

Spiritual Readiness

by Roger Ellsworth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual readiness, modeled by the Apostle Paul, as essential for serving God effectively in a challenging world.

Duration: 31:39

Scripture: Acts 21:4-39

Topics: "Readiness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being ready and willing to serve God. He encourages listeners to examine their own hearts and ask God to restore their passion and excitement for Him. The speaker also highlights the significance of fellowship with other believers, using the example of Paul's interactions with fellow Christians during his travels. He warns against churches that prioritize entertainment over the preaching of the word of God and reminds listeners of the power and light that the word of God brings to a dark world.

Transcript

Please find Acts chapter 21. Acts chapter 21, thank you Dan and Wanda and Sylvia for leading us in this wonderful time of praise to our Lord. My, what a joy it is to be here in the house of the Lord.

You may be saying, well pastor, we're small in number as we usually are on Sunday evening, but that doesn't matter. We can still lift our voices to praise in God and what a blessing it is to be able to gather with brothers and sisters in Jesus and sing songs of praise, songs that honor the Lord Jesus Christ, and what a privilege it is to be able to open the word of God and read from it and to study it. And we have a wonderful passage here before us tonight.

I have, in light of the heart-wrenching events in Japan the last few days, I have been thinking about what the apostle Peter says over there in 2 Peter chapter 1. He refers to the word of God as a light shining in a dark place. And my, this is a dark, dark world, isn't it? But it would be even darker if there were no light at all. It's a dark world, but thank God there's a light that shines in this dark, dark world.

And the light that shines is the word of God. Now you just stop and think about how dark this world would be and how dark your life would be if you did not have the precious promises and the glorious truths of the word of God. Well, I guess I'm just trying to defend what I'm doing this evening.

I'm about to read a passage from the word of God, about to ask you to give attention to a passage from the word of God. And I just want you to know before we look at this passage that we are here tonight on important business. A pastor never wastes the time of his congregation when he calls upon them to look seriously into the word of God.

How we need to remind ourselves of this. There's so many churches today that have abandoned the preaching of the word of God and they've gone off into all sorts of, of bizarre things. Churches today, I know you're all interested in my assessment.

Well, here it is. Churches today seem to be more fastened on entertainment than they are on the truth of the word of God. You're welcome.

And I just, I just in this day and age, find myself shaking my head sometimes in despair as I see what's unfolding in our churches. Oh, I tell you in this dark world, we need the light of the word of God and no pastor is wasting the time of his congregation when he calls their attention to the word of God. So we're here tonight on high and holy business.

Now it's been our blessed privilege the last several months to work our way through this book of Acts. And we have come here to the 21st chapter and we've still got a ways to go because Acts has 28 chapters. Some of you may be saying, this has been a long series.

I guess it just depends on your perspective. It seems very short to me. I love this book of Acts and I think it's good for the church of Jesus Christ today to often visit the book of Acts because that early church had a vibrancy and a bounce and a liveliness that's missing in many of our churches today.

And it came from the spirit of God. We have a tendency today to think if we just create a commotion that we can call that a moving of God's spirit. Well, my friends, there were great things happening in these days, but these things were not created by men.

They were sent down from God and we should crave for God to be moving today in a powerful way, even as he was in this book of Acts. I tonight want to talk with you about the business of spiritual readiness, spiritual readiness. You may be saying, well, pastor, I'm not sure I know what you're driving at when you talk about this business of spiritual readiness.

Well, maybe a good place for us to begin tonight would be just to remind ourselves of a little bit of American history. May I give you just a little history quiz this evening? We used to have when I was in the university and also in seminary, I like to say when I get the chance that I went to the university and I went to seminary because I afraid that people might not know if I didn't tell them from time to time. Well, they'd have a pop quiz from time to time.

And I always loved it whenever I walked in and seemed like the professors always had perfect timing, Dr. Dan, because they were always the day that I was least prepared for a pop quiz. That was the day that they would invariably choose. And I've always kind of wanted to turn the tables and do this to other people.

What was, isn't there a verse that says do unto others as they have done to you? Well, that may be a perversion of that verse. I don't think it goes quite like that, but I've always kind of wanted to turn the table. So now here's the pop quiz.

Do you remember the Minutemen in American history? What era of American history was that? Are we drawing from here when we talk about the Minutemen? Say what? Yeah, the Revolutionary War. Yes. And is that what you were going to say, Rebecca, the Revolutionary War? I thought Rebecca had the right answer.

I'll tell you if I'm not sure about something, I ask Rebecca. She's pretty sharp and pretty smart. The Revolutionary War.

And when we were in school, we studied about the Minutemen. And these were men, American colonists now, American colonists, who were to be prepared at a moment's notice, hence the term Minutemen, at a moment's notice, they were to be prepared to throw down whatever they were doing and grab their arms and go out and fight the British, the Minutemen. And so they were ready men, or they were at least to be ready when the situation called for readiness.

Now I want to plant that idea of readiness with you tonight. And I just want to ask you, do you have spiritual readiness? Are you ready to do what God wants you to do when he wants you to do it? Well, Paul was a ready man. Now, you know, by now, if you have been here on Sunday evenings and followed this book of Acts, if you've been here for just several Sunday evenings, maybe not all, but several, you know, by this time that I have tremendous admiration for this man, Paul.

Oh, I sometimes wish God would just send him back, don't you? And let him minister in our churches for a while. How we need the example of this man, Paul. And this man, Paul, was a ready man.

He knew what it was to have spiritual readiness. He was ready to serve the Lord in each and every situation. He wasn't reluctant, but he was ready.

And those seem to be the options. We're either ready to serve the Lord or we're reluctant to serve the Lord. And see if you can spot readiness here now as we look at these verses, beginning with the first verse of chapter 21.

Now it came to pass that when we had departed, remember Luke, the physician, is the author of the book of Acts, and he accompanied Paul on many of his journeys. And when you see we, you know that Luke was right there with Paul. And he says, it came to pass that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course, we came to Kos the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days.

They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way, and they all accompanied us with wives and children till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

This all sounds like history, doesn't it? These things actually happen, and Luke is giving us an account of these things. Verse 6, when we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

On the next day, we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven, one of the original seven deacons, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Now when they, we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him, that is with Paul, not to go to Jerusalem. And look at verse 13.

Then Paul answered, what do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? And here is where we find this business of readiness. He says, I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. So when he would not be persuaded, we stopped, we ceased, saying the will of the Lord be done.

And so this, I think, is the theme that we need to fasten on tonight. There are a lot of historical details here in these verses, but here is the theme that I want to put before you this evening. It's this matter of spiritual readiness.

And I've already described Paul as a ready man. And here he says in verse 13, I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And I can show you other verses from Paul's writings in which he expressed readiness.

I could take you over there to Romans chapter one. And perhaps you remember this verse where Paul said, I'm ready to preach the gospel, even to those of you who are at Rome. And this was so typical of Paul.

He was ready to preach the gospel wherever he went. I tell you, this man, Paul, is a rebuked man. I think he's rebuked to many of us in our churches today, because he was ready to share the gospel.

This was his glory. This was his passion. This we might say was his lifeblood.

And yet many of us today are reluctant to share the gospel. Well, we don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, you know. We don't want to impose our views on anybody else.

We don't want to violate the current code of political correctness and all of that. So we keep the gospel to ourselves. But Paul said, I'm ready.

I think that what Paul said in reference to going to Rome, I'm ready to preach the gospel at Rome. I think Paul could have said that no matter where he went. I'm ready to preach the gospel.

I could take you to second Timothy chapter four, and I could show you there where Paul says that he was ready to depart and be with the Lord. He was ready to meet the Lord. And so wherever I find this apostle Paul, I find a readiness, a readiness to serve the Lord, a readiness to suffer for the Lord, a readiness to preach the gospel, a readiness to do whatever God wanted him to do, a readiness even to die for the Lord.

And I tell you, he rebukes me at this point. And the reason I'm putting this before you tonight is because I think it could be that I'm not the only one in this church that needs to be rebuked at this point. Do you have

spiritual readiness? Do you come anywhere near Paul's example in this matter of being ready to serve the Lord, being ready to speak for the Lord, being ready to suffer for the Lord? Well, I've already said that our options are either readiness or reluctance.

And I have to tell you that after serving as a Baptist pastor for 10 these many years, I have oftentimes encountered more reluctance to serve the Lord than I have readiness to serve the Lord. I've heard things like this down through the years. Well, if you can't find anybody else, I guess I could do it.

And I always feel like saying, well, thank you for your readiness. You can just hear the reluctance, you know, dripping from those words. Well, if you can't find anybody else, I suppose that's not the spirit that we find in Paul.

And that's not the spirit that's going to move our churches forward today, this reluctance. I suppose we could say that we do have a readiness of our own. Sometimes we have a readiness that's entirely different than Paul's readiness.

I've talked about his readiness to serve, his readiness to suffer, his readiness to preach, his readiness even to die if necessary. Well, we can have a different kind of readiness if we're not careful, a readiness to complain, a readiness to bail out of spiritual responsibilities, a readiness to quarrel, a readiness to insist on our own way, a readiness to criticize. May God deliver us from the wrong kind of readiness and give us the readiness of the Apostle Paul.

Now, perhaps someone is asking this question, and I hope you are because this is the question that I came prepared to answer tonight. Perhaps you're asking, well, Pastor, how do you explain the readiness of this man, Paul? And I want to put three answers before you in the time that we have remaining this evening. I want to tell you that, first of all, Paul was a man who was guided by the Spirit of God.

And secondly, he was a man who was motivated by love for Jesus Christ. And thirdly, he was a man who was fortified by fellowship with other believers. And I find all three of those things right here in these verses of Scripture.

Paul was guided by the Spirit, he was motivated by love for Jesus, and he was fortified by fellowship with other believers. Fortified simply means he was strengthened by fellowship with other believers. May I just put these things before you if you tonight say, well, Pastor, I already feel rebuked.

I know I'm not as ready as I should be in spiritual matters. I know that oftentimes reluctance is more my trademark than readiness. May I just put before you these three things and suggest that you take inventory.

Are you being guided by the Spirit of God? Are you motivated by love for Jesus Christ? Are you finding strength from brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ? And my assessment is that if you are guided by the Spirit and motivated by love for Christ and fortified by fellowship, that you will have a greater degree of readiness than you have right now. So I urge these things upon you. Now as I look here at this passage that I read, I find Paul was guided by the Spirit of God.

I also find a problem here in this passage of Scripture, and the problem arises if you go back to chapter 20 and verse 23. You find Paul speaking there to the Ephesian elders, and look at what he says. The Holy Spirit testifies in every city.

This is Acts 20 and 23. The Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. Paul's going down to Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit is telling Paul before he goes to Jerusalem that he's facing tribulation.

He's facing suffering there. But look at what he says in verse 24. None of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself.

He was ready to die, so I may finish my race with joy. And so here's the problem. In Acts chapter 20, Paul has the leadership of the Spirit of God saying there are all kinds of trials that await you in Jerusalem.

And look now at verse 4 in chapter 21, and there we find that Paul encounters disciples, and they tell him through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. Look further at verse 11, and you see the same thing. This prophet Agabus, thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, referring to Paul.

And so the dilemma is this. It seems as if the Holy Spirit is guiding Paul to go to Jerusalem. And on the other hand, it seems here in chapter 21 as if the Holy Spirit is not telling Paul to go to Jerusalem.

So which is it here? Is the Holy Spirit having trouble making up his mind? Is he saying at one point, well Paul, I want you to go down to Jerusalem, and then five minutes later he's saying, no Paul, I've changed my mind. I don't want you to go to Jerusalem. Well, you know better than that, don't you? You know that the Holy Spirit is utterly consistent, and that there's no contradiction here in these verses.

By the way, anytime you think you've found a contradiction in the Bible, you haven't found a contradiction in the Bible. All you have found is a flaw in your own understanding. And if you just understood things better, the contradiction would disappear.

And I simply want to say there's no contradiction here. On one hand, the Holy Spirit was requiring Paul to go to Jerusalem. But on the other hand, and this is what we find in chapter 21, the Holy Spirit was announcing to Paul what he would find there in Jerusalem.

The Holy Spirit's requiring him to go, but the same Holy Spirit is giving him advanced notice and saying, Paul, when you get there to Jerusalem, you've got chains awaiting you, you've got tribulations awaiting you, and there's no contradiction between the Holy Spirit requiring Paul to go and the Holy Spirit on the other hand announcing what Paul would find when he got there. And that's how I resolve that particular dilemma. By the way, I think all who have this notion that God's concern is just to make life as easy and comfortable for us ought to take a look at this passage of Scripture here.

Here is God's Holy Spirit guiding Paul to go to Jerusalem, and yet it's not going to be easy. Now, there's so many today who seem to be dead set on making Christianity some kind of formula for obtaining an easy life. And listen, Christianity is not some kind of formula for ensuring that life is going to be trouble free.

The Bible never tells us anywhere, come to Christ and all your problems will be over. The Lord Jesus himself said, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Now, I don't know what you make out of that, but here's what I make out of it.

A cross is an instrument of suffering. And if you follow the Lord Jesus Christ, your life's not going to be easy. You're going to have difficulties.

And that's what we have here. The Holy Spirit was saying to Paul, I want you to go, but Paul, be aware, it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy.

And we can draw from that the conclusion that the Holy Spirit of God does not lead us in ways that make life easy. You may be saying, well, how do we find the leadership of the Holy Spirit these days? And these are different days than what we're dealing with here in Paul's time. Paul did not have a completed scripture.

May I simply suggest to you that if you want to know what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to you, get your nose in this book, because I read there in Ephesians chapter six, where the sword of the spirit is the word of God. And the primary way that God guides his people today is through the word of God. So Paul was guided by the spirit.

The spirit was compelling him to go to Jerusalem and that Paul, this ready man, because the spirit was compelling him to go. Paul was going to Jerusalem, but the spirit was also telling him, Paul, you're going to have trouble there. But Paul was not moved by the awareness of the trouble.

He went, he forged ahead and oh, that we could have the readiness of Paul. And in order to have that readiness, we need to be guided by the spirit. And to say that we need to be guided by the spirit is to say that we need to be much in the word of God, because this is how the spirit guides.

Now here's a second component in Paul's readiness. He was not only guided by the spirit, but he was motivated by love for Christ. I want to call your attention there again to verse 13 of chapter 21, where Paul says to these people who are telling him not to go to Jerusalem, they were telling him that the Holy Spirit wasn't telling him that.

Paul said, what do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem and get this, for the name of the Lord Jesus, for the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul was ready to do whatever God required of him because he had this passionate love for the Lord Jesus. You may be saying, well, why did Paul love the Lord Jesus so much? And the answer is right there in those two words, Lord and Jesus.

You have in those two words, the very essence of the Christian message, ladies and gentlemen, Lord Jesus. What do those two words convey? Well, the word Lord refers to one who is absolute ruler. He is sovereign.

And Jesus is of course, the human name for the second person of the Trinity. And so now you put those two words side by side as they are here in this 13th verse, and you have the marvel of the Christian message because here's what Christianity asserts and affirms, the sovereign ruler of this universe, the Lord took our humanity when he came to this earth as Jesus. And Paul never could get over this, that the sovereign ruler of the universe should come to this earth in our humanity.

And then of course, the question is why, why did he come? And the answer is he came to provide forgiveness for our sins, came to provide salvation, came to lift us from the condemnation of hell and make us citizens of heaven. I tell you, my friends, there's only one wonder that is greater than the wonder of the Christian message. And that is the wonder of us losing any sense of wonder about the Christian message.

Did you hear that? There's only one wonder that is greater than the wonder of the Christian message. And that is the wonder of us losing the sense of wonder that we should have. But it's all right here.

Paul regarded himself as the chief of sinners. This is what he said in his letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy. And he never could get over the Lord Jesus Christ providing salvation for him.

Now there was a time whenever you felt the wonder of it all, but now maybe you've gotten over it. Maybe it's not quite as thrilling as it used to be. What has happened to us that Christianity has become so tame and so mild and so boring and so uninteresting to us? The eternal sovereign ruler of the universe takes our humanity and in that humanity lives and dies on our behalf so that we don't have to perish eternally but can have everlasting life.

Now when was the last time you heard anything that thrilling? Are you thrilled? Are you thrilled? And if you're not, why not? What's happened to you? Shake yourself. Talk to yourself. Ask God to bring the thrill and the wonder back to your heart.

I'm trying to explain how it is that Paul was this ready man, ready to serve, ready to suffer, ready to preach, ready to obey, ready to die even. How are we to explain it? Guided by the spirit, motivated by love for Jesus. And now I want to just call something else to your attention in closing and that is that Paul was fortified by fellowship with other believers.

Look there at verse 4, in Tyre we read that Paul finding disciples stayed there seven days. He fellowshipped with the believers in Tyre. In Ptolemais, verse 7, we're told that he greeted brothers and sisters in Christ and stayed with them one day.

In Caesarea, we're told in verses 8 and 10, he and his party were accommodated in the home of Philip the Evangelist and they stayed there a number of days. And also we read in verse 16 that the disciples in Caesarea personally escorted Paul and his party to Jerusalem. And in verse 17, we read that Jerusalem, we didn't read this verse a while ago, but in Jerusalem, we read that Paul was warmly received by his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

That's in verse 17. Listen, there's nothing that will so help us face the trials and the difficulties of life as warm fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Jesus. I have to tell you, I wonder what people do for strength, who separate themselves from the church of Jesus Christ.

What do they do for strength when the trials of life pour in? I find strength in the fellowship of the church. Paul found strength in fellowshiping with believers. And I just close by saying, if we are suffering, let us rejoice in the fellowship that we have with the Lord Jesus and in the fellowship that we have from brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

If we're suffering, let us rejoice in the fellowship we have with Jesus and the fellowship we have with our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. And if we're not suffering, let's seek to be true brothers and sisters to those who are suffering. And God's people said, let's bow together for prayer.

Father, give us the spiritual readiness that we find in the apostle Paul. Help us to be guided by the spirit, motivated by love for Jesus, fortified by fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Father, forgive us for our reluctance in spiritual things.

Forgive us for always trying to find the easy way out. Forgive us, Father, for losing the wonder of the mighty, glorious message of salvation. Father, create within us a new zeal, a new determination, a new readiness to be all that we can be here at Parkview for the Lord Jesus.

We pray in his blessed name. Amen. Amen.

Stand with me, please.

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