper. It’s so important to know that God’s will can involve suffering, adversity, and difficulty.

I don’t believe that the Spirit was telling Paul not to go. I believe that He was just warning him about what was going to happen when he got there. We remember when Paul (at that time Saul) was converted on the road to Damascus and was blinded. Ananias came and laid his hands on Saul to receive his sight. God told Ananias, “Go to him. He’s a chosen vessel, and I will show him what great things he will suffer for My name’s sake.” God actually said that at the beginning of his ministry, so living for Jesus and following Christ isn’t always a bed of roses. Sometimes there are thorns on those roses. God calls missionaries to go to difficult places where sometimes they are persecuted, sometimes they suffer, and sometimes they die; but it’s being in the will of God that is the most important.

So, they prayed and (verse 6) "...we took ship; and they returned home again." What a contrast. Paul and his party, again "we" with Luke, got on a ship and went back to their homes. Sometimes it's harder to go back to your home than it is to get on the ship. Sometimes it's harder to get on the ship than it is to go back to your home but whatever God's will is. For some people God's will is to get on the ship and to go. For some people God's will is to go back home and to minister there where God has planted them. "And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day." Again, this is still up north. It's modern day Akko. It says, "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea," this is called Caesarea Mamertine. It's the Caesarea along the coast. We visited there in February when we were on our tour. It was the seat of the Roman government. So, they came to Caesarea. This is on land that he traveled actually from Tyre down the coast. They didn't sail down the coast. They traveled by land and came to Caesarea. That's the seaport of Jerusalem, so he could go from there anytime he wanted into Jerusalem. That's where, of course, they were predicting that he would suffer and would actually be persecuted and arrested.

As they were in Caesarea, they stayed at Philip the evangelist. Again, we come back to Philip. The name "Philip" means lover of horses, an interesting name. We first met Philip, you remember, in Acts 6 when they chose the seven deacons or men to wait on tables. Two of them we're well familiar with. One of them is Philip and the other is the man Stephen. Stephen became the first Christian martyr who died for his powerful preaching. Philip was the one who went down to Samaria, and God used him in a revival there. Then, he went out to Gaza and preached to the Ethiopian eunuch who was riding in his chariot. Philip came alongside and shared the gospel from Isaiah and baptized him.

Philip was caught away up the coast and evidently landed in Caesarea. He met a fine young lady to marry. They got married and had children. It says that he had four daughters who were unmarried. They were "virgins, which did prophesy." By the way, in verse 8, Philip is the only person in the Bible actually called an evangelist. The word "evangelism" is used a couple of other times, only a couple of other times; but this is the only time a person in the Bible is actually called an evangelist. I'm sure that during these years Philip was actually busy doing the work of evangelism. He had four daughters. They were unwed and did prophesy. That has always been a fascinating thing that these daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy. That's all it says. I don't fully know how they prophesied or when they prophesied and how it all worked, but even in the book of Corinthians it indicates that women in the church can prophesy. It has the idea of the head being covered and so forth. I think they need to be under the authority of a pastor in the church, but they were these young girls that prophesied.

Verse 10, "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet," so he doesn't go right off the bat to Jerusalem. He hangs for a while in this coastal town of Caesarea, and from Judaea down in the area of Jerusalem comes this other prophet "named Agabus. 11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle," or belt, "and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." This

is kind of like Old Testament prophet stuff where sometimes they would get very demonstrative and would go through little antics and do little show-and-tell things for their prophecy. This prophet, Agabus, comes and takes Paul's belt and ties up his hands and says, "Thus saith the Lord, so shall the man who owns this belt be bound when he gets to Jerusalem." Again, he doesn't tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, he just tells Paul what's awaiting him in Jerusalem. "This is going to be what happens to you when you get to Jerusalem."

Interesting, too, that Philip had four daughters that prophesied, but they weren't the ones that prophesied about Paul being bound. Agabus came from Jerusalem, and he's the one that prophesied about him being bound. They were there at Philip's house, and they heard that. It says (verse 12), "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place," so now Paul is surrounded by Luke, his traveling companions, and all these believers, and they're crying, pleading, whining, begging, "Paul, please, don't go." It's like having kids with tears running down their eyes, "Please, can we go to Disneyland?" you know. It's time to go to bed and they can't do what they want to and they're crying. They're all just gathered around Paul begging and pleading him.

We all wrestle with the will of God, right? We all sometimes wonder: Is this the will of God? Is that the will of God? What's the will of God? Sometimes we look to our friends, you know, "What do you think? What should I do?" What if Paul would've looked to his friends right there? Well, it's pretty clear what they wanted him to do, right? "Paul, don't go. We don't want you to get arrested. We don't want you to be in trouble. We don't want you to die in Jerusalem. We don't want you to be put in prison." They're weeping and crying. Sometimes when it comes to the Will of God, one of the things that we so often do (and it's okay to do that if we're careful about who we go to), we get counsel from people. We bounce things off friends, "What do you think about this?" You need to be careful that you don't base God's will for your life on what other people think or say—that's a point you need to hang onto. You don't base God's will for your life on what other people think or say. You have to be confident of what you know God is calling you to do and not let other people influence you.

They begged him not to go (verse 12) to Jerusalem. What was Paul's response (verse 13)? "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" It's actually, "Are you trying to soften me up here? Do you think these alligator tears are going to change my heart?" Paul was a man who was determined. Paul would not be deterred. Now, don't get me wrong. Paul wasn't perfect. He was a fallible human being, and he could make mistakes. That's one of the arguments for those who think that Paul was out of the will of God as he was an apostle. When he wrote Scripture, he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but it's very possible that Paul could make a mistake. I don't believe that in this case Paul was making a mistake. Agabus did not tell Paul not to go, he just told him what awaited him.

So, Paul says, "I am ready," remember when Paul said to the Romans, "I am ready to preach the gospel. I am not ashamed of the gospel." So, Paul says now here, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14 And when he would not be persuaded," I love that. I've highlighted that in my Bible, "he would not be persuaded."

Again, I realize there are those that will disagree with me and say that Paul was being hard-nosed and stiff-necked and was a stubborn person, and we all know people like that that want to do what they want to do. I think that Paul basically just had a consuming love for his brethren the Jews and a consuming desire to fulfill the will of God for his life, and he didn't care what happened. He didn't care if he was going to be arrested. He didn't care if he was going to suffer. He was doing God's will, and he wanted to be obedient. He says, "I'm willing to be arrested, to suffer, and to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

My question for you tonight is: Are you ready? You say, "I am not." Are you ready to come to church in an air-conditioned car, in an air-conditioned sanctuary and hear a message, but are you ready to do the will of God? If God was calling you to go somewhere or to do something where you were going to face opposition or persecution or difficulty or misunderstanding. You could view this whole chapter, actually, as the misunderstood missionary. You know, whenever you do anything great for God or you venture a faith for God, let me promise you, you will be misunderstood and you will be criticized and you will be opposed, so you need to be sure that you are hearing God's voice and you're doing God's will, and you're not doing the thing of, "Wow, I wonder what's going to make my friends happy," or "I wonder what is going to make me comfortable," or "I wonder what's going to make me prosperous," or "I wonder what's going to make me rich?" You have to be able to say, "I wonder what is God's will for my life?" I've always thought that that's just the most important thing of anything is, "God, what is Your will for me? Where do You want me to go? What do You want me to do? What do You want me to say? What do You want me to be? I belong to You, Lord, I want to live for You and serve You and I don't want to waste my time. I want to invest my time."

I love Paul's determination, his unwavering faith. He had a commitment to God's will, and he had trust in God. All of this that is seen in Paul is because he believed and trusted God and was resting in God. He believed in God's love and care and providence and will is good for him, so he wanted that.

In verse 14, one of my favorite verses in the book of Acts, "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." Again, take note of that statement. I believe the will of the Lord was done. I believe that one of the most important things that we could ever do is actually say in our prayers, "Thy will be done," not "my will, but Thy will." Somebody you love in the hospital, someone you love is maybe sick, somebody you love is maybe going to die, and we want so bad to see God heal and raise them up. You can pray that God would heal and raise them up, but when you finish your prayer you need to have enough faith and trust in the providential care and grace and sovereignty of God to say, "God, not my will, but Thine be done." That's what takes faith. It doesn't take faith to tell God what to do and demand God that I should have a healing or I should get that new job or I should have that raise. What does take faith is saying, "Lord, no matter what, even if they throw me in this fiery furnace, I will not bow down. I will not bend. I will trust You. Even if they throw me in this den of lions," Daniel slept better in the lions' den than the king did out of the will of God. The king walked in his palace all night, up and down wearing out his carpet, while Daniel had a lion for a pillow.

When the disciples were sent out on the Sea of Galilee by the Lord and a storm came and they thought they were going to sink and die, and Jesus came to them in the storm, they were safer in the boat in the storm than they would've been on land. You're safer in a storm in the will of God than you are on the shore out of the will of God. That's why when you think about your life—your marriage, your job, your children, everything that involves your life—the safest place for you to be is in the will of God and to know that God loves you and God's in control and that God has a purpose and a plan. I love that! They said, "Okay, we stopped trying to pester and persuade him and we just said, the will of the Lord be done."

Let's wrap this up. I'm only going to get to verse 16, and that's what I had planned on doing. He said, "And after those days we took up our carriages," King Jimmy. It actually means our luggage or baggage, "and went up to Jerusalem." So, finally he heads off to Jerusalem like Jesus who set His face to go to Jerusalem. "There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge." I want you to take note. At the end of verse 16, or you could put it at the end of verse 17, but right here, verse 16-17, is the end of the third missionary journey.

There were three journeys: the first, the second, and the third. This is the end of the third missionary journey (verse 16), "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." Why was Paul so set and determined to go to Jerusalem? Well, when you get a chance, read Romans 15:25-29. Paul shed some light on his desire to go to Jerusalem, and he was collecting, in the areas he traveled, an offering from the Gentiles to give to the Jews to show the Jews in Jerusalem that the Gentiles were one with them and loved them. We'll pick that up when we continue our study in the book of Acts, but what I want to do is wrap this up in showing that there's a fantastic parallel between Paul, who set his face to go to Jerusalem knowing that he would be arrested, that he would be tried, that he would suffer and be in prison; and the parallel of Jesus, who set His face to go to Jerusalem knowing that He would be arrested and that He would be tried and that He would suffer on the cross for the sins of the world. The lesson that is so important for us is to know that you can be in the will of God and suffer.

There was pressure from Paul's friends not to go. The first reason that Paul got pressure from his friends because his acquaintances or his friends demonstrated the all too common inclination of being quick to know God's will for someone else. Isn't it funny how we know God's will for other people? "That's not God's will! That's not God's will!" And, other people know God's will for us? How quick these people that surrounded Paul seemed to know, "You know, that's not God's will for your life," and it's like, "Well, thanks for telling me," you know. I think God has your phone number, and God can speak to your own heart.

The second reason his friends were trying to persuade him is because the well-meaning believer friends of his were trying to make God's will conform to their preconceptions of what God's will is. You say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" I can't tarry. I've already taken more time than I want to but the idea that (I see this all the time) God wants me to be happy. I'm not happy, therefore, I'm out of the will of God. You know how many people I've had come to me in

their marriages that say, "God wants me to be happy, and I'm not happy in my marriage, so I'm out of the will of God." No. Where in the Bible does it say God wants you to be happy? 2 Fleshalonians? I don't see that in the Bible. God wants you to be obedient; and if you're obedient, you'll be happy—God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him. I meet people that say, "God wants me to prosper, and I'm not prospering so I must be out of the will of God." You can be in the will of God and suffer. Do you know you can be in the will of God and get sick? You can be in the will of God and get cancer. You can be in the will of God and lose your job. You can be in the will of God and get in an automobile accident. You can be in the will of God and your car won't start. I mean, that has nothing to do with the will of God.

I've told you before about my story years ago on my way to Australia. We prayed and we planned. We were going to Australia to preach, and we had conferences to do. A long story short, I went to Australia. I went down to LAX to get on a plane. Before we got on the plane we went to a restaurant outside the airport and got kidnapped in the parking lot at gunpoint. For three hours we were in a car with guns at our heads and everything like that. Finally, a long story short, we got out of the car, we got saved, and we got home and everybody's like, "Don't go to Australia. Don't go to Australia. Don't go to Australia. You're out of the will of God," you know, "Obviously, God doesn't want you in Australia." No. God wants us in Australia. The devil doesn't want us in Australia. So, the next night we got on another plane and went to Australia and because we were kidnapped, we were celebrities in Australia! We got on radio stations and did interviews and all kinds of cool stuff. God opened the doors because we got kidnapped on the way to Australia, but I remember so many people saying, "Oh, Pastor John, obviously God doesn't want you to go to Australia." No. God wants us to go to Australia. He wants us to do this ministry, and just because we're being persecuted or opposed it doesn't mean that we're out of the will of God.

They wanted to persuade Paul not to go because of their own benefit, "We want Paul. We need Paul. Paul's a blessing to us, so we don't want Paul to go to Jerusalem," instead of, "The will of the Lord be done," which is ultimately what they finally said as they trusted God and His will.

Remember when Jesus was in Gethsemane and He prayed, agonized, and sweat drops of blood? He said, "Father, if it be Your will, let this cup pass from Me? Nevertheless, not My will but Your will be done." It wasn't the Father's will for Him to avoid the Cross. He went to the Cross, He suffered and died, that He might redeem us by His blood.

As you take communion tonight, you eat this bread and drink this cup, I want you to all remember that Jesus came from Heaven, went to a cross, suffered and died in the will of God. It doesn't mean that you're going to be miserable and unhappy and you're all going to suffer and die; but it means that the best place for us to be is in the will of God, doing the work of God, and God will speak to us through His Word by the inner witness of His Spirit through the circumstances, but you have to live by faith. You have to trust Him. You have to believe in His promises that He will never leave you or forsake you, that His will is perfect, that He has an awesome plan for your life. Every time I take communion, with a thankful heart, I just remember: this is what Jesus did for me, now let my life be a living sacrifice for Him. Let's pray.