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**Is Where the Mature are Compelled
To Go The Extra Mile
Acts Chapter 21**

What we see in the Book of Acts Chapter Twenty-one is Paul traveling, and he is traveling with a mission. He is going back to Jerusalem. He is going back to Jerusalem for the sake of bringing the gift or the collection that he has been taking to help the church in Jerusalem, often mentioned in the Book of Corinthians. He mentions, for instance, those in Macedonia in Second Corinthians Chapter Eight, who gave even out of their poverty for the sake of the Jews in Jerusalem. The reason for the collection is because there was a famine in Jerusalem. Because of that famine, the churches began to take up a collection even in Greece and beyond for the sake of the church in Jerusalem. What was God doing? Well, it was pretty clear that God was uniting the churches together. God was causing the church and the body of Christ to function in unity and compassion for the brethren. There is a good picture of this in Ephesians where he talks about

the walls and the barriers in 2:14 that are there between the Jews and the Gentiles. He says that barriers can come down. We are all a part of the same family. You read that in the book. You might be able to hear the Ephesians saying, “Well, sure, the walls are down; so, we need to donate. God was tearing those walls down in that respect. I think one of the things that he mentions to the Corinthians is that they received spiritual gifts from the Jews in the sense that salvation first came to the Jews. After all, it was the Jewish church that began to spread the word. He says it is good for us to give physical things back to them. There is a unity that is happening. Paul is heading back to Jerusalem for the purpose of bestowing this gift upon the church of Jerusalem. What we find is that at every single turn, he is running into difficulty. I think the thought often is, “Well, if we are doing the right thing, then life should be smooth as butter.” I think you will discover that to not be the case. Will God bless? Yes. Will God richly supply and take care of you? Yes. But it does not mean things will go smoothly. God is calling leaders to take not only stands, but to be willing to go the extra mile. We will see this in the text. What God is and has established in Scripture is that if you are a good

leader, you have to be willing to go the extra mile. There is an old saying by Dr. Bob of Bob Jones University. It went something like this: “Others may, you cannot.” What he meant by the phrase was that there are some things that the world can do but, because you are a leader, you cannot do it. There are lines that you have to draw because you are a leader. James will say put it this way:

(James 3:1) “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.”

According to the world's way of thinking, that is reversed. They think that if they have a position of authority, then they can be condescending and get away with things that everybody else is not getting away with. But Scripture says just the opposite. It says you are held to a higher standard; and, because of that, you have to be willing to go the extra mile. There are things that you can do that I cannot, simply because of my position. As we look in Acts Chapter 21, we see the higher calling of Paul. The reason that I put “going the extra mile” in there is because he is doing a lot of traveling. During the travels, he goes many

places out of his way. Things happen as he travels this lengthy distance. He went from Asia Minor at the end of Chapter 20 to Jerusalem at the end of Chapter 21. His destination was Jerusalem. As he took this trek back to his home, he went there with purpose in mind. It is for the sake of others, not for his own comfort. The Scripture has conveyed this all the way through this chapter. We will see sacrifice on behalf of Paul that you would not expect a normal person to do. In fact, you are kind of taken aback by the fact that he was willing to do that. Our paragon, of course, is Jesus Christ who took up the cross. When James and John wanted to have the main seats in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said that He was about to drink a cup that had a lot of consequences to it. He asked James and John if they were sure they wanted to hop on board with this? “Of course. We are able to do that” was their answer. However, what Jesus revealed to us is that because He was the leader, He would go to places where we could not. I think it was a warning. In First Timothy 3, Paul says:

(I Timothy 3:1) “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”

But Paul then goes down the list of the requirements:

(1 Timothy 3:2) “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...”

Paul continues down the long list. He is telling us that there are higher standards for an overseer. Once again, the world reverses this. Paul talks about this in Philippians 3. If you are familiar with Philippians Chapter 3, you do not need to turn there. If you are not, it probably would not hurt to follow along. At the beginning of Chapter 3, Paul talks about the Pharisees and how they ravaged people and how they had taken advantage of their positions. Then he talks about the things that he had done for his own aggrandizement, the trophies that he had achieved. He concludes this though in:

(Philippians 3:7) “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

(Philippians 3:8) “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ

Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,”

He had decided to follow a higher standard. This is the essence of what he is saying within the text. The question is, what is the higher standard? The answer is, “I have decided to follow Christ.” His statement is:

(Philippians 3:10) “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;”

It is a pretty interesting phrase. Knowing about the sufferings of Christ took him on a journey where he took on many of the same things. He gave up certain things in his life. None of the sufferings felt like a hindrance because he was willing to give up everything for Christ. I believe that anybody who goes into ministry must be willing to give up everything. I believe there is absolutely no compromise in that; there will come a time when he may be called to suffer. That said, he may not be called to do that. I think it is interesting in the Old Testament with

Abraham when God says, “Okay. Take your son, your only son, and lay him on the altar.” That is the same as laying everything on the altar. That is the requisite that God has for those who are going into ministry. Unfortunately, what most people think is what they are reading in the advertisements: that in order to be in ministry, all you have to do is to get the degree. It is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. Yet, I see it on good websites. All you have to do is get this degree, and you will be in the ministry. How ridiculous is that? That has nothing to do with character. It has nothing to do with a calling from God. It has nothing to do with the affirmation of the church or the Spirit of God in that person. I think it is a sad commentary. Should you study to show yourself approved under God or a workman who needs not to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of God? Absolutely.

However, that is not what makes you a pastor or calls you into a ministry. God’s calling is a pretty powerful thing. Do you remember why Moses was not allowed to go into the promised land? He hit the rock. He hit the rock with his staff. The other Israelites had done all these horrific things. Moses just hit the rock, but he was not supposed to do that. Anger—he was angry. But, please. The guy has

been leading all these people and putting up with their complaining and sinning. To compound it, he was told to hit the rock a previous time. This is the second time, but this time he was told to speak to the rock. That was the only difference. It was a very minuscule infraction, if you think of it that way. We could say it was only a matter of semantics. The point is that there was a higher accountability, and God exposes us all the way through. Moses was angry at their grumbling. That was why he hit the rock. He had a good reason to be angry, did he not? In a way, it was like Jonah. He wanted those Ninevite people dead. God told him, “Well, you have good reason to be angry.” Jonah actually did not have a good reason, but he felt like he did. He told God that he knew God was compassionate. True. That was why he was angry—because God was compassionate.

As we look at Chapter 21, what we are going to see is God’s calling being unveiled. I often think that, to me, one of the key texts regarding this is:

(Romans 15:1) “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.”

Wow. To me this is a touching text where it establishes the standard for those who are stronger. Ultimately, it gives the paragon of Christ. The way the world sees it is: “Now we who are strong ought to take advantage of all those who are weaker than us in order to get ahead. Step on them. Walk your way up on the bodies of those who have fallen.” That is the way the world would read it. To whom is he talking? To the strong. He is not talking to the weak. More specifically, we are talking about those who are strong in their faith. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good so that we build him up.

(Romans 15:3) “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproach you fell upon Me.”

In other words, He took upon Himself our sins. This is a great passage that reminds us that God is calling. What we will see then is Paul adhering to that higher calling as

he begins to take this journey. If I could put it this way, it is a walk of a higher call. We will see the fact that God is calling the mature. In fact, Paul will state in,

(Philippians 3:15) “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;”

The word translated “perfect” is mature. His point is:

(Philippians 3:14) “I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ.”

What we are talking about is that there are people who are content with mediocrity. We know that. Fortunately, there are others who will say, “I will not be content. I will press on towards the mark of the high calling.” It is a higher calling with a higher standard. It is the difference between somebody settling for good and another striving for the best. You would not believe how many worlds apart those two things are. It is the difference between somebody walking up to you and saying, “Can I do this and get away with it?” as opposed to somebody saying, I

do not even want to get close to that.” It is a totally different way of thinking. God is calling for those who would seek His best. We will see this within the passage. As you look at the first 6 verses, Paul is starting his journey. He finds a ship that plans to cross over to Phoenicia and goes aboard. We will not read all of the text because I am trying to get through a whole chapter. Pardon me for not going through the details. Many of your Bibles probably have maps in the back where you can see the journeys of Paul. He is talking about the ship going from Asia Minor.

(Acts 21:3) “When we came in sight 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.”

That tells us where he is. Syria is north of the area of Caesarea and Jerusalem. He is heading that way. What is interesting to me is that they kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre to unload the cargo. I think that is an interesting phrase. The reason I state that is that we know that on many ships there was a blend of passengers and cargo. However, there were specific ships that were well

equipped for largely passengers alone and others that were mostly cargo ships. We know that he is not going first class. I have nothing against first class, but the point is that he is on this mission. It seems as if he is trying to save all the money he can to make sure that all of it goes to Jerusalem. He is going the extra mile; I guess that is what I am saying. Going the extra mile for this church. There might have been other times where it would have been different. One of the things that Paul states is:

(Philippians 4:11) “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”

He says that he has had a lot. He probably has gone first class before. He has also had little. He knows how to deal with both. This text seems to emphasize that he is going the extra mile. He wanted to be above reproach and to make sure that as much money goes to the church of Jerusalem as possible. We pick up in:

(Acts 21:4) “After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.”

This is an interesting point. I think that sometimes people want to make the word spirit found here lower case to indicate that it was their own spirit, but I believe this is the Holy Spirit. I believe it is appropriate within the text to capitalize “Spirit.” The point is that he was being warned. This is a key point because we see Paul seemingly going against the Holy Spirit, which is not true at all. I want to lay that foundation. The Holy Spirit was clarifying Paul’s destination through these people. “Paul, you are going to Jerusalem, and you will be bound. It will not be a good thing.” Remember that he was taking this gift. I would be thinking, “I am taking this gift. Everybody will be happy. We will be celebrating. The church will be able to feed their poor people, and there will be some relief. It will be a time of celebration.” Would you not be thinking that? He is bringing this large amount of money. He came onto the shore, and Israel is just north of Syria. He stopped off at what was probably one of the early churches. Without hesitation, people began to tell him that he did not want

to go down there. It would go badly for him in Jerusalem. I can just imagine Paul asking, “Is this from you? Is this a premonition?” “No. The Spirit of God is telling us that you should not go down there.” The phrase is “not to set foot in Jerusalem” if you look again in Verse 4.

(Acts 21:5) “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.”

Was he listening? Yes. There are times when my wife says, “Do not do that,” but I go out and do it anyway. The scene on the beach is very much the same picture as we saw in Chapter 20. If you look at the end of Chapter 20:36-38, the people from the church at Tyre were crying and weeping. “Do not go. Do not go.” Everything that Paul heard was what? “Do not go.” Then in Verse 6, he went aboard the ship. He left. They headed toward home again. He continued his journey. I want you to see in the first 6 verses how Paul went the extra mile or how he was compelled. He wrote in Corinthians,

(II Corinthians 5:14) “For the love of God controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

The word translated “controls” can also be translated “compels”. It should be the love of God that compels you. The first 6 verses demonstrate that there was a sense of compelling by the Spirit of God to embrace and care for those who proclaim the truth. You see the embracing in the church in their warning him. They were caring for him. You know what I mean? You do not warn people for whom you do not care. Right? They asked him not to go in addition to the fact that they walked him down to the boat dock. We see their care. Why did they care so much for this man? There is a reason why. He brought the word truth. He states this in Chapter 20 to the church at Ephesus:

(Acts 20:20) “how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.”

He held back nothing as he declared the word of truth to them. When truth seekers hear the truth, they embrace those who proclaim the truth because they have been waiting to hear this all their lives. Finally, they hear it. There is a compulsion, I would say, by the Spirit that is drawn to those who bring this good news. This laid the foundation for why Paul is in this elevated position. Going on, look at Verses 7 through about 14. He is heading down now through Syria, basically on land although they could probably have taken a boat along the coastline. Verse 7 tells us:

(Acts 21:7) “When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.”

He then departed for Caesarea, which is not far from Jerusalem itself, probably the Roman port city. He entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven, with whom he stayed.

(Acts 21:9) “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.”

In other words, they were inspired by God to reveal certain things.

(Acts 21:10) “As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.”

Agabus was one of those who prophesied about the famine. He was a pretty accurate guy. Certain people kept records, so he could probably be trusted.

(Acts 21:11) “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.]’”

It is as though he was asking, “You want to know what bound looks like? You want to focus, Paul. You want to know what bound looks like? This is what it looks like.” He was theatrical in the passage. We know that this was the

Holy Spirit. This affirmed what was said at the earlier port. This is what the Holy Spirit said, “It is obviously not going to go well for you if you go to Jerusalem.” Who was saying that? The Holy Spirit.

(Acts 21:13) “When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents, began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.”

Who is the “we”? Well, we know Luke was involved because he wrote the Book of Acts, so he is including himself. There were undoubtedly others. The entourage who had traveled with Paul said, “Maybe we should not go. This does not look good.” They also begged Paul not to go. Now they were getting pretty intense.

(Acts 21:13) “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.’”

As in Chapter 20, the people responded with weeping and begging.

(Acts 21:14) “And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, ‘The will of the Lord be done!’”

Wait a minute! One church up north on the coast gave the message that this church later affirmed. The Holy Spirit was involved in both instances; yet Paul insisted that he was going. Is he going against the Holy Spirit? The answer is absolutely not. Then what was the purpose, what was the Holy Spirit doing? I will tell you. The purpose was to cause their relationship to deepen. There was a longing for Paul in this setting, a caring that was demonstrated by the church that was unprecedented in Paul's life.

When I was a child, we would visit my grandparents in North Carolina. When we drove out of the driveway to leave, my grandfather was usually at work. But my grandmother would be standing at the end of that driveway with about five handkerchiefs. She would be bawling. It was the hardest thing that we ever had to contend with, and yet it was the greatest thing that I remember because I knew my grandmother loved me. What God is doing is solidifying their love in Paul's heart

because Paul was going to prison. What picture do you want if you are going to suffer for people, if you are going to prison for people? What picture do you need to have in your mind to keep you sustained and to help you know that it is all worth it? All these loving arms and all these loving tears were shed for you while the people said, "We love you, Paul. We love you. You cannot go." How powerful do you think that was? The Holy Spirit was calling upon them to show deep care. How did they show care? They did not stand back and say, "Well, you will be hung today. Ho-hum." That's not faith. Scripture tells us that to care deeply for somebody is not a lack of faith. It is a demonstration of love. What is one of the main purposes of the church? This will surprise you. It is to unite the body. What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit? To unite the body. Do you not think that the body was being united here? The body was united more by Paul leaving than if he had stayed. The Spirit of God was working. We see Paul's compulsion along with his higher standard. Right? What Paul is compelled to do is to submit to the will of God no matter what the consequences are, no matter what the cost is. That is a high calling. I believe that those who are called and those who are doing their

best are always willing to give up things and to go the extra mile. There will be times when family members say, "Please do not do this." But you say, "I have to do it." It is not that they are wrong in asking you. It is a demonstration of love. I think that often we see it as adversarial. It is not. It is a loving thing. Paul does not respond harshly. He does not say, "Get behind me, Satan." He does let them know that they were breaking his heart, but it is because of their powerful love. At the end, they recognized that it was the Lord's will. This is the strength of conviction, and it had to be from God. That was a unifying statement of the body of Christ. When the church is called upon to sacrifice deeply something that it values so that the work of God can be accomplished, it is unifying to the body of Christ. The Church had not been unified more than at this time. When the Church as a whole began to say, "We are willing to give this up so that God's will can be accomplished," it is an act of God.

(Acts 21:15) "After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem."

(Acts 21:16) “Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.”

The entourage, the people who went with him, are compelled to go with him for his encouragement. They know they are going into the lion's den; yet they are compelled to go for the purpose of encouraging him. They are going out of their comfort zone for the purpose of encouragement. That is an interesting compulsion. I know that many of us would say, “All right. Tell me once again—there will be trouble in Jerusalem? Yes. Will anybody get hurt?” Maybe. “We are going just to encourage Paul? I am not so sure about that. I will see you next year. I will visit you in prison.” Instead of saying any of these things, they were compelled to go, and so they went. They picked up a disciple along the way, which suggests that God compelled and convinced him also. I would say in every case that these are people who are seeking the best because they are willing to let go of their comfort zones and safety.

As you look at verses 17-26, a very interesting phenomenon occurs. Paul finally arrived at the church at

Jerusalem, and they were all glorifying God. “We are glad you made it; and we are so thankful that God has done a great work by using you to minister to the Gentiles.” They are all excited about this. We do not hear them thanking him for the gift. That was the whole reason why he went. James, the pastor of the church of Jerusalem, calls Paul off to the side and said, “Listen. There is a little problem that we have. Here is the deal. There are many zealous Jews in our church. They still have the high standards of Judaism ingrained in them. After all, it is part of their culture. Paul, to a Jew, you become a Jew. To the Greek, you become a Greek. So here is the deal, Paul. There is a rumor going around that says that you are jumping ship. They think that you do not want to be a Jew anymore.” The Scripture uses the Greek word “apostasy.” James continued, “There are four guys who are taking a Nazarite vow. Why don’t you attach yourself to these four guys to show the Jews that you are really a Jew.”

The tradition went something like this. If you take a Nazarite vow, the minimum time was thirty days. It was a separation under God for a particular purpose. It was done willingly. Strangely enough, it is only mentioned in the Book of Numbers Chapter Six. In order to take the

vow, the person had to be of a willing heart and make certain commitments. He would separate himself from certain things, including wine. He could not drink grape juice or have grape jelly. He could not have figs or grapes. He had to literally stay away from those fruits. It is a picture of separation. They also could not cut their hair. From what we understand, there were probably three people in all of the Bible who were Nazarites from birth. Their parents had separated them from birth to be a Nazarite. One was Samson, one was Samuel, and the other we believe was John the Baptist. We have these paragons to serve as examples of how to live this kind of life. John the Baptist is often considered quite austere because of his standards of living. It is about separating yourself to such a degree that it is noticeable, but you are doing it because you are making a commitment for some reason. It is for a specific purpose, except for those who were Nazarite from birth which was a dedication by their mothers. The minimum time, according to tradition, was thirty days. Sixty days was probably more the trend, ninety days for some, a hundred days for others. Paul is now in Jerusalem. He does not have thirty days to give. They were getting ready to end their vow. At the end of

the vow, they would offer sacrifices and cut their hair all off. This truly displays the end of the vow. Why shave your head? That is an important question to ask. It is because you are not going to take any glory for anything that has been done. Shaving one's head represents sorrow along with ashes. It says, "I will not take any glory." Whatever happened as a result of the vow, you do not want to be the focus of glory. Also, at the end of that vow, you were to sacrifice two turtle doves, an ewe lamb, a ram, a meal offering, and an unleavened bread offering. Multiply that times four. James told him that these guys were getting ready to end their vow. "I will tell you what would really be respected by the Jewish community, that you pay for their offerings." It was allowed for someone else to pay or defray the cost of their offerings. It was allowed for you to attach yourself to their vow. It was one of the allowances that was made. To the Jewish community, this would send a huge signal because a Gentile would not do that. A Gentile would never do that. A Gentile would never be concerned for what Jews believe. It is an act that sends the message that he cared about Jewish customs. He did care about the things that were part of their life and wanted to minister to them. He did not tell him to "throw

the baby out with the bath water.” What the Jews thought was that he wanted to jump ship with the whole thing and that he did not even care about Moses. That was not true. None of that was true. Paul could have stood up on a pinnacle and preached to them and said that it was not true. They would never have believed him because Jews seek a sign. They wanted to see the reality of this expressed in his life; and there was no more powerful reality than Paul, we will use the phrase, going the “extra mile” so that he might minister to the Jewish believers. If you look at the passage, what he was compelled to do was to give his money. This came out of his pocket to pay for their sacrifice. I imagine that it was quite a large expense. It was for all four, which multiplied the expense. We know it was large because we know that the temple authorities were exploiting the people. He paid top dollar for those turtle doves, as well as the lamb, as well as the ram, as well as all of the kosher animals that were sold out of the temple. He paid top dollar and out of his own pocket. Why was he doing it? Because the mature are compelled to give even though, and this is a key point within the text, you may be misunderstood and reviled. If you think about it, Paul was clearly misunderstood by his

deeds and the things that he was doing; and he was reviled by those to whom he was bringing a gift to these people. These were the Jewish believers to whom he was bringing the gift. All they were doing was sitting around thinking, “He is jumping ship.” He just brought them a gift, and that was the way they treated the guy. But Paul does not say, “I was expecting better from you.” You do not hear any sign that he is indignant. He just hops right on board. You almost feel like saying, “Paul, you do not have to do this. Buddy, take it easy. These guys are not worth it.” He does not do that, does he? It reminds me of the wonderful passage in First Peter 2:21-23:

(I Peter 2:23) “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;”

Looking at the entire passage, if you would; it is talking about the fact that Christ, though He was reviled, did not revile in return. He took upon himself all of our sins. That was the Spirit of giving, even though He was misunderstood. If you are a leader, there will be times when you will be misunderstood. There have been

situations in my life where I reasoned with myself, “Okay, I can defend myself in this; but if I do, it will tear somebody else down. It is not worth it.” You have to walk away. Now people will say, “But you will be misunderstood.” “Well, I will have to be misunderstood because I will not defend myself if it tears somebody else down.” Yes. Even though it may be truthful.

Paul did not circumcise the Gentiles even though that would have adhered to the law. They believed that he was not affirming Judaism. They believed that he did not want to have anything to do with Moses as it says in Verse 21. In their minds, Paul had jumped ship, especially on the issue of circumcision. Paul was not telling them to not be Jews, but he was telling them that all these things pointed to Christ. The fear was that he was involved in a sect which was anti-Moses and anti-Law. He was denying that. In fact, he wanted them to understand that the Spirit of Christ Jesus came upon the Gentiles when they were baptized. Just as Jesus had said in Matthew 5:17, Paul explained the law was being fulfilled, not abolished. Paul went the extra mile. He did not need to do this. Most of us would say he should not have done it. But Paul said, “Look. I have some brothers here who are weak. This

means a lot to them. I will do it.” He was a Jew. Right? He was compelled. They twisted everything and lied about it; on top of that, they were tearing him down. He could have gotten on a platform, pointed his finger, and told them how stupid they were. But what good would it have done? A person who is committed to God has to think in terms of what their reaction would do to the word of God. What would it do to the proclamation that Christ came as the sacrificial Lamb? This is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians who were Jews:

(I Corinthians 9:20) “To the Jews I became 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;”

(I Corinthians 9:21) “to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.”

Paul went to many people who were not Jews. They had no business becoming a Jew because they were not Jews. It was not a part of their tradition. You know? There are

today Messianic Jews who still observe Jewish customs. These sacrifices were not for sin but were sacrifices related to cleansing and purging. It was their vow of separation from their vow, or another way of putting it was that it was a vow of consecration. The person who took the vow had a desire to go the extra mile. It is not a law but a gift that somebody wants to give, like the free-will offerings. It had such stringent requirements that the person was saying that he wanted to go the extra mile. If he did not have to, why in the world would anyone do this? This person would say, "Because I really want to be separated under the Lord." In many respects, this chapter is Paul being consecrated in every decision by going the extra mile because he really wanted this. I think you really have to be willing to do that, and that is what it shows. If you want to go the extra mile, there are times where you could defend yourself. But if you want to go the extra mile, you will step back and say, "Okay. Who would benefit if I get into a shouting match? I will not get into it, even if I am right. I will not do that because I know that it would tear down this person in the process. I will put my faith in God. I will trust in Him." Let me demonstrate this. I bought someone a gift, and he was upset with me for

some reason. I am not sure why, but that happens to me a lot. I am sure it is probably something I caused. Later, I was talking to him, and he said, “By the way, that thing you got me broke.” I responded, “Well, I'm sorry to hear that. It shouldn't have broken.” “Well, it did. I couldn't use it at all.” So, this past week, I sent another one to him. I said nothing about it. I got a call. Should I try to defend myself in the gift? He apologized to me. I should never have brought it up” or something like that. I said, “You know, it just gave me another opportunity to tell you that I care about you.” You can ask yourself how you want to handle something, but keep in mind that you can be very destructive in being right. Do not take it as though you have a goal to achieve. My dad used to tell me that it was better to be holy than to be right because being holy is a consecration and a sanctification that would set yourself apart as being like Christ. That is why Scripture says to speak the truth in love. People all too often leave out the love aspect. They like to blurt out the truth, and they say, “Well, it is the truth.” True, but you just laid somebody low with the truth. The thing you have to ask yourself is, “Will this truth benefit this person at this time?” There are times when it will not.

In Verses 27-36, we have another situation with the Jews from Asia. In spite of him going the extra mile, there were Jews in the city who did not care that he went the extra mile. They did not care to know that he really cared about them. They wanted him dead. So, they went after him. They were the ones who caused him to be bound. The Holy Spirit was right. He was bound. But the passage tells us that a mature person is compelled to suffer for doing what is gracious and right. In other words, there will be times when you do what is right and gracious; even so, you might suffer for it. This is what the whole Book of First Peter is about, by the way. It is better for you to suffer for doing what is right than to suffer for doing what is wrong. Peter will say that God has called us for this purpose—to suffer—that is a key point—to suffer for doing what is right. I know that sometimes we do the right thing, and then bad things happen. We go, “Man, I do not know why that has happened to me.” I know why. You have been called to suffer for doing what is right. The mature person will say, “Well, that is why I am here. You really should take time to read this. But you really do not see Paul going, “Man, I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't be here.”

Now what God did was to cause the word to get out to the Romans. They saw these people beating him without a trial, which was not allowed. It was unlawful. It was unlawful to mess with a Roman citizen without at least a trial. It was also unlawful to beat up anyone without a trial, but especially a Roman citizen. The Romans had more scruples than those in Jerusalem. They could not beat someone without a trial. Word reached the Romans, and God began to rescue him. The thought was, “Okay, if I must suffer, so be it. I will do it.” What is the sense of doing something that you will have to suffer for? That argument does not even pass through the mind of Paul. If you shoot for the highest mark, you will not complain when you suffer for doing what is right. You will willingly suffer for doing what is right. You will perceive it as a badge of honor in which, at this moment, you get to identify with Christ because that was exactly what he did. That is the point. That is the parallel, basically, with First Peter.

At the end of the chapter in verses 37-40, Paul was compelled to proclaim the truth of the Gospel even though he was cognizant of the adversarial surroundings. He knew that there were people who were very hostile

toward him, and yet he turned to the warden. He asked, “Do you think I can have a word with them?” Now these were the people who had been beating him up; getting their attention, he said, “Let me just say something to you.” In Chapter 22, he began by talking to his audience, the people who were aggressively hostile. Have you ever spoken before an aggressively hostile audience? Let me tell you something. It is a most uncomfortable thing to do. It is hard enough to stand in front of people who do want to hear you and talk. But when you stand in front of people who you know do not want you there, it is terrible! Has this happened to you before? Indeed. You know that they do not want you there, and you can see the hostility in their faces and bodies. But you have to go through with what you are saying. Now imagine having the option not to go up. I would take it. But Paul says, “I have to say this. I have to care for them.” Paul will even say in the Book of Romans:

(Romans 9:3) “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,”

The same people who were trying to kill him, he could wish himself accursed for. He was compelled to proclaim the Gospel even though cognizant of adversarial surroundings. This is a sign of maturity. There will be times when you will be in a place that is adversarial. You will say, “Okay, they do not want me here.” But you will hear the Spirit of God say, “You need to say something.” The person who is shooting for that higher mark will proclaim the truth in the midst of adversarial surroundings. Chapter 21 is an interesting set of passages illustrating one going the “extra mile.” The Jews who seized Paul were not Jewish believers. Correct? Yes. The ones who seized him came from Asia. They were trying to kill him. Why were they there? Because of the feast. They had come during the Feast of Pentecost. I think he had been trying to get there in time for that feast. They came in for that particular feast from all around. Yes, sir. When the Romans took Paul to their barracks, he asked them if he could speak using the Greek language.

(Acts 21:38) “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

Scripture is telling us that there was a troublemaker who had been there. God allowed Paul to speak because of what was on his mind. It really was the sovereign hand of God. What was on the mind of those who were in charge of keeping the peace was whether he was this troublemaker. God allowed him to clarify to them that he was not that person. Scripture is revealing that God was maintaining Paul's integrity in spite of how people were trying to tear him down.

Prayer

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Father, we give You thanks for these examples that reveal to us just what it means to go the extra mile. Father, forgive us for our gripping and complaining about the sufferings that we often go through because we did something wrong. If it was our fault, then we should be found out. But, Lord, take us to that higher level of being willing to suffer while doing what is right. Lord, give us the opportunity to say something to those who may not even want to have anything to do with us when it is Your will. As we speak, may we continue to display care and love for

them in spite of their animosity. We know that this is a higher calling. We know that it is a higher walk. God, help us not to be a people of mediocrity. Help us not to be a people who settle for being good. Rather, help us to be a people who are looking for the best, people who are pressing on towards the mark of the high call of Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.