Finding Strength in Scripture: Reflections on Acts 21

A journey of faith and courage

Reading and Listening Session



With Sister Paulette Morrison on September 11, 2022



Today, as we reflect on the events of September 11th, a day etched in our memories with profound sadness and resilience, let us turn to the Word of God for guidance, strength, and hope. The story of the Apostle Paul in Acts 21 offers a powerful narrative of courage, faith, and unwavering commitment in the face of adversity.

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

Our journey begins with Paul's voyage to Jerusalem. As we read in **Acts 21:1-5 (NIV)**:

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. We sought out the disciples and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including the women and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.

This passage illustrates the heartfelt connection Paul had with the early church communities and the spiritual warnings he received. The disciples, guided by the Spirit, cautioned him against going to Jerusalem, sensing the danger that awaited him.

Prophetic Warnings and Unwavering Resolve

Continuing our reading in **Acts 21:7-11 (NIV)**:

We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’

Here, we see the theme of **Daughters' Prophesy**, the prophetic gift manifested through Philip’s daughters, and the dramatic warning of Agabus. Despite these clear warnings, Paul remained

resolute, displaying **Courageous Faith** in the face of impending suffering. He knew his mission, and he would not be deterred.

Paul's response is captured powerfully in **Acts 21:13 (NIV)**:

Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

This verse embodies unwavering commitment and selfless dedication to the Gospel. His willingness to sacrifice everything resonates deeply, challenging us to examine our own level of commitment to our faith.

Arrival in Jerusalem and Growing Tensions

The narrative progresses with Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, as highlighted in **Acts 21:17-21 (NIV)**:

When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come.

Paul **Share[d] [His] Testimony**, detailing his ministry among the Gentiles. However, tensions arose as Jewish believers, still zealous for the law, had heard accusations against Paul. To address these concerns, the elders proposed a plan.

An Offering of Purification

To demonstrate his respect for the Jewish law and customs, Paul participated in **An Offering of Purification**, as instructed by the elders. This is found in **Acts 21:25 (NIV)**:

As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

This act was intended to dispel rumors and promote unity within the early church.

Arrest and Defense

The situation escalated, culminating in Paul's arrest, as described in **Acts 21:30-33 (NIV)**:

The whole city was in an uproar, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him,

news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd. When the people saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done.

Amidst the chaos, Paul sought to address the crowd, asserting his identity and faith, as recorded in **Acts 21:37-39 (NIV)**:

As the soldiers were about to take him into the barracks, Paul asked the commander, “May I say something to you?” “Do you speak Greek?” he replied. “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?” Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

Paul's actions illustrate his courage and his continued desire to **Share [His] Testimony**, even in the face of imminent danger.

Transformation Through Scripture

Paul's journey in Acts 21, with its themes of prophetic warnings, unwavering faith, and turbulent events, offers a profound message of **Transformation**. Just as Paul faced trials and tribulations with courage and reliance on his faith, we too can find strength in the Word of God during difficult times. The events of September 11th, and the countless other challenges we face, remind us of the importance of resilience, faith, and unity. May we be inspired by Paul's example to stand firm in our convictions and share our faith with boldness, trusting in God's guidance and provision.

Reflection

As we remember September 11th, let us draw inspiration from the story of Paul. Despite facing warnings and opposition, he remained steadfast in his mission. We too, can face our challenges with courage, faith, and a commitment to sharing the message of hope and love. Let the Word of God be our guide, transforming us into instruments of peace and understanding in a world that desperately needs both.