READY TO BE BOUND; READY TO DIE

Acts 21:1-36

Key Verse 21:13, “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.”

Last week we studied Paul’s farewell speech to the elders of the Ephesus Church. In his farewell speech we learned Paul’s deep affection for the church and his resolution to finish the task which was given to him-the task of testifying the good news of God’s grace. Paul encouraged them to be shepherds of God’s church. Shepherds are those who protect their sheep from wild beasts, provide them with green pasture, and guide them towards the right path. Paul served the church of Ephesus for three years as their shepherd with great humility and tears. There is a saying that Christian churches are built by the blood of missionaries. This generation needs such devoted and affectionate shepherds who serve sheep with great humility and tears like Paul. I pray that we all may be shepherds of the church of God and raise many good shepherds like Paul. Amen.

In today’s passage Paul finally returns to Jerusalem after his second and third missionary journeys. He should have been welcomed by the people of Jerusalem like a war hero. But persecution and arrest charges were waiting for him instead. Paul’s arrest and trial in Jerusalem are parallel to Jesus’ arrest and trial. We see the image of Jesus through Paul’s passion in Jerusalem. Let’s learn how Paul faced and dealt with the upcoming suffering and how God protected Paul from danger.

First, I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (1-16) Verses 1-16 tells us Paul’s returning route from Miletus to Jerusalem. After an affectionate farewell with the elders of Ephesus Church, Paul and his companions sailed from Miletus via Kos, Rhodes, Patara, Cyprus, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea towards Jerusalem. On the way, the believers in Tyre urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem because they knew through the Spirit that danger was waiting for Paul in Jerusalem. (4) But Paul continued on his way. The word ‘continue’ repeats two times in verse 5 and 7. Despite the warning to him, Paul continued on his journey. Paul reminds us of Jesus who continued on his way to Jerusalem even though he knew that his arrest was waiting for him in Jerusalem. Luke 19:28 says that Jesus went on ahead of his disciples, going up to Jerusalem. Jesus knew that he would be arrested and be handed over to the gentiles, suffer, and die on the cross in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jesus went ahead of his disciples, going up to Jerusalem. Mark 10:32 says that Jesus was leading the way on his way to Jerusalem. Can you find anyone else who led the way towards death? Jesus was not afraid of death. He was a fearless fighter who stood against his enemy, Satan. Paul was the same as Jesus. Paul did not hesitate to go up to Jerusalem. He did not delay his journey either, but continued it without any break.

Not long after I became a Christian, I was so impressed by Jesus’ fearless challenge against the power of death. Most people are afraid of death and become helpless before the power of death. But Jesus was different. He was leading the way to Jerusalem where death was waiting for him. Jesus was more than a conqueror. I was so proud of being Jesus’ disciple. In a bus I said to myself, looking at others, “Hi, guys. Look at me. I am a disciple of Jesus!” Our life is a long journey to the kingdom of God. During our journey we will meet numerous obstacles and dangers which threaten our journey. But I pray that we all may not give up, but continue on our journey, fixing our eyes on Jesus, who went ahead of us. Hebrews 12:1,2 says, “…*And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith*…” Amen!

While Paul stayed at Philip’s house in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea to meet Paul. He was the same person who had prophesied the severe famine in the entire Roman world in chapter 11. (11:28) 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.***’” (11) Tying one’s hands and feet with a belt symbolizes arrest. Agabus warned Paul that Paul would be arrested by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. When Paul’s companion and the people at the house heard this, they pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. (12) How did Paul reply? Look at verse 13. “***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.***” Their sorrowful request might have weakened Paul’s solemn resolution. Paul asked them not to weep or cry for him because he was ready to give his life for the name of Jesus. He reminds us of Jesus who comforted the weeping women who followed him while he was carrying the cross. “*Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children…”(*Lk 23:28) Jesus took the cross and carried it on his shoulder in order to take away the sins of the world. Jesus resolved to die for the sins of the world. Paul asked his people not to break his heart through their tears because he had already resolved to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Here we learn Paul’s resolution and commitment to the Lord Jesus.

In the Old Testament we find some heroes and heroines who were ready to die for the name of the Lord God and their people. Daniel, even though he knew that his disobedience to the king’s edict caused him death, went up to his house, opened the window toward Jerusalem and prayed. Daniel did not compromise, but by faith stood before the king to keep his faith. Esther was the queen of Persia, but she was a Jewish woman. When she found that all the Jews in her kingdom were in danger of extermination by the evil Haman, she boldly came to the king even though it was against the royal law. She said, “*If I perish, I perish*.” (Es 4:16) Her commitment to the Lord and her people saved the lives of all the Jews in the world. Daniel and Esther were no one but the shadow of Jesus who gave his life for the sins of the world. Paul was also ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. He confessed his commitment to the Lord Jesus in this: “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” (Php 1:21) In Romans 1:5 he said, “*Through him and for his name’s sake I received grace and apostleship…*” Paul remembered Jesus’ grace through the forgiveness of sin. In the past Paul had persecuted the church of God. But Jesus forgave him, loved him, and called him to be the apostle for the gentiles. The love of God in Christ Jesus transformed Paul from persecutor to preacher. Paul was ready to die for his Savior Jesus. He said, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*.” (Gal 2:20) Amen!

There are many people who gave their lives for the Lord Jesus and for his name’s sake. There is a cemetery of foreign missionaries called, “Yang Hwa Jin” in Seoul Korea. The missionaries who came to Korea in the early 20th century with the gospel of Jesus Christ were buried there with their coworkers and families even with their children. They buried their bones in their mission field Korea. They were like kernels of wheat as Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*” (Jn 12:24) As Jesus fell to this world and died a kernel of wheat, they too came from elsewhere and died as kernels of wheat. Through their death, many lives have been saved. Even though they came to the unknown country of Korea, they were not afraid of death. They were ready to die for the Korean people. Finally they were buried with their children there.

Let us think about the words ‘to die for the Lord Jesus.’ What does it mean? How can we die for the Lord Jesus in this generation? Should we be crucified as Jesus was? Should we be beheaded like the Coptic Christians in Egypt who suffer from the extreme Muslims? Or should we deny our emotion in order to be recognized as good Christians? In what situations should we be in when we say that we are ready to die for the Lord Jesus? I believe that we are ready to die for the Lord when we love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength. When we love Jesus, we die for him. God so loved this world and gave his One and Only Son. Jesus loved us more than his life and died for us. Paul loved Jesus because Jesus loved him first. Paul was willing to die for Jesus. Do you think to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is easy? It’s easy to say, but not to obey. We sometimes feel like dying when we deny ourselves to obey him. Even Jesus struggled to love God the Father with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane in order to obey God’s will until his sweat fell to the ground like blood. (Lk 22:44) Let us think about the meaning of dying for the Lord Jesus today and make our small decision to live and die for the Lord Jesus. Amen!

Second, Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (17-36) After spending some time in Caesarea, Paul finally arrived at Jerusalem. The day after he arrived, he met James, the brother of Jesus and church leader, and the elders of Jerusalem Church. In front of them Paul reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.(19) When they heard this, they praised God. But their joy and praise didn’t last long. They expressed their anguish about the possible attack of the Jews who heard Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem. The Jews accused Paul that he had apostated the Jews who lived among the Gentiles from Moses’ law and the Jewish customs. (21) So, the elders of the church got an idea to protect Paul. They suggested Paul to join the purification rite at the temple with other four young people so that Paul might prove his obedience to the law. Paul listened to their suggestion and went to the temple next day for the purification rite with four other people. Did the elder’s compromising idea work?

No! It didn’t work. Paul was arrested. Verses 27-36 explain it well. When the Jews who came from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple, they stirred up the whole crowd and seized him. They shouted, “***Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place***.” (28) The whole city was aroused, 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 whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. The commander at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. (30-32) The commander arrested Paul and bound him with two chains. He asked Paul who he was and what he had done. The crowd shouted one thing or another, but the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar. So he ordered his troops to put Paul in the barracks. When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was great. They shouted, “***Get rid of him***!” (36)

Paul’s arrest and trial before the commander reminds us of Jesus’ arrest and trial before Pilate the Roman governor. According to the gospels, after being arrested and tried by the religious leaders, Jesus was brought before Pilate. The whole city of Jerusalem was in uproar. The crowd accused Jesus with many words that were in disagreement. Pilate knew that Jesus was falsely accused because he did not find any crime from Jesus which deserved him death. Pilate wanted to compromise with the angry crowd by releasing Jesus according to the Jewish custom. (Jn 18:39) But, his idea didn’t work. They asked Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. They shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”(Jn19:6)

Paul confessed in his letter to the saints in the Philppi Church. “*I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*…” (Php 3:10) As he confessed in this letter, Paul was following the footstep of Jesus, his Lord and Master. He was beaten and flogged by the soldiers as Jesus was. He was arrested and tried as Jesus was. He was ready to die for the Lord Jesus as Jesus was. Being Jesus’ disciples is not lip service, but decisive practice. Jesus said in Mark 8:34, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*.” According to Jesus’ word, only those who follow him can be his disciple. Amen!

When Michael Lanier mentioned about his plan for reading program this summer for young leaders, I was so encouraged. He wants all young leaders to read the biography of Jim Eliot, an American missionary in Ecuador, who gave his life for the native Indians. Jim Eliot was like Paul who was ready to die for the Lord Jesus. We don’t want to lose our children, but pray for them to learn the faith and life of Jim Eliot. Let us pray that God may raise many Pauls and Jims among young people in this country. Let us pray that God may raise many disciples of Jesus and shepherds of God’s church who follow the life of Jesus, Paul, and Jim! Amen!