

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

PAUL'S ARREST

(Acts 21:1-40)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 13

Paul's journey to Jerusalem - visited Tyre, Ptolemais and Caesarea - warned of brethren of coming suffering - tender farewell - mobbed in Jerusalem - rescued by soldiers.

1. Making use of opportunities.
2. Healing old enemies.
3. Pursuing old enmities.
4. Overruling the wrath of man.
5. Manifesting an unyielding courage.

After Paul and his company had bidden a sad farewell to the elders of Ephesus he sailed to Coos, about forty miles south of Miletus. The next day they came to the island of Rhodes on the southwest of Asia Minor. They would no doubt see the remnants of the great statue of Apollo which had been erected over the harbor but at that time lay in ruins. It had been regarded, when standing, as one of the wonders of the world.

FALSE GODS WOULD FALL

At Philippi the Pythoness had been healed and her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone. At Corinth the worship of Venus had become less prominent. At Ephesus the worship of Diana had suffered a marked decrease. Paul looked forward in faith to the day when all false gods would lie prostrate like Apollo at Rhodes. He knew the prophecy which told of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which was to smite in pieces all heathen images and opposing powers (Daniel 2:45).

FORETOLD PAUL'S SUFFERING

The next day they sailed to Patara.

From thence they sailed in another vessel, no doubt a larger one which was built to ride the storms of the Mediterranean, passing by Cyprus on the left towards Syria and landing at Tyre whence the cargo of the vessel had been consigned. Paul made it a point to seek out the disciples at Tyre and he had a week of Christian fellowship with him. They protested against Paul's going to Jerusalem. We are told that they said this through the Spirit. This, we believe, means that the Spirit informed them of the suffering which Paul was to endure, as he had witness to this fact in every city; but we do not think that it means that the Spirit directed Paul not to go. They evidently thought that God would be honored more by Paul's liberty, but it was the plan of God that He should be honored by Paul's prolonged imprisonment.

TENDER FAREWELL

The parting at Tyre was a very touching one. All the disciples, their wives and children accompanied Paul to the beach and knelt down with him on the shore while he prayed. Then they bade him a tender farewell and he, with the others of the company, went on board the ship and sailed for Ptolemais. They enjoyed one day's fellowship with the brethren there and then started overland to Caesarea, a distance of about thirty miles.

IN PHILIP'S HOME

At Caesarea they went to the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and abode with him several days. Did Paul hesitate to go to see Philip as Jacob did to see Esau? He had driven Philip from Jerusalem several years before. Philip had escaped during that persecution and had gone to Samaria. There is no word of any old grudges to settle as Paul went to the house of Philip. Their minds would perhaps run back to the old days when Paul was the bitter enemy of Philip and the other Christians. But that hatred had long since been laid aside. They were now brethren in Christ. It is now Paul who is about to face persecution and suffering. Philip is as solicitous about his future welfare as the rest of the disciples.

The home of Philip was a godly one. Four of his daughters were prophetesses. It was there that the Prophet Agabus showed Paul so vividly how he should be arrested and bound at Jerusalem. He was unmoved by their entreaties or tears, but insisted that he was ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they yielded and said: "**The will of the Lord be done**" (Acts 21:14).

AT JERUSALEM

Paul and his friends took up their baggage and went to Jerusalem where they were gladly received of the brethren. He met with James and the elders and told them what things God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry. They glorified God when they heard of his work. Accepting their advice Paul went with four men, who were fulfilling the ceremonies in connection with a vow which they had taken, in order if possible to prevent the criticism of the Jews. In this, however, he was unsuccessful.

CHARGED WITH POLLUTING TEMPLE

The Jewish rule was written and printed before the temple that “No man of alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes round the temple. If any one is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows.” Some of the envious Jews, who had followed Paul from Asia, saw Trophimus of Ephesus with Paul and they imagined that he had taken him, though a Greek, into the temple.

They began to shout, charging Paul with blasphemy and polluting the temple. Thus they stirred up a mob, but owing to their belief that it was wrong to kill a man in the temple a sufficient delay was occasioned to allow the roman officers with their soldiers to interfere and rescue him. The soldiers were no doubt keeping a vigilant guard because they had experienced serious trouble with the Jews shortly before this.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

An Egyptian who had claimed to be the Messiah had led a rough band of about four thousand men out into the wilderness and there had gathered about him about thirty thousand with the aid of whom he had threatened the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. The band was defeated and dispersed but their leader had escaped and it was feared that he might appear again. Moreover, the cruel conduct of Felix, who was the Roman procurator at this time, had driven the Jews almost to the point of insurrection. As a consequence the Roman captain, Lysias, his officers and men, were keeping a vigilant guard, on this occasion, when there were many thousands of Jews in and about Jerusalem, lest trouble should again arise. From the tower of Antonia at the north-west corner of the temple, and overlooking the place of worship, the sentinel could discover any disorder at once and the soldiers could be dispatched to quell a riot in a moment's time.

RESCUED FROM THE MOB

When the soldiers rescued Paul, so furious was the mob that they had literally to carry Paul to keep him from being torn by the violence of the people. The multitude were crying, as they had against Jesus, “Away with him!”

Amidst the tumult the peace of God was in Paul's heart and self-possession and wisdom were manifest in his words and actions. He addressed Lysias in Greek which at once surprised him and proved that he was not the dreaded Egyptian as he had supposed. Lysias asked Paul who he was. He told him that he was a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, and asked that he might be permitted to speak to the people. Lysias apparently wanted to learn as accurately as he could what the uproar was about, so he permitted Paul to speak to the people from the stairs of the castle. When they learned that he could speak readily in the Hebrew they listened quietly.

We shall lead the address of Paul for consideration upon another occasion. We wish to gather and apply some of the lessons which are apparent from the record in this chapter.

MAKING USE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Paul made use of every opportunity to preach; even the short stops when the ship was loading or unloading her cargo. Whether one day or several days, were used to the best advantage by him. He would meet with disciples and dispense the Lord's supper and hold preaching services, or he would use the time, working day and night, in order to encourage and strengthen the disciples. He would not permit them to dwell upon his troubles but endeavored to benefit and bless them.

We have seen how he stopped at Troas seven days, near Ephesus a few days, at Ptolemais one day and at Caesarea several days. His desire was to exhort the disciples and pray with and for them in every place. Paul was not longing for an opportunity to view and study the noted places of art, or the historic sights which might be seen as he passed from city to city. He was not seeking vacation days or places of entertainment. He might have found strong reasons for needing a rest; he might have enjoyed many a feast and social hour among friends and men of distinction in the cities which he visited and revisited. He had one great goal and he kept that clearly in mind. He wanted to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, after quoting Henry Ward Beecher to the effect that Paul was devoid of the artistic sense because he did not mention things of beauty and art, adds that he does not agree with his conclusion, but that he would rather express the truth in the words of Dr. Parker, who when referring to his visit to Tyre said: "There was no scenery to Paul; there was no geography; there was nothing but lost humanity, and the redeeming Cross of Christ."

A Christian worker wrote not long since: "At my old home in London, England, some fifteen years ago, was a group of young men who combined Christian service with pleasure. They would go out for a ramble through the country on their bicycles each Saturday afternoon through the summer, and when they came to a village would halt, stack their machines, conduct a short open-air service, preaching the Gospel to all who would listen and distributing Gospel tracts. The rambles were carefully planned so that they were able to cover a wide territory during the summer, and as they went they preached. Today several of that little band are missionaries in China, and elsewhere, still seeking to obey the Saviour's command, 'As ye go preach'." We may well ask ourselves, are we making use of our opportunities? We will one day regret opportunities which pass by unused.

Another Christian gentleman writes in the following strain: "As I passed through a pleasant street God told me to give His message to an old man who was sitting on a lawn. I thought I might be mistaken and passed on to take a car, but found I had no money, so returned and spoke to him. Some ladies who were on the veranda, hidden by vines, began to talk to me and I knew they would hear all I said. Alas! I had been told, times without number, that one should not ask a person if he were a Christian, or invite him to come to Christ, when others were present as it might do more harm than good. I sat on the steps and talked with the ladies, but the old man went away and in a few hours was struck by an express train and was killed immediately. I then learned that he was not a Christian. Thus eternally important are the opportunities which God brings before us on many occasions. No man has ever given us a better example of how we should use every opportunity to speak for Christ than the apostle Paul. It will be well for us and a blessing to many souls if we will imitate him.

HEALING OLD ENMITIES

When Paul and his company came to Caesarea they entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and abode with him. Philip, his family and friends showed deep concern for the welfare of Paul. Whether Paul and Philip had ever met since the day, twenty years before, when Paul had been the leader in putting Stephen to death and in driving Philip from Jerusalem, we do not know. Paul's reputation had spread so generally through the church that the disciples in the various cities knew him, trusted him, and loved him. They knew that he had suffered more at the hands of others than they had suffered at his hands, and that he had repented most earnestly of his past conduct as a persecutor. Philip did not hesitate a moment, did not ask any apology or demand any evidence of sorrow from Paul for what he had done in the past. He received him with open arms and made him welcome to all that he had in Caesarea.

We can see his four daughters working early and late in order to grind the corn, bake the bread, carry the water and have all the work about the house done so that they might listen to Paul as he told of what God had wrought through his ministry in Asia and Macedonia and Achaia. They were prophetesses themselves and they would treasure Paul's messages and repeat them often when they went out to teach and speak for their Master in and about Caesarea, or when they went on missionary journeys with their father and helped him in his evangelistic work. Paul's faithfulness and courage would encourage them and his clear messages would enable them to expound the Scripture more clearly when they taught others of Christ and Him crucified. They too, knew how their father had fled from Paul some twenty years before. Some of them must have been little girls at that time, and the occasion would stand out most vividly in their minds, so impressionable at that age, when every one of the Christians feared, hid from and trembled at the very name of Saul of Tarsus. But there is no hint of retaliation now. They honored and loved the great apostle and, prophetesses that they were, no doubt agreed with Agabus and entreated Paul not to go to Jerusalem where they knew he was to be bound and delivered to the Romans.

Philip and his family knew the command of their Lord, "**Love your enemies,**" and what was more they practiced it. Philip and his daughters may have been watching at a distance as they saw the cruel mob, urged on by Saul, drag their beloved friend Stephen outside the city and have heard those precious forgiving words of his that he had prayed while being stoned and which they could never forget: "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge**" (Acts 7:60). They knew that prayer had been answered on behalf of Paul, and now they were praying every day that the enemies of the disciples and of the church everywhere might be forgiven and brought to Christ. They were doing to their old enemy just what Paul had written so recently to the Christians in Rome advising them to do: "**Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head**" (Romans 12:19, 20).

From examples like this and such advice as this how many have learned lessons which have made the world a happier place in which to live! Governor Stewart of Missouri, recognized, in a convict he was about to pardon, a steamboat mate under whom he had served as a cabin boy.

He said: "I want you to promise you will never again take a stick of wood and drive a sick boy out of his berth on a stormy night; because some day that boy may be governor, and you may want him to pardon you for another crime. I was that boy. Here is your pardon."

Christians who have been persecuted have always had to suffer, but how often they have exercised the spirit of their Master and have not only been ready to forgive, but ready to help to seek forgiveness for those very men who have wronged them. After the frightful massacre of the Christian Armenians in 1901, "an Armenian woman who had seen her father, uncles, husband, and son murdered by the Turks, was visiting Moslem homes with an open Bible, preaching forgiveness and the life of Christ, within a week of the murders" (*What Next in Turkey*, Eddy).

"There is a cunning little proverb
From the sunny land of Spain,
But in northland or in southland,
Is its meaning true and plain;
Write it deep within your heart,
Neither lose nor lend it -
'Two it takes to make a quarrel;
One can always end it'."

PURSUING OLD ENMITIES

Some of the bitter enemies of Paul from pro-consular Asia, probably some of those who had sought his life before, had followed him to Jerusalem and were watching every opportunity to stir up the people against him. These men were the very opposite in spirit from Philip and his family. They harbored hate and constantly plotted to carry out their murderous plans. Paul had tried to avoid suspicion, for he knew that they were watching him and seeking some charge to lay against him. He had observed special ceremonies with others who had a vow in order that they might see that he still respected the law of Moses. In this some think that he made a mistake. Whether or not this view is correct, the plan did not succeed. The envious Jews from Asia had seen Trophimus, a Greek, with Paul and they supposed that he had taken him into the temple. They did not take the trouble to discover whether this suspicion were true. They wanted to bring a charge against Paul, whether true or false, so they began to shout, charging Paul with blasphemy, polluting the temple and attempting to destroy the law. Soon the people were excited and a mob was aroused.

The Roman guard, close by, hastened to the scene. When the mob saw the soldiers coming they ceased to beat Paul. The captain commanded that Paul should be bound and demanded who he was and what he had done. Some of the excited people cried one thing and some another, and the captain could not make out what it was all about. In order to protect Paul he demanded that he be carried into the castle. Possibly some of this same crowd had cried out against Jesus and demanded his life, more than twenty years before, when they shouted: "**Away with him, away with him, crucify him!**" (John 19:15). At least they had a similar spirit as had the mob at that day. Wicked men allow themselves to be driven to dreadful extremes of hate.

But why do Christians allow themselves to be driven by hate? Are they Christians when they give way to hate? **“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now”** (I John 2:9). **“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”** (I John 4:20). Some Christians have something of the same idea of those commandments as the little boy who was playing with his sister. A most unpleasant woman who lived nearby had been finding fault with them, and the little boy said: “I just hate her.” His little sister, greatly shocked, said: “Oh, no! the Bible says we must love every one.” “Oh well,” he replied, “Old Mrs. _____ wasn’t born when that was written.” A great many people excuse themselves just as readily from practicing the requirements of God’s Word concerning love.

Dr. Moffatt, the celebrated South African missionary, tells of a shepherd lad who had been converted by reading the New Testament. He had been very wayward, but the teachings of Jesus had made him quite a new boy. One day he came to Dr. Moffatt in much distress, telling him that their big watch-dog had gotten hold of the Book and had torn a page out of it. Dr. Moffatt comforted him by saying it was no matter for he could get another Testament. But the boy was not at all comforted. “Think of the dog,” he said. Dr. Moffatt laughed and said, “If your dog can crunch an ox bone, he is not going to be hurt by a bit of paper.” Dr. Moffatt supposed that the boy thought that the paper would hurt the dog’s teeth, but that was not it. “Oh Papa Moffatt,” he cried, “I was once a bad boy. If I had an enemy I hated him and everything in me wanted to kill him. Then I got the New Testament in my heart, and began to love everybody and forgive all my enemies, and now the dog, the great big hunting dog, has got the blessed Book in him, and will begin to love the lions and the tigers and let them help themselves to the sheep and the oxen.” We may smile at the simplicity of the lad, but there is a lesson which many mature Christians fail to grasp as well as he, namely, that every one who knows the love of Christ and the commands of Christ should practice a forgiving spirit.

OVERRULING THE WRATH OF MAN

God overruled the wrath of man to his own honor. Some had determined to kill Paul; to rush him away without any semblance of a trial. There were various things which prevented it. They were filled with hate and were ready to take his life, but they would not take life within the courts of the temple. It took a little time to get Paul through the crowd and out of the temple. On account of the recent attempt under the leadership of an Egyptian the Roman soldiers were guarding against any beginning of an uprising. This was to Paul’s advantage. Moreover, the fact that Paul was a Roman was to his advantage as it had been several times before. Paul was not only rescued from the mob but he was protected and finally transported by the Roman government to the very place where he had longed to go, to Rome. The people thought that Paul’s plans were being defeated, and Paul was likely tempted to so believe at that time. But Paul left all his plans with God, was ready to submit to His will, and in the end he found that in this, as in other things, God’s plan was best. A missionary in Russia was tried and sentenced to go to Siberia for preaching and teaching the Gospel, and that without knowing anything about the trial until it was over. “All right,” he said, when he heard the sentence, “that is where I have been wanting to go for some time. I long to preach Christ there, as I do not have the means, and now the question is providentially solved for me - I am to go at the expense of the government.” As with Paul, his enemies were helping to carry out both his plans and the plan of God.

Mrs. Satterwhite, in telling of a personal experience while she was a home missionary, said: “An ungodly father beat his boy to keep the lad from going to church or Bible school. The boy came to my class many times with marks of violence on him. Finally I exclaimed, “I wonder that you do not run away from home.’ He looked up in surprise and said: ‘I ain’t stood near as much as you said He did. If I stay at home perhaps Pa will believe some time.’” “How often God brings the blessed message of the Gospel to the very persons who are trying to resist it, or if He does not lead them to accept it, allows their enmity to drive the messenger to others who receive it with gladness. He thus makes the very wrath of man to praise Him.

MANIFESTING AN UNYIELDING COURAGE

Paul knew beforehand that something like this was coming. His friends entreated him not to go to Jerusalem. They prophesied his arrest. But he set his face like a flint, as Jesus had done before him. He said when they urged him not to go: **“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”** (Acts 21:13). Paul loved life, but he loved his Lord more than life. Shortly before this he had written those memorable words of the eighth chapter of Romans: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.**

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

A fishing village called Caistor, near Yarmouth, on the Norfolk coast, is a dangerous place and has the first record in all England in regard to the number of rescues effected by the life boats. In November, 1901, during a terrible storm, signals of distress were seen at sea. The violent hurricane raged so furiously that it took three hours to launch the life-boat. And when the boat had been out only half an hour it was overturned and nine of the crew of twelve were drowned. James Haylett lost two sons and a grandson in the catastrophe. But the veteran seaman said simply, and with no touch of boastfulness: “Caistor lifeboat men never turn back. They would have kept there till now, if necessary, to save men in distress. It was against the rule to go back when distress signals were shown.” No wonder the king personally presented Mr. Haylett with a gold medal in recognition of his services.

So Paul could not be persuaded to turn back. He had resolved to march ever forward and nothing could swerve him from his purpose. The Macedonian call, “Come over and help us!” was still ringing in his ears and heart, and he was resolved to go wherever men did not know Jesus that he might enable them to find Him and be saved from eternal death. Paul was certain of the fact that God had called him to bear the Gospel to the Gentiles and he would not be disobedient to the heavenly vision for anything that men might offer.

A father who was an officer in the Union Army served in the same regiment with his son. One day during a battle he called for his son, wrote out an order, and, handing it to him said: "Deliver this to the general down on the firing line." The young man placed the message under his belt, mounted his horse and rode away. The enemy's bullets flew thick and fast while he made the dangerous ride. The father stood and watched and waited, and wondered, a strange conflict raged in his soul because he knew that his son had been exposed to danger at his own command. At last the son rode back into his father's presence on his foam covered horse and dismounted. The father threw his arms about the boy's neck and said: "My son I did not want you killed, but I had to send a man whom I could trust." God loved His servant Paul more than any father can love a son; He did not delight in seeing him suffer, but He needed a messenger to send on the greatest of all errands, a messenger who would take the Gospel to the great lost world, and He wanted a man whom He could trust. May Paul be our example! May we ever be true to our trust, and may we never turn back from any work to which God calls or any mission to which He sends us!

QUESTIONS (Acts 21:1-40)

1. How did Paul use his time at Tyre?
2. What shows the love of the people for him?
3. What evangelist did Paul find at Caesarea?
4. Is it probable that Philip had suffered at the hands of Paul? Did he forgive?
5. Tell something of the character and work of Philip and his daughters?
6. What did Agabus prophesy would occur to Paul at Jerusalem?
7. How did Paul receive the entreaties of his friends concerning his proposed visit to Jerusalem?
8. Whose will were they willing to obey?
9. How was Paul received at Jerusalem?
10. What constituted the burden of his report?
11. How did Paul endeavor to turn away the hatred of the Jews?
12. What charge did his enemies bring against him?
13. What was the mob about to do with Paul?
14. How was he rescued?
15. Who did the captain think Paul was?
16. How did Paul prove that he was not a leader of sedition?
17. How did God overrule the wrath of man in this matter?
18. How was Paul ready to make use of his opportunities?
19. How was Paul's learning of value to him when speaking to the soldiers and the mob?
20. What was Paul's source of courage? What is ours?

~ end of chapter 37 ~

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