

HIS JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Acts 21:1-16

I. From Miletus to Tyre. 21:1-6.

"After we had torn ourselves from them" is a forcible description of the painful and reluctant parting of Paul and the elders of Ephesus at Miletus. They sailed during the daytime, and stopped over nights in different ports for safety.

When Paul left Miletus he took the quickest route to Jerusalem. He was driven by divine impulse to attend the Feast of Pentecost. Missing this feast at other times did not seem to matter much, but at this particular time the stage was set for a divine act, and Paul was the main actor.

They went in a straight course to Coos, which was forty miles south of Miletus. It was noted for its school of medicine. It must have been of great interest to Luke, the physician. Here the ship probably lay at anchor over night. Coos was a small island.

The next day they reached Rhodes, which was the name of a famous island and its capital city, about fifty miles southeast of Coos. It was celebrated for the great temple of the sun, and the Colossus, one of the seven wonders of the world, a brazen statue over one hundred feet high at the head of the harbor, but then in ruins, having been thrown down by an earthquake. Here they probably lay at anchor during the night.

Then they proceeded to Patara which was a city about sixty miles east of Rhodes. It had a good harbor, and was the resort of coasting vessels. Here, they changed to a ship sailing direct for Tyre, in Phoenicia. This was a distance of about 340 miles. In Tyre they found a company of disciples, the members of the church there. The gospel had been preached there soon after the martyrdom of Stephen (11:19), and a congregation gathered. (15:3). It is implied that they located the disciples by searching or inquiry. They tarried with them for seven days. We may take it for granted that they spent a Lord's day in an assembly with them. We cannot doubt that a ministry of strengthening filled these days and made them blessed.

In his hurried journey, Paul passed Cyprus without stopping. It was a place of many sacred memories, but duty to God was more important than satisfying a whim or gratifying a personal wish. Hence, Cyprus became but an isle of memory. Cyprus had been the scene of conflict. It had been a place of broken friendship. It had been the battlefield of hot passion and hasty words. As Paul recalled these memories he was somewhat filled with gloom.

But Cyprus suggested other things. It was there the Roman proconsul realized he had a soul, and by Paul's wise instructions had come into a new world. The best in Paul came out in Cyprus as well as his worthy traits. There are two sides to each one of us, and the good is always struggling against the bad. Cyprus was never the same after Paul's visit, nor was Paul ever the same. He immortalized Cyprus as Jesus did Bethlehem. He passed Cyprus as one passes an enchanted spot.

Who won the disciples of Christ at Tyre? Evidently they were the converts of Paul. These disciples were as lights shining in the darkness of a pagan city--lights which all of the sin of paganism could not dim.

Paul's visit at Tyre was primarily a social one. He always enjoyed his friends, especially the ones he had won to the Lord. Such experiences formed ties that were not easily broken. These friends were as his own children to him. While his visit

was chiefly social, he made it a spiritual blessing as well. Paul drew no line of demarcation between his spiritual and his social life. In his religious life he never forgot to be social, and in his social life he never forgot to be religious.

The Tyrean disciples had, through some prophet perhaps, a message from the Holy Spirit on the basis of which they said to Paul that he ought not to go on to Jerusalem. They were informed by the Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited the apostle at Jerusalem. Prompted by their feelings for him, they exhorted him not to go there, if he had any regard for his own safety or personal welfare. The prophetic warning of his brethren, however, prepared him through grace to encounter these perils and confirmed his conviction that it was God's will that he should suffer in His cause. The answer which Paul gave to their warning is not given, but we know that he did not swerve from his purpose.

Beautiful is the farewell scene in connection with this visit. It even surpasses the farewell of the previous chapter. The entire Christian group, men, women, and children, accompanied them, and a final farewell service was held on the sands of the beach, beyond the suburbs of the city.

Modern missionary life presents its parallels to the scene so briefly sketched in this verse. A missionary in the region of Paul's birthplace related his experience in departing from the field with his family for a temporary absence. He said: "More than a hundred of the converts accompanied us out of the city; and there, we halted, and a prayer was offered amid tears. Between thirty and forty escorted us two hours farther, on horses and mules, singing hymns as we proceeded on our way. Then another prayer was offered, and with saddened countenances and with weeping they forcibly broke away from us. It really seemed as though they could not turn back."

It is a sweet picture of love. Even the children came along to get the last glimpse of the great man of God, who had tarried in their midst. And what a prayer meeting it must have been, there on the seashore. Then the farewells and the embarking, while the local Christians returned to their homes.

II. From Tyre to Caesarea. 21:7-14.

It was about thirty miles from Tyre to Ptolemais. This completed the sea portion of Paul's journey. When they reached Ptolemais, they saluted the brethren and spent one day in their company. It is evident that there was a church there. Paul doubtless had visited them before when passing through the city.

This one day afforded them an opportunity for a little rest, greetings to the local Christians and preparation for the land journey of forty miles to Caesarea. At Caesarea the party remained some days. At least Paul and Luke were entertained in the home of Philip the evangelist. The word "evangelist" means an announcer of good tidings.

Special mention is made of the four unmarried daughters of Philip, who had the gift of prophecy. They possessed the gift of prophesying, and of teaching, and they also made use of the gift. They exercised their gift in their sphere, in their home, the house of their father. The New Testament does not contain any record of any woman being a minister of Christ.

In verse ten we meet another old friend, Agabus. He came as a prophet from Jerusalem where Paul was going. Coming into the presence of a group of Christians, he took Paul's girdle and bound himself hand and foot. Then he explained his prophecy that in Jerusalem the Jews would thus bind the owner of the girdle and turn him over to

the Gentiles--Jews and Gentiles combining in his persecution--so both the members of Paul's party and the local Christians united in the opinion that Paul must not go. They besought him not to expose himself to impending danger. Prediction was of the Holy Spirit, but the prohibition was their own.

His sublime answer shows how much better he understood the Lord's will than even they did. He certainly thought that the Spirit warned, not to deter him, but to prepare him for his course. He said, "What are you doing that you weep?" You only intensify my suffering--break my heart--without lessening my danger or changing my purpose. Their opposition to his going was not only painful to him, but was useless for he was not to be shaken in his purpose. Stop all this, "for I am ready not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," if that be necessary. He had well considered the matter and counted the cost. He was thoroughly convinced of the Lord's will, and nothing could cause him to swerve therefrom. He deemed it a privilege, not a hardship, to suffer in the cause of Christ. He held himself in readiness to suffer and even to die for Christ's sake.

III. From Caesarea to Jerusalem. 21:15-16.

At last they made all preparations, packed up their baggage, and made the trip of sixty-three miles to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples of Caesarea joined the company. They were evidently solicitous about the dangers threatening Paul at Jerusalem. They had made arrangements with Mnason to be the host of Paul and his friends while they were in Jerusalem. He may have been a personal follower of Christ, or he may have been converted on the day of Pentecost. He did what he could--entertained and shared in the work.

One outstanding lesson of this passage of scripture is that each of us must do what God tells us to do. It gives us a wonderful revelation of Paul:

1. His influence on others.
 - a. Their thought of him.
 - b. Their love for him.
 - c. Their prayer for him.
 - d. Their sorrow for themselves.
2. His personal character.
Tenderness, strength, courage, trustfulness.
3. His blessed secret.
Christ was all and in all.