

>>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 32 <<<<<<<<

- 1) From last time, you recall that Paul was speaking to the elders from Ephesus.
- 2) We pick up now at the conclusion of that goodbye.

**Acts 20:25–35 (NIV)**

- 3) This is the real tear jerk moment in this meeting.
- 4) Paul is saying that they will never see him again.
  - a) He is very final in his wording. There is no room for suppositions or maybes.
- 5) I have had only a few of those moments in my life but when I think deeply about them, I can still feel the knot in my throat and the hurt.
- 6) Paul makes what at first appears to be an odd statement in the NIV.

Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you.

- 7) In the NASB the verse is rendered slightly different:

Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people.

- 8) I think this is a more reasonable translation and it truly fits with his next statement.

For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

- 9) Paul then describes an ominous warning regarding the responsibilities the elders will face in the coming times.
  - a) Their flocks will be attacked by evil forces from without and from within and it will be their responsibility to guard against those forces and keep the flock safe.
  - b) This must have added even more pain to the moment to think that some of this evil will actually come from among their own ranks.
- 10) One other point to be made here is that these elders are becoming painfully aware that they are on their own.
  - a) God of course will always be there for them but Paul will not be.
  - b) This is like taking the training wheels off the bicycle.
- 11) And finally, he is reminding them that this should not be something new – he has been telling them about the dangers for the last 3 years.

***Do our elders have to deal with the issues today that Paul is warning these men against?***

***In what ways?***

- 12) Paul concludes his admonitions to these elders by simply saying to continue to work hard, remember his example regarding money and other matters and continue to support the poor among them.

13) Finally, we read...

**Acts 20:36–38 (NIV)**

14) Again, a very emotional goodbye for all of them.

**Acts 21:1–6 (NIV)**

15) As mentioned earlier, here is another time that, through these disciples at Tyre, Paul is being warned (urged) not to continue on to Jerusalem.

a) It is important to note that this was by or through the Spirit.

**Acts 21:7–16 (NIV)**

1) The Philip spoken of here of course is the Philip of Ethiopian eunuch fame from back in chapter 8.

2) Agabus, the prophet, comes from Judea and by way of prophesy of the Holy Spirit, he clearly tells Paul of the plight that awaits him.

a) As mentioned previously, this is the same prophet who prophesied about the famine in Antioch.

3) This is indeed the last chance anyone has to talk Paul out of this – the next stop on the journey is Jerusalem.

4) The people then plead with Paul not to continue on to Jerusalem, all to no avail.

5) Paul's first response is interesting. He says:

“Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?”

***Why do you think their response and weeping is breaking Paul's heart?***

6) Let's refocus for just a moment.

a) Paul is on a mission to deliver the contribution for the poor in Jerusalem.

b) In the truth of the situation, this is really the only “given” reason for this journey.

i) We also know that there are others who are with him who can accomplish this task so truly, that is not a very solid reason in and of itself to continue the journey.

c) Paul obviously has something in mind but, beyond his being willing to suffer the consequences of his actions and beyond we do not know what it is.

d) He states this again here very emphatically:

“I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

e) We really do not know the exact reason for his absolute insistence.

7) I think we need to wrestle a little more with several questions here.

***First, what normally happens when a person or persons ignore God’s prophets?***

***Why does this not apply to Paul – or does it?***

***What are some reasons you might think Paul has for being this committed to this path?***

***Can you think of a reason(s) that the Holy Spirit is acting as He is in this particular situation – so many warnings, even prophetic and graphic, and yet He appears unwilling to stop Paul?***

### **Acts 21:15–22 a (NIV)**

- 8) We begin here with a situation that could be considered a surprise.
- 9) If, the output of the Jerusalem conference was taken seriously by the very men who created it, Why would there be problem like this?
- 10) Paul obviously does not do what they are saying that he is.
  - a) He is not telling (I think the implication here is “forcing”) the Jews living among the Gentiles to abandon the Law.
  - b) I think the phrase “living among the Gentiles” also has some significance in that it implies that Paul is promoting a dual standard.
- 11) What he is clearly saying to the believing Jews is that those rituals and other requirements of the Law are no longer “required”.
  - a) If they choose, they may keep them but they are now only a ritual – not something that God looks at as a requirement or prerequisite to be one of His children.
  - b) Yet here we are back to the same issue again with just a little different take.
- 12) My thought on this is that these “thousands” of Jews who are Christians are of the opinion that we discussed some weeks back.
  - a) Their mindset is that one must be a Jew first and always before one can be a Christian bringing the requirement of circumcision with it.
  - b) If indeed, they did understand the freedom in Christ and the fulfillment of the Law as it truly is then this would be a non-issue.
- 13) And, to make matters worse, it appears that these men are **not** willing to stand up and attempt to set them straight.
- 14) And here comes the really bad part. Continuing, we read ...

### **Acts 21:22b–26 (NIV)**

- 1) These verses actually say and affirm several things about the situation.

- a) First, James and all the elders are wanting Paul to reaffirm his Judaism through participation in this purification ritual.
  - i) Their reasoning is that by Paul’s participation in the ritual, he will be considered a “true Jew” keeping the Law and therefore would not be teaching what the reports were saying.
  - ii) Don’t miss the connection here and the simultaneous disconnection!
    - (1) Connection – because you are living as a Law-Abiding Jew – you would not teach such a heresy.
      - (a) To say this another way, “if you do what we are asking, you will be seen as a Jew who is a Christian” and not one who WAS a Jew and is now a Christian.
    - (2) Disconnection – just because Paul is living and keeping the Law in most ways does NOT mean he doesn’t understand the fact that the Law has been fulfilled and is not binding in the way it once was.
- b) The next affirmation in all this is that they (elders and James) still are disconnecting Jews and Gentiles.
  - i) The reference to the letter written to the Gentiles back in Acts 15 is clearly not (as it should have been) a disavowing of a dual standard – in truth, in this context, it is exactly the opposite – an affirmation that there is a double standard.
    - (1) The only thing that was changed was that the Law was not to be bound on the Gentile – not that the Law had been fulfilled and was no longer binding on the Jew as well.
- 2) Paul goes along with their desires I personally think to more defuse the situation than to buy into or agree with the assumptions that these men are making.
- 3) This falls squarely inline with Paul’s statements regarding becoming all things to all people that he might win a few.

**1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law, *I became* as *one* under the Law, though not being under the Law myself, so that I might gain those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without the Law, *I became* as one without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

- 4) Here is another one of those opinions – if this is allowed to stand as is among the elders in the Jerusalem church, I see no way this can ever be reconciled.

- 5) I further suggest that history bears this out in that within the next 100 to 300 years, the Christian religion becomes primarily Gentile.
- a) In fact, orthodoxy of the “Christian” church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century outlawed practice of most of the rituals of the original Jewish law.
  - b) According to James Dunn in his book the Parting of the Ways.

“There was a post-Nicene "double rejection" of the Jewish Christians by both Gentile Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. The true end of ancient Jewish Christianity occurred only in the 5th century.”