

Onto Jerusalem

by Steve Gallagher

Steve Gallagher's sermon explores Paul's journey to Jerusalem, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit, the challenges of early church dynamics, and the importance of faith amidst persecution.

Duration: 52:10

Scripture: Psalm 37:23, Proverbs 16:9, Jeremiah 29:11, Acts 21:14, Acts 22:14, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 9:22, James 4:15

Topics: "Gods Will", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

This sermon delves into the events in Acts 21 and 22, focusing on Paul's journey to Jerusalem, the tensions between Jews and Gentiles, and the unfolding of God's will in Paul's life despite challenges and misunderstandings. It highlights the importance of staying in God's will and the profound impact of being in His presence.

Transcript

All right, last week we left off with Paul in Ephesus. He had stopped by just briefly to share his heart with the elders of the church there. This week we're going to cover Acts 21 and 22.

The main things we'll be looking at are his meeting with Philip, and then with James and the Jerusalem church, and then of course all that happened with the Jews in Jerusalem there. You'll notice that from here on out the story slows down in two ways really, because now Luke starts to go into great detail over what happens to Paul in Palestine. But also his life slows down.

The Lord is going to take him out of all that bustling activity and set him down for a period of four and a half years or so. Now think about that. The Apostle Paul, is this some kind of a terrible divine mistake that the Lord would yank him out of this tremendous ministry and work, right? When everything is going so well? No, it's not a mistake.

The Lord knows what he's doing, and he had his purposes in it, and a lot of good came out of it too. All right, let's pick up the story here. We're going to have a lot of reading to do, so we're going to have to get through it.

Chapter 21, verse 1. When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cause, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Potara. Having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we came inside of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria

and landed at Tyre.

For there, the ship was to unload its cargo. After looking up to disciples, I think some translations say searching for the disciples, we stayed there seven days, and they kept telling Paul through the spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. All right, this is an interesting thing.

The Holy Spirit tells these people, lays it on their heart to tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, when everything in him is telling him to go. There's a discrepancy here somewhere. We'd already heard last week when he was talking to the elders in chapter 20, verse 23, he was saying to them that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city.

Now, what cities were those? Probably at that point, he had been in Corinth, remember, for three months. Then he went up to probably Thessalonica and Philippi, and then ended up in Ephesus. So by then, those are probably the cities referring to.

But in every city, the Holy Spirit's telling him that bonds and afflictions await me. So he's already got a clear word from the Lord, that that's what's going to happen in Jerusalem. So what is this going on here? I'll get to this a little bit more in a few minutes.

Maybe I'll just leave it at that. But it seems like I'll just leave it at that, and I'll get to it here in a second again. Corny Baron Housen says this about it.

We see that different views of duty might be taken by those who had the same spiritual knowledge, though that knowledge were supernatural. St. Paul looked on the coming danger from a higher point. What to others was an overwhelming darkness, to him appeared only as a passing storm, and he resolved to face it in the faith that he had, who had protected him up till now, would still give him shelter and safety.

So what they are basically saying is that the Lord was telling them that he was going to be arrested or something was going to happen to him, something dreadful there in Jerusalem, but maybe they were taking it beyond what was meant to be taken. Maybe it was their affections, their feelings that were now speaking and interpreting what they had received from the Holy Spirit, and reinterpreting and sending it out as a mixed message that don't go. So that's how Corny Baron Housen and most commentators feel that way.

All right, verse 5. When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey. While they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

Then we went on board the ship and they returned home again. When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemy, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed there with them for a day. On the next day, we left and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven.

We stayed with him. Now, this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. Now, this is Philip the Evangelist.

If you remember back in the early church series, he was one of the seven deacons who were appointed back in Acts 6, where there was tension in the church between the Hellenized Jews. In other words, the Jews from across the Roman Empire who had kind of developed the Greek mentality to some degree, the

Hellenized Jews and the Hebrew Jews from Jerusalem. There was some tension there in the community in Jerusalem, and that had come into the church.

So he was one of those seven deacons that were to administrate the funds and so on to the poor. And then in Acts 8, when Saul the persecutor started bringing all that heat on the church there in Jerusalem, he was one of those who went out from there and began to evangelize. And you remember the whole story.

He went into Samaria and was preaching, and signs and wonders were happening. And he faced that false prophet there. And then he was told by the Holy Spirit to go down to the road to Gaza.

So he goes down there. He doesn't even know why. And he gets down there, and the Holy Spirit tells him to go and speak to the eunuch.

And then the Holy Spirit whisks him away. We don't even know exactly what that means. And plants him somewhere, and he goes on preaching and ends up in Caesarea.

So he's been in Caesarea for 25 years now. Gets married, has four daughters. Apparently his wife must have died by now.

So he's living there with his four daughters who all have the gift of prophecy. That's an amazing thing. You know, I thought women weren't supposed to speak.

Well, you know, I'm not so sure. But anyway, so they have been living there for 25 years by now, something like that. And later, Asubius wrote and said that he and his daughters eventually moved to Heriopolis and lived out the rest of their lives there.

So Paul had a lot in common, really, with Philip. They were both Hellenized Jews, so they knew what it was like to be a Jew living out in the Roman world, the Greek-speaking world. They both had had interaction with Stephen.

Philip was probably very close friends with Stephen, you know, and who had him put to death? Paul, back when he was still a Pharisee. At least he played a big part in it. And then it was Paul's persecution of the church that had pushed Philip into the tremendous ministry he ended up having amongst the Samaritans and others.

And probably that continued on all those years. I mean, what was he doing for 25 years? He was probably street preaching in Caesarea, probably going back to Samaria and ministering to the people down there. I don't know, but it seems as though his main ministry was to Gentiles.

And that really was the biggest common denominator between these two, is they both played a big role in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. I mean, that's a huge thing in those days. Think about it, because everything was all focused on just the Jews, but God was trying to get it, break the church out of the confines of the Jewish world and get it out to the Gentile realm where there were many people who would get saved.

And so these guys were both pioneers, trailblazers. Where Peter and the other apostles, and then James and the elders, all those guys stayed focused, at least at this point, you know, on the Jewish population in Jerusalem. Paul and Philip, both during their own time, played a big role in moving it out past there.

So think of the fellowship they must've had for that week. What a blessing it was. I don't think they probably had ever met before, you know, but there they are spending a week together, probably talking about the old times.

You know, there's nothing that can bring enemies together like the cross, right? And just to look back on those early days from two different vantage points, wow, that must've been some very interesting conversation going on with those two. And someone conjectured that Cornelius might even have come over and been involved in those conversations. You remember Cornelius, the Roman centurion that Peter led to the Lord and so on.

But I doubt it because I would think that Luke would have mentioned it if Cornelius had been involved. He may have died by now or been, you know, relocated somewhere else, but it's a nice thought. Anyway, verse 10, as we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, this is what the Holy Spirit says. In this way, the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. So what we have here is a dramatic symbolism of Old Testament prophets.

That's something that, you know, Isaiah or Jeremiah would have done. And, you know, you don't see this kind of thing in the New Testament, but Agabus is, he's quite a prophet. If you remember in the early church days, he was the one who prophesied about the famine back in chapter 11, I think it was.

And, you know, so the Lord really had his hand on Agabus. But look at the imprecise nature of prophecy here. And I want to bring this up for a purpose.

In this first word that he got from these other believers, they said, the Lord says, don't go to Jerusalem. All right, now that's not right. I'm almost positive that the Lord was saying that he needed to go to Jerusalem.

The Lord had a purpose in mind, and we'll get into that later. So they get a message from the Lord, but they reinterpret it, sort of put their own slant on it, and then deliver it. You know, in other words, a clear word comes to them, and it gets into this human gray matter and comes out wrong, really.

And then Agabus here, he says, look what he says right here. The Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt. Well, that didn't happen.

It was the Romans who bound him. It wasn't the Jews. So there again, a mistake.

Now, the reason I'm bringing this up is because one of the attacks on the gifts of the spirit being in operation today is that, you know, if a prophet speaks and there's something wrong in what he says, then the Bible says that it's not of the Lord. Well, that was said, yes, it's true. Way back in Old Testament times, the word of prophecy then was something different than it became in the New Testament time.

But anyway, it's what I said, that you get a word from the Lord, and depending on how clear you can hear from the Lord or whatever will determine how clear it comes out. I would say that Agabus got a fairly clear word from the Lord. He just, you know, again, put a little slight slant on it to make it not absolutely perfect.

And if he had done that in this day and age, you have half the church world would have written him off and said he's a false prophet. He didn't speak the truth, you know. And I just say, be very careful because when the Holy Spirit's in operation, and I had to rebuke a loved one about the same thing one time when

he had got it, someone had told him in his denomination that tongues were of the devil.

And he said, made that mistake of saying that in front of me one time, and I rebuked him. And I said, you better be very careful about what you're saying, because if it's of the Lord, you are saying that the work of the Holy Spirit is of the devil. Be very careful about making statements like that, you know.

So again, you can have your opinions, but be careful when it comes to talking about the Lord like that. All right, let's move on. Verse 12, when we had heard this, we, as well as the local residents, began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then Paul answered, what are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking the will of the Lord be done. So they just kind of acquiesced to what Paul was saying.

Now, you remember 20 years before this, when Paul got that word from Ananias up in Damascus, and, you know, as to his being called into ministry, the Lord said to Ananias that he would have to tell him how much he must suffer for my name's sake. That's what Ananias said regarding Paul when he was called. You know, when you're called into God's work, there is a genetic disposition, if I can put it that way, stamped into your soul, and you're going to basically follow out that path as long as you stay in God's will.

And that was his path that he was going to have to walk out. It's not the same for everyone, but this is what it was for Paul. And he understood that, and it was for his name's sake.

And look exactly what he says here. I am willing to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. That's why he was in the ministry, not for any other reason, not for any self-purposes.

He was in the ministry to glorify the name of Jesus Christ. And that's what we all need to strive towards. But, you know, immature believers have a hard time comprehending that God could actually lead a believer, a child of God, into painful situations, into affliction, into persecution or trials.

You know, it's just a very immature perspective. No, persecutions, trials, they're all part of the package. Well, maybe not persecution so much, but definitely affliction is part of the package of being a believer.

All right, verse 15. After these days, we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Manassin of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

All right, I want to read this quote from Pole Hill. Josephus described this period of the mid-50s as a time of intense Jewish nationalism and political unrest. One insurrection after another rose to challenge the Roman overlords and Felix brutally suppressed them all.

This only increased the Jewish hatred for Rome and inflamed anti-Gentile sentiments. So there is a rising nationalistic fervor gripping the Jewish people. You know, they had basically kind of let things go.

There was always murmuring going on towards the Romans. There were always the zealots and so on, but it's taking hold of the whole population little by little. And of course, 12 years later, well, actually less than that, it will turn into open revolt.

And 12 years later, the Romans will come in and destroy Jerusalem. But it reminded me a little bit of the ghettos in the 60s when black Americans really just, I don't know how to say it exactly. And I, you know, I'm certainly no expert on it, but I think they just got fed up to here with the prejudicisms, the racism, being treated like second class citizens and just riots started breaking out in especially South Central Los Angeles, the Watts and so on.

And it kind of reminds me of that a little bit, you know, different reasonings, different things involved and so on. But it was kind of like that, where it was just in the air in those communities that they were sick and tired of this Roman oppression. All right, verse 17.

After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present. After he greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

When they heard it, they began glorifying God. Let me just stop there. Now Luke skips over what happens here with the elders, you know, without much ado.

He doesn't really say much about it. But let me just say a couple of things about that we know. For one thing, Paul had put forth a tremendous amount of effort and time into taking the collection for the Jewish believers there.

You know, and this takes up a lot of his epistles even. It's just he's constantly was trying to, I don't know, promote their cause, I guess, amongst the Gentile believers. And anyway, he showed up there with a sizable amount of money and Luke doesn't even mention it.

Now, I don't know if it's because Luke doesn't feel like it's important or if it's just that they didn't make a big deal about it. Like they just like, oh, thanks, you know, and just kind of blew on past it. I don't know.

I don't know exactly what was going on. But another issue about this is the position this put these elders in with the Jewish population. You know, they are living in this hotbed of fanaticism and they are trying to stand firm for Christianity.

And here they have the Apostle Paul, one of the most hated men in the nation. You know, I'm sure they hated Felix more than they hated Paul. But there was a lot of hatred for Paul in the Jewish population there.

And so, you know, they had to walk a fine line between how to handle this. By accepting this collection from the Gentiles, they were really kind of making a statement to the Jewish population that, yes, we are behind Paul and his efforts. So it was kind of a dangerous thing for them.

And, you know, Paul could come and he could stay for a while and move on. But they had to live there. That was their home.

And so, you know, it wasn't a matter of them just leaving town when things got uncomfortable. That was where they had to stay and minister. So you can see a little bit of the challenge it was for them.

And also Luke doesn't say anything about what Paul shared. You know, so we don't know how far Paul went with telling about the different struggles, the Judaizers and all of that. Did he mention it? Or did he just downplay that and focus on the positive? I don't know.

Let me read this quote from Coney Beer Howson. But beneath this superficial show of harmony, there lurked elements of discord, which threatened to disturb it too soon. A Pharisaic faction was sheltered in its bosom, which continually strove to turn Christianity into a sect of Judaism.

We have seen that this faction had recently sent emissaries into the Gentile churches and had endeavored to alienate the minds of Paul's converts from their converter. These men were restless agitators animated by the bitterest sectarian spirit. But besides these Judaizing zealots, there was a large proportion of the Christians at Jerusalem whose Christianity, though more sincere than that of the Judaizers, was yet very weak and imperfect.

Their minds were in a state of transition between the law and the gospel. James accommodated himself in all points to the strict requirements of the law and thus disarmed the hostility of the Judaizing bigots. He was indeed divinely ordained to be the apostle of this transition church.

Against Paul, their dislike had been long and artfully fostered by the Judaizers, of course, and they would, from the first, have looked on him with suspicion. So, you know, what Coney Baranhausen's bringing out is this cold reception that Paul seems to have gotten. I don't think that James was against Paul or that he didn't appreciate Paul's efforts.

He just was in a difficult position and, you know, he probably saw things very differently than Paul. So who knows? But anyway, definitely the church there was, for the most part, rather suspicious of him. All right, let's pick up the story in verse 20 again.

You see, brother, now this is James speaking to Paul, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed and they are all zealous for the law. All right, thousands of believers there, they're all zealous for the law. That's the Jerusalem church and that's where it would have stayed had the Lord not pushed it out of there.

That's what it'd be to this day if the Lord hadn't pushed it out of there. And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. This is all lies.

That is not what Paul said. He never preached that to the Jews out there, you know, out in the Roman world. He was preaching to the Gentiles that the Gentiles didn't have to become Jews in order to be saved.

That's where his total message of grace was headed. But not to the Jews, you know, if they wanted to maintain the traditions and some of those things, he wasn't against that and certainly not circumcision. He was just saying, though, that it has nothing to do with salvation.

That's all that Paul had stood for. Farrar says this, the remark is a startling one. It emphasized the extreme danger of the apostles' position in that hotbed of raging fanaticism.

You know, so Paul shows up there. Now, let me just continue on because they tell him what they want him to do. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come, meaning all the Jewish church.

Therefore, do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Take them and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads and all will know that there is

nothing to the things which have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law.

But concerning the Gentiles, and he just basically reinforces what he had said before. All right, now there's, this is James trying to work out some kind of a compromise. Most commentators would say that this was just a compromise of wisdom, you know, just trying to put Paul in the best light as possible for the Jewish believers there, you know, not to create unnecessary tensions.

Chuck Smith sees it in a negative way. He believes that James and the elders had just become too compromising with the culture, that they were trying to accommodate the culture in which they lived. And he said it more like along the lines, like what it would be like for you and me to compromise with the world, the American culture that we live in.

He saw it more along those lines. Now I'll let you choose for yourself how you see it. But, you know, he also went in, he also said that Paul's heart was not in this ritual.

I mean, that's for sure. He didn't want to do this stuff. I can just imagine.

He had discovered God's grace. You know what I mean? He had found the real thing. He didn't need the ritualism of Judaism.

He was free from all of that. He had found the Lord. But these believers in Jerusalem had not yet really discovered God's grace.

They were still very much bound up in Judaism and all of that ritualism and all those demands and stuff. But Paul was willing to do it anyway. He went against what his own feelings no doubt told him, which this is ridiculous.

This is a waste of time. Why should I put myself through this? You know, and all of that. He probably had some struggles over it, but he did want to try his best to, you know, bridge the gulf between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians.

And, you know, he said to the Corinthians sometime before this, in 1 Corinthians 9, he said, to the Jews, I became as a Jew so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law as under the law, though not being myself under the law so that I might win those who are under the law. So, you know, that's exactly what we see here.

That Paul is just trying to, you know, be whatever he could be to win people to the Lord. That was always foremost in his thinking. All right, verse 26.

Then Paul took the men and the next day purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. So this is over the matter of a few days. When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him.

Walvert mentions that this is the sixth time in the book of Acts that a crowd has been incited by Paul's ministry. You know, and he just, it's like I said way back when, he just had that kind of personality. He just caused problems everywhere he went.

McLaren says this. It's very interesting thought that McLaren brings out here. He says, no wonder that they construed his presence in the temple as an insult to it.

If Martin Luther had appeared in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, he would not have been thought to come as a worshiper. You know, think about that. Or put it in more modern terms.

Imagine Paul Washer showing up at Joel Osteen's church in Houston. You know, and if they spotted Paul Washer down there in the crowd, I don't think anyone would be thinking, you know, Paul Washer is here to just embrace us and to worship the Lord with us. No, they would be thinking he's here to cause problems.

And which would be true, no doubt. You know, so yeah, I mean, I think there's probably some truth in that. Verse 28.

This is what these Jews cried out. Men of Israel, come to our aid. This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people.

That's not true. And the law and this place. That's not true.

And that's not true. Then besides, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. That's not true.

For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him. And they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Well, that's what they wanted to believe.

You know, let me just add something here. Josephus says that there was a placard in one of the entrances into the temple mount area, at least not the temple mount, but the actual temple. And that notice said, no foreigner is to enter within the partition around the sanctuary.

Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death, which follows. And you know, the Romans backed that up. In fact, if a Roman went in there and was murdered by those Jews, the Romans would just, you know, well, you saw the sign right there.

You shouldn't have went. So that's how how fanatical they were about keeping Gentiles out of the inner courts there. Verse 30.

Then all the city was provoked and the people rushed together and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple and immediately the doors were shut. Let me just throw in here another McLaren quote real quick. Notice the carefulness to save the temple from pollution, which is shown by the furious crowds dragging Paul outside before they kill him.

They were not afraid to commit murder, but they were horror struck at the thought of a breach of ceremonial etiquette. Of course, for when religion is conceived of as mainly a matter of outward observances, sin is reduced to a breach of these. You know, and that is so true when I don't care if it's Judaism or 21st century Christianity.

When the religion becomes all about outward rules, that's what people want to focus on or, you know, some people want to focus on because they don't want it to deal with heart issues and they will resort to murder if anyone crosses those lines. You see that spirit in some groups who are very religious-minded for outward things, but not so much for the real issues of the heart like love and humility and so on. You know, somehow they just overlook those things and they're not important to them.

Verse 31. While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them.

And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up and took hold of him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. And he began asking who he was and what he had done.

But among the crowd, some were shouting one thing and some another. And when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

For the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting away with him. All right. Let me read a pulpit commentary quote on this.

A Jewish riot had something terrific in it, something dreaded even by the iron-minded Romans. The features all contorted with passion, the large eyes starting out of their sockets, the savage grinding of the teeth, the fierce cries, the wild throwing of handfuls of dust into the air, the tossing and waving of their garments with an unbridled violence gave a demonic aspect to such rioters. Paul had barely escaped with his life, but not without many blows.

All right. Now, let me just touch on some phrases that are in this passage I just read. The people rushed together, they dragged him, they were seeking to kill him, they were beating Paul, they were shouting one thing or another, and it spoke of the violence of the mob.

Now, as I was thinking about how to put this message together, I got the idea of getting a video clip of a, you know, Muslim mob which often acts just like this. And so I went into YouTube and I found a clip and I watched it yesterday. It was, you know, a few minutes long.

Some British guy had made some statements over there. They weren't even that big of a deal. But these Muslims, there was probably 30 of them, I guess.

I watched this video. They drug him out of his car and they were just wild, crazy, beating him. You know, anyone, they were trying to get to him, but the mob was around him.

They were all beating him. His face was all bloody. And you could see he's just in a state of shock.

I thought about playing that video for you guys, but my wife said that she didn't feel like it would be a good atmosphere. And it's true because it was very demonic. It really was.

And as soon as she said that, I knew, yeah, that's not the thing to do, to introduce into the sanctuary something like that. But it was horrible. It was horrible.

And the reason I'm telling you about it is this. That man, that British man, it was so obvious he was in a state of shock. And I could not imagine if, let's say, the police ran in, pulled him out of that mob, for him to turn around and have the composure and the utter selflessness to then preach to them a sermon.

I could not comprehend that from what I saw in that video. And that video was no different than what Paul experienced. Can you imagine Paul doing that? It's an amazing thing that he had the wherewithal, but it was the Lord in him.

And Jesus had once said, don't try to prepare a message when they haul you before judges and so on. I'll give you the words. And he did.

Right then, he just like this calm came over him and he just preached a sermon, which is what chapter 22 is all about. So basically, the message in chapter 22 is his testimony. He just shares his testimony.

I'm not going to read it. It's basically the same thing in chapter 9. There's a few little differences here and there. But this is his testimony of what had happened 20 years earlier.

And this is just kind of a side note for you guys here. But I was thinking about how recently we've heard both Pastor Jeff and Rose share their testimony of what happened to them in their lives 20 years ago. So it's just kind of a interesting little side light to me that they could remember back 20 years to the Lord coming to them and speaking to them and turning their lives around, mostly Jeff, turning their lives around, and then responding to the call of the Lord to come to work at Pure Life Ministries.

And what a radical thing that was for them to leave New York to come here. And it just was a comparison I thought of. Anyway, he tells his story and he gets to the part where he's in a trance in Jerusalem and Jesus is speaking to him and Jesus tells him, I'm gonna send you to the Gentiles.

And as soon as he said that, the place erupted again. You know, everything was okay. They were listening to him.

He was speaking in the Hebraic tongue and that got their attention, you know, and he was doing okay. But I mean, inevitably he had to tell them this part of the story. And you can almost, if you read through that testimony, you can see how certain places he could have said it, but he avoided it.

He was like putting it off. But finally he got to the point where he had to say it, that this is what my call has been from God. And, you know, let me read what Farrar says here.

That fatal word, Gentiles, which up till now he had carefully avoided, but which it was impossible for him to avoid any longer, was enough. Up to this point, they had continued listening to him with the deepest attention. Were they to be told that a vision from heaven had bidden him to fling open the hallowed privileges of the Jews to those dogs of the uncircumcision? All that strange multitude was as one.

The same hatred shot at the same instant through all their hearts. That word, Gentiles, confirming all their worst suspicions, felt like a spark on the inflammable mass of their fanaticism. Then began the spectacle of an oriental mob, hideous with impotent rage, howling, yelling, cursing, gnashing their teeth, flinging about their arms, waving and tossing their blue and red robes, casting dust into the air by handfuls with all the furious gestulations of an uncontrolled fanaticism.

Yeah, and that's what happened there. And then, of course, the Roman commander starts to question him. And basically, the chapter ends by the commander taking Paul away.

And then he's going to have him speak to the Sanhedrin the following day. And we'll get into that next week. But let me just say a couple of words about this story that we've looked at today.

If you look at 21.14 and 22.14, there's a common denominator. And that is that the will of God is mentioned in both, both those verses. And, you know, this is such a mysterious thing, how God works his will in the life of a believer.

And it seems to be dependent on the person's willingness to keep his life in line with that will and what the Lord wants to do with that person's life. An interesting side note here is that McLaren brings out how you have two bitter antagonists, the Romans and the Jews, basically who hate each other, and how the Lord is using them in this conflict. And regarding this man, Paul of Tarsus, how he's using them almost like pawns on a chessboard.

He's using them to bring about his own purposes, which is to get Paul to Rome, to get him before Nero and so on. God could have done it another way, but this is, for whatever his reasons were, this was his way of handling it. Now it is possible, and Chuck Smith believes that actually it was the Lord saying to Paul, don't go to Jerusalem.

And that Paul just was, had it so stuck in his head that he was going to get that collection to the Jerusalem church himself, that he was so determined that nothing was going to stop him, and he was not afraid of the consequences or whatever. I don't know. I don't know if that's right.

I could see a possibility, but I bring that up for another purpose. If you, in your heart, sincerely want God's will, even when you make mistakes, God will still bring good out of it. You know, it had only been a month or two before that he wrote these words to the Romans.

He told them, I don't want to find it here, and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, not to any old person that calls himself Christian, those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. You see? Now, here we see this really unfolding. Whether it was a mistake or not, it doesn't matter.

God was going to accomplish his purposes in Paul's life. And I also thought about what happened with Kathy and me five years ago in 2009 when we left here to go to Colorado to work in a ministry. And I have said that I felt like when I drove out of our home that there were two things I was sure of.

One was that I was making the mistake of a lifetime, and the second one was I was in the will of God. And, you know, the impossibility of that, and I've talked about that elsewhere in other messages and so on, but I will say it like this. I don't know now that it was God's will.

And Kathy's always questioned that, you know, that statement that I've made. I think I'll backpedal off that a little bit, and I'll say it this way, that if you are a believer, you're in the grip of God. But there are times when God kind of loosens the grip a little bit because you are bent on your own way.

And he might loosen the grip a little bit and give you a little bit of latitude or maneuverability or something to kind of pursue your own course, but he's going to bring good out of it, even at that, you know, up to a point, of course. I mean, if you're in self-will and just determined, and then, you know, you could get yourself in real trouble. But I know that what he took us through was for the good, that it was a horrible experience.

And I, you know, I don't want to go too much into that, but I will tell you this. We were out of God's will, at least in the sense that we were where we shouldn't be. We belong here in Kentucky attached to Pure Life Ministries.

We are absolutely where God has us. Now we know that for certain, you know. But when we were out of, I don't know if it's God's will or not, maybe it was God's bigger purpose to take us out of, I say his will, but his place for us, which is here.

Maybe we needed to step outside of it for a time to be taught some lessons. I know this, that the deep breaking that we went through out there would not have happened here. I don't know how it would have anyway.

And I can say this, because I thought about this this morning. I would rather, I don't mean to be overly dramatic here, and I don't mean to somehow bring positive attention to myself, but I'm just saying it like how I feel it. I would rather face one of those wild mobs in Palestine, in Gaza or something, than to go through what I went through in Colorado again, where for a whole year, we were outside of God's presence.

It was hell. Every day was miserable. Just miserable isn't strong enough.

I don't have the words strong enough to describe how horrible it was to be outside of his presence. His presence for Stephen Cathy Gallagher are here in Kentucky. And yeah, I can leave and do ministry trips and the Lord's with me because that's part of his will.

But to be outside of that, I felt like I was in hell. And that internal, emotional, spiritual deadness that we experienced for a year outside of here, you talk about breaking you and humbling you. And I don't know exactly how it all plays out and what Paul went through, how much of that was because of any determination on his part to have things his way.

Part of me just can't even imagine that with the Apostle Paul. But I just want to say this, that if you know what God's will is for your life, stay there. You do not want to get outside of it.

Trust me. You do not want to get outside of it. And I think of some of the people who have left here.

I don't know if they ever really knew the great joy and the closeness of God that means being in his will and being in his presence like that. But when you step outside of it and God withdraws for a time, man, you come to appreciate it. All right.

So I guess that's it for this week. Next week, we will cover chapters 23 all the way to 28, you know, his time in Caesarea and his journey to Rome. God bless you.

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