

Your Purpose in Living

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20 will begin at the end of the chapter, verse 36, as Paul is concluding his time with the Ephesian elders.

Acts 20, 36, and we'll read through chapter 21, verse 36. When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.

They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.

Then they accompanied him to the ship. 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 Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail.

[1:08] 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.

Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.

After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers 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.

[2:19] 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 Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 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. When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, The Lord's will be done.

After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay.

He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly.

[3:50] 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 child or live according to our customs.

What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow.

Take these men, join in their purification rites, and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know that there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

[5:07] 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.

The next day, Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place. They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area. The whole city was aroused and the people came running from all directions.

[6:29] 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.

He 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.

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.

Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. And since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.

When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great, he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, away with him.

[7:37] Well, why do you want to go on living? To ask the question another way is, what is your purpose in life?

Your aim that gets you up each morning and sends you into your day and makes your life worth living, gives meaning and importance to your every day.

David says in Psalm 119, let me live that I may praise you. You see his purpose for living?

Let me live. I've got one reason I want to live, that I may praise you. Now how would you finish that sentence? Let me live so that, so that what?

That I may what? It's important for us to be clear on our purpose in life, isn't it? Lest we waste our life on trivial things that don't amount to anything.

[8:40] And here in our text today and in this sermon, we're going to hear the Apostle Paul tell us his purpose in life. In Acts chapter 20, if your Bible's open, you might just turn back to chapter 20 and verse 24, where Paul tells us in no uncertain terms his purpose for living.

The one thing for which he regards his life here as worth the living. He says, I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Paul knows that to depart and to be with Christ is better by far. So the only reason he wants to go on living here in a place that is not as good as there is just that he may finish, he might complete the assigned task, a task that the Lord Jesus gave to him at his conversion and then repeated throughout his life.

Remember back on the road to Damascus as Paul was going up to arrest Christians and persecute them? The Lord Jesus met him and smote him with a bright shining light and identified himself saying to Paul, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles.

[10:27] I'm sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

So upon his very first meeting with the risen Christ, his assignment was given to him to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

And from that point on, this assignment shaped his life. It gave shape to every day that he lived.

It got him up in the morning and it kept him going all through the day through all sorts of persecutions and sufferings, discouragements and troubles. It opened his mouth. It gave purpose to every day. All that he might be able to say at the end of his life to his commanding officer, Jesus Christ, what the Lord Jesus was able to say at the end of his life to his Father in heaven.

[11 : 34] I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work that you gave me to do. That was Paul's goal.

And we will never understand the life of Paul unless we understand the purpose of Paul. His decisions and actions will not make any sense to us.

For instance, if we think that his purpose was to live as long as he could, a life, a pain-free life of ease and rest, why, his life will make no sense to us.

The decisions he makes, the places he goes, the things he does. Or if we think that his purpose was to get as much of this world's possessions and pleasures as he could pack into his short life, well, then he'll appear to be a real loser.

He really missed the boat on that one. Oh, but if we know that his purpose is to testify to the grace of God in the gospel, to finish that business, why, we'll say, well, his life makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

[12 : 44] It all fits together. You see, his life was so bound up and tied up with his purpose and governed by it that his life is really unexplainable apart from knowing his purpose in living it.

Now, perhaps you can piece together by observing his life, you can piece together what his purpose is. But we don't need to do that because the Apostle Paul tells us in just pointed words what his singular purpose is.

And once we get that, we understand why he talked the way he did, what he said, why he did the things he did, and why he decided and made the decisions he made.

Now, this is especially important. It's to be, it was true of all of his converted life, but it's especially important in what happens from chapter 21 of Acts to the end of the book.

We're coming to a turning point in the book of Acts. Remember how it started out with Jesus' great commission, charging his church to take this gospel of his grace from Jerusalem to Samaria, all Judea, and to the ends of the earth.

[14 : 11] That's how it began. And we've seen, as we've gone through the book of Acts, we've seen them doing that, taking it, starting in Jerusalem, and then spreading right on to the ends of the earth.

The last half of the book of Acts has chiefly followed the spread of the gospel through Paul and his team. And here in chapter 21, Paul's arrival in Jerusalem marks the end of his third missionary journey.

But it also marks the beginning of the last section of this book. So, chapters 21 to the end. It's over a fourth of the book.

He's taken up with Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, his imprisonment, his being bounced from court and trial to trial, different plots on his life, his appeal to Caesar, and then being taken as captive to Rome to stand trial there, where the book then suddenly ends.

Well, we're just coming into this last section. And in several ways, it mirrors the four gospels. They, too, spend about a third or a fourth of their words on our Lord's last entrance into Jerusalem and what happened that final week in his arrest, his trial, his going from trial to trial, and then his death.

[15 : 40] And so, here in Acts, we find the last fourth of it deals with Paul's arrest and trials on his last visit to Jerusalem and then just leaves us with Paul there in Rome, where he had appealed to stand trial before the Caesar.

Well, the first part of chapter 21, then, is taken up with details of Paul's journey to Jerusalem. Let me show you on the map what he, what is told us.

They're in a ship that is hopping along the shore. So, Paul has come to Miletus. He's sent for the elders at Ephesus to come. He made his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, and now he's in a ship that just is hopping down the coast.

Comes down to Kos, down to Rhodes, down to Patara, where he gets on a bigger vessel and sails the 400 miles to Tyre. Once he's in Tyre, he then does a similar thing, hopping along the shoreline to Ptolemaeus and Caesarea, and then the 62-mile track inland to Jerusalem.

Now, Luke's diary of Paul's last voyage to Jerusalem is marked by a growing tension. I wonder if you felt it as we were having this chapter read.

[16:58] There is a tension here. The closer Paul comes to Jerusalem, he meets with increased warnings from the Holy Spirit about the sufferings that are awaiting him there, and he meets with increased pleadings of his friends to not go on to Jerusalem.

But even more staggering is the way that Paul is undeterred by any of it and continues on just as the Lord on his last trip to Jerusalem had set his face to go to Jerusalem and nothing would deter him.

Now three times Luke records these warnings about the coming sufferings in Jerusalem. I want us to trace those out and draw some lessons from them.

First of all, it was at Miletus, so he's left Miletus and he's at Miletus and it's in this farewell address to the Ephesian elders that he speaks to them in chapter 20, verses 22 to 24.

And here's what he tells them. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

[18:25] So Paul speaks here about the Spirit of God compelling him and the Spirit of God warning him. Notice Paul did not take these warnings of the Holy Spirit as directives.

He didn't regard them as commands to be obeyed, as if he was not to go on up to Jerusalem, but was to flee the dangers there.

For in spite of such warnings, he's still compelled by the same Spirit, you see, to go to Jerusalem. the same Holy Spirit who warns of sufferings awaiting him there also is the one who is compelling him to go there.

And then follows this great purpose statement of his life in verse 24. I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task which the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

So Paul's ready to suffer at Jerusalem. He's ready to even lose his life in completing the assignment the Lord Jesus is giving him. He's expecting suffering as he comes into Jerusalem, even as Peter did.

[19:43] You remember Peter's word to the believers of his day, dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial that you are suffering as though something strange is happening to you.

Oh, they're insulting me. Peter, they're persecuting us just for being Christians, being faithful to the Lord. He says, man up, get used to it, expect it.

It comes with the territory. Look what they did to your dear Savior. And why should this world treat you any better? That's what Paul had, the same expectation expectation.

That indeed all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. So he didn't view suffering as something strange, but he expected it.

And he expected it from the very beginning of his Christian life. You remember back as he came blinded into Damascus and the Lord sent Ananias to bring a word to brother Saul.

[20:52] And Ananias is scared to death because he's heard that Saul's come to arrest the Christians. And the Lord says to Ananias, go.

This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

You see, right out of the gate, he must learn how much he must suffer for my name. Suffering was part of his assigned task in proclaiming the gospel of God's grace to Jew and Gentile.

It was not something to avoid at all cost. It was rather something to be endured for the sake of the name. Well, that's the first mention here then as he's making his way to Jerusalem, the first warning of sufferings.

We see the second set of warning when he comes to Tyre. So he's back here in Tyre, chapter 21, verses 4 and 5.

[22:02] And he meets up with some disciples of Christ there. And through the Spirit, verse 4, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

Verse 5, but when our time was up, they were unloading cargo from the ship and now it's ready to sail again. When our time was up, we left, Luke writes, and we continued on our way.

In other words, against their urging. Now, we know that it's not beyond Paul to sin against God.

He's the first one to tell us that he's the chief of sinners and he needed the daily grace to be found

at the mercy seat.

But I think we would be greatly mistaken to conclude that Paul disobeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this place. Rather, we understand that just as in every city, Paul received these warnings from the Holy Spirit about the sufferings awaiting him.

So it is again as he comes to Tyre. He's made aware through the brethren there of the sufferings that are awaiting him in Jerusalem, which his friends, naturally out of love to Paul, misinterpret, it seems, as meaning that he's not to go up there.

[23 : 28] And so they urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Well, as we saw in chapter 20 and verse 22, Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go up to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, regardless of the dangers, he's to go. And Paul's willing to count that cost, as he's made very clear. Well, he then makes his way on down to Caesarea.

And it's here at Caesarea we have the third of the three communications from the Spirit of the dangers awaiting him in Jerusalem.

So he's here in Caesarea. We're told he's staying at the house of Philip the Evangelist. And I should bring back to mind, oh, he's one of the seven. He's one of those deacons that were appointed there in the church in Jerusalem, who later went out and preached Christ throughout Samaria, and then was directed down to that road leading out of Jerusalem, heading toward Ethiopia, where he met that eunuch, reading Isaiah 53 and witness to him of Christ.

He's the one who is here suffering to win salvation for all who trusted him. And the man was converted and went on his way to Ethiopia, and it says that Philip then went to Caesarea.

[24 : 51] And that's where he's been now for 20 years. And he's got four daughters now as well. And no doubt there were disciples gathered in that city as well.

So here he is. Paul is there at Philip's house. house. And in verse 10 of our text of chapter 21, Luke writes, after we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Now this is the same Agabus we met earlier in chapter 11, who had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch to tell the church there about a severe famine that was coming upon the people in Judea. well, here he is again, Agabus, this prophet. And now we see him operating much like the other prophets of the Old Testament. Not simply with word, but sometimes with action.

And they would take objects and they would act out something and then would speak words of interpretation to make not only a prophecy with word, but also with action.

[25 : 57] And so Agabus takes Paul's belt and he ties his own hands and feet with it. And then he says, the Holy Spirit says, that's always what happens when real prophecy is taking place.

God the Holy Spirit is speaking. There's no lesser authority prophecy. When true prophecy happens, God the Spirit is speaking. And he says, the Holy Spirit says, in this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

Can you see? Agabus, he must have been one twisted pretzel, all tied up, hands and feet, and he's making this pronouncement. The owner of this belt is to be tied up and handed over to the Gentiles. Again, the prophecy could not be clear, could it, about what's going to happen in Jerusalem. It's getting clearer and clearer what the troubles are awaiting him there. But again, you'll look in vain to find a command from God's Spirit for him not to go on up to Jerusalem.

In verse 12, Luke says, when we heard this. Now, remember, Luke's writing this. Luke's with Paul. It's not just Paul and Luke. When we heard this.

[27 : 18] Remember, there's a whole team of Gentile believers traveling with Paul. They've been sent by the various churches, remember? And they're traveling with Paul carrying this financial gift for the people in Jerusalem and Judea.

And so Luke says, when we heard this about this prophecy of Paul, we and the people there, and Philip the evangelist and all the disciples there, we all pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. They were begging him with tears. Now, Paul's no heartless tin man. He can't stand there and watch his dearest friend sobbing without being deeply affected.

And he tells them that. Would you guys stop it? You're weeping and breaking my heart. heart. In other words, their sobbing was having effect upon his emotions.

The word there for breaking my heart is what a woman did in those days in taking the laundry down to the riverside and getting her laundry wet. And she would take that wet laundry and she would pound it on the rocks to clean it.

[28:39] It was a different kind of washing machine, kids. And she pounded it, pounded it. And that's what Paul says, you're doing to me. You're sobbing and pleading with me. You're pounding at my heart.

I can't take it anymore. Stop. I'm ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

You see, I know what's waiting for me. But sufferings did not move Paul from his assignment. He took up his cross and died every day and so he's ready to do the same in Jerusalem.

And so his dear friends found that the more they pleaded, the more he dug in with determination to go. And verse 14 says, when they saw that he was not budging, they gave up and they said, well then the Lord's will be done.

And after this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. Yes. Do you see the building tension? The closer Paul comes to Jerusalem, the more vivid becomes the prophecies about the troubles awaiting him there, the more intense become the pleadings of his friends not to go up there.

[29:55] But we find that none of it broke Paul's resolve to go up to Jerusalem. Now why? Why? How do we interpret this? Some people say, well, Paul made a mistake.

He didn't follow the Spirit's warnings through his church. Why? Why is Paul so stubbornly set on going to Jerusalem?

You know, it's not natural for men to march into danger. What is natural is for men to avoid pain, to avoid suffering, to avoid hardship and trouble.

Furthermore, Paul is no masochist. He finds no pleasure in pain. He's not just going there because he finds that exciting and somehow exhilarating to suffer.

So what was it that drove Paul into Jerusalem? Why could nothing turn him even when he is told and warned of the troubles awaiting him there?

[30:54] Well, I've got three answers for you. Number one is purpose in life. His purpose in life. What was it? To complete the task that the Lord Jesus had given him, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

purpose. He's not stubbornly pursuing his own plan. Paul says, I'm going to Jerusalem and by gum I'm going to get there. I don't care what you all say.

That's not what's happening here. It's not his own plan. It is the word, the word of God to him.

He didn't consult his ease. He rather consulted his duty. He didn't ask, what's the safest and easiest course for my life? But rather, what task did my Lord Jesus give to me? And if in the pursuit of my God-given task I lose my life, then so be it, for I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

So here's a man. He's a man on a mission, sent by the one who died on the Christ's cross for him. And how could he do anything other than take up his own cross and willingly suffer anything if only he might complete the task given to him?

[32:08] So his purpose in life is what drove him on. There's more testifying to the gospel of God's grace to be done in Jerusalem.

Paul could write to Timothy who had spent much time ministering with Paul, and Paul can say to Timothy, you know all about my purpose. I wonder if the people that live closest to you could say, I know all about your purpose, just by living with you.

I wonder if your kids could say that about your mom and dad. They watch you. And you could write to them and say, you know all about my purpose.

Can't hide it. Our actions reveal it. That's the way it was with Paul. His purpose, it drove him. And it drove him right into Jerusalem.

Why? To testify to the gospel of God's grace. Now that deserves some comment and just some time out. That to Paul, the gospel was about God's grace.

[33:21] grace. Paul defined the gospel, God's grace. God's grace. Paul had received grace from God, hadn't he? He was out there killing and persecuting Christians.

He deserved to be damned. But instead, he was shown grace. Kids, you know how to spell grace? G. Spell it with me.

G. R. A. C. E. God's riches at Christ's expense.

That's grace. You know another way to spell grace? C. R. O. S. S.

The cross. Not just any cross. But that middle cross on Golgotha 2,000 years ago. The cross of Christ.

[34:23] Who is it on that middle cross? It's God's one and only son. The son he loved. His eternal son. And what is he doing on that cross? God sent him.

God so loved the world of sinners that he sent his one and only son to die on the cross, to receive the punishment that sinners deserved in their place instead of them.

So that if they will just turn from going their way and trust in this Savior, they will not perish but have everlasting life. That's grace. The cross of Jesus Christ.

And that's why wherever Paul went, he preached Christ and him crucified. That's the gospel of God's grace. Salvation comes at Christ's expense.

Jesus really did pay it all. Salvation is not earned by any works that Paul did, by all the work that Jesus did in his place. Perfectly obeying all the commands where Paul couldn't obey.

[35:30] And then taking the penalty that Paul's disobedience deserved. He had received grace. That's the gospel of grace. And that was his purpose to make this message known.

For Paul can say, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. That you through his poverty might become rich.

He took all your debts of sin. Oh, how poor he became when all the mountain of your sins were placed upon him. He who was rich became poor.

And what did he give to you? All of his righteousness. All of his merit. All of his worthiness. He gave that to you. Making you rich forever. Grace.

Grace. And Paul's willing to suffer the loss of life to tell sinners of this amazing grace of God. I trust that as we heard this morning in our worship that we're not yet over this grace of God.

[36:37] That it's got a grip on us. Not only do we have a grip on it, but it has gripped us. And it's now become the purpose of our life to testify to this gospel of grace.

Last Sunday I was even at a home of a dear Christian family in the Fayetteville Church. And the Christian lady of the house told of a Jehovah Witness who came to her door.

and she took this interruption to her schedule as an opportunity to speak of the gospel of God's grace.

And so she gave him a book by Jerry Bridges that made the gospel very clear. And he brought it back days later and was very angry.

Do you mean to tell me that I have to get into heaven on someone else's coattails? I can't believe that.

[37:34] He got the gospel, didn't he? Isn't that the gospel of grace? That we get into heaven on someone else's coattails?

That he obeyed and we hanging on to him come right on into the throne of God and we're declared righteous. What a beautiful expression of the gospel found on the lips of this Jehovah Witness.

But what is the pride of the natural heart to hate the gospel of God's grace? To want to be able to say there must be something that can be attributed to my work that I've accomplished so that I can boast about.

No, no. Not with the gospel of grace. It's all of grace. The very faith with which you believe is a gift of grace. You couldn't take the first step without his grace drawing you.

You can never get into heaven apart from this one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

[38:49] So if you'll not come on the coattails of Jesus' blood and righteousness, you cannot come at all. But oh, what a gospel. What a grace that he will have you right on his merits, right on his coattails, right into heaven.

Bless gospel. That's the first thing that took the apostle into Jerusalem. He's on a mission, he's received an assignment, and he's willing to die to proclaim this gospel of grace.

Secondly, why did Paul go on to Jerusalem even though he knows trouble's waiting for him there? Well, divine compulsion. Didn't we see that back in verse 22 of chapter 20, and now, compelled by the Spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem.

Set his face like flint to go to Jerusalem. Why? Compelled by God the Spirit. So not only has he received the outward assignment from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of God's grace, he also now has the Holy Spirit within, compelling him, constraining him to no longer live for himself, but for him who died for him and rose again.

So, with this outward assignment from Christ and this inward compelling of the Holy Spirit, Paul is ready to go to Jerusalem. There's no conflict then between the Spirit compelling Paul to go to Jerusalem and the Spirit warning Paul that prison and hardship are awaiting him there.

[40 : 22] The warning did not diminish the compelling. It's simply the Holy Spirit preparing Paul for what's going to meet him when he gets there. This is your assignment, yes, and he's moving his heart and compelling him to go and he's saying, I want you to know when you get there, Paul, you're going to have prison and hardship.

Those two are not fighting each other, not in the heart of one touched by grace. And so Paul goes into Jerusalem in spite of warnings of dangers there, just as Jesus went into Jerusalem full knowing what was waiting for him there.

Now, we've already seen this as we've come through Paul's missionary journeys that sometimes Paul marched right into danger for the gospel's sake. So he's stoned and left for dead outside of Lystra.

What's he do? As he gets up, brushes off, he goes right back into Lystra. He has many plots on his life in Ephesus and he does not run but he stays and preaches for three years as those plots were being attempted on his life.

And then he goes and he revisits all these places where he had preached before where there were plots on his life, threats. So we see this in the missionary journeys but we also see something else, don't we?

[41 : 47] There are other times that Paul does avoid the threats. He does leave town once the Jews come and stir up all the Gentiles to kill him. Paul hurries on to the next town and there he's persecuted and he runs on to the next town.

So there we see him avoiding the persecution but again, it's in order that he might go to the next place and testify of the gospel of God's grace. There's more work to be done and even when on this third missionary journey when he comes to Corinth he's ready to sail for home and what happens? He learns of a plot to kill him at sea and so he changes his course. So which is it? Does Paul run from danger or does he march into it?

Well we see he does both. Well why now does he not employ the run tactic and not go into Jerusalem?

Why now does he march right into Jerusalem? Well there's a third reason. Not only because of his purpose not only because of the inward compulsion of the Holy Spirit but thoroughly to deliver the financial gifts from the Gentile churches.

[43 : 03] Now all along the way Paul has been telling these churches and you see it in his letters especially to them. He's been telling these Gentile churches the brethren back in Jerusalem and Judea are suffering under a famine and they're taking up collections to send with Paul on his way back to Jerusalem and not only that they are sending representatives from their churches.

They're saying okay you be the one or you too go with our money here at Thessalonica with Paul back to Jerusalem and convey to them our love and sympathy with them.

These gift-bearing representatives of the churches made up quite an entourage. Chapter 20 and verse 4 lists seven of them plus Luke plus Paul there could have been as many as ten or a dozen making this journey and Paul viewed the delivery of this gift as critical for the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

It would show the Gentiles solidarity with the Jewish brethren in Christ that they were one in Christ Jesus. There'd been nasty stuff to divide them in their past histories.

The Jews hated the Gentiles and the Gentiles hated the Jews. It was hate and being hated and real prejudices between them still very much alive as we'll see at the end of chapter 21 this chapter but their past and their differences must not be allowed to divide the church of Christ into two separate bodies.

[44 : 46] A Jewish church and a Gentile church was not God's will but rather that there might be one people of God reconciled to God and to one another.

Gentiles and Jews in Jesus' fold as we sing. One church comprised of both. And this was foretold in the Old Testament where God says I'll place over them one shepherd and when that good shepherd came in John 10 he came first to the lost sheep of Israel nevertheless he said I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen the Gentiles and I must bring them also they too will listen to my voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

John 10 16 John 11 51 Caiaphas the high priest prophesied that year that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God the Gentiles to bring them together and make them one.

Ephesians 2 speaking of Jewish and Gentile believers Christ who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier the dividing wall of hostility his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

Can you see how this gift from the Gentile Christians all over the world coming now and being given to these Jewish believers would itself testify to the gospel of God's grace.

[46:32] That's the purpose of Paul and this gift is going to testify as well to the gospel of God's grace. It would show that God's grace reconciles people. It brings people together who've been enemies all their lives and does that not magnify the glory of God's grace?

It says this is what happens when people experience the saving grace of God in the gospel. The recipients of God's grace then show grace to others.

That's what Jesus prayed for in John chapter 17 that all God's people might be one so that the world might know that you sent me Father. The unity Jew and Gentile of all the people of God into one body in Christ Jesus demonstrates that this gospel is no fluke it's a real thing God really sent his son and that brings honor to the grace of God.

This is what Jesus prayed for it's what he died for to create in himself one new man out of the two and to put to death the hostility and this demonstration was so important to the apostle Paul that he was willing to risk his very life to deliver these gifts from the Gentiles to the Jews.

You see they regard you as one in Christ they regard you as brothers. How important is this loving unity of the body to you? Is it important enough to die to ourselves to give grace to live for each other all so that God's glorious grace might be demonstrated in his church?

[48:09] What a demonstration of the gospel of God's grace. What must God's grace be to make such gracious people? They don't even know who these Jewish believers are but they are sending men to personally deliver the love gift of their hearts for them because of Christ.

So under divine compulsion to testify to the gospel of God's grace and to demonstrate it by this gift delivered to the Jewish believers the apostle Paul marches right into the lion's den of Jerusalem and sure enough it's not long before they have their claws on him and he is arrested and in chains just as the Holy Spirit had warned.

In fact given just a few more minutes the Jews would have had the life pounded out of him but the Roman sentry came and they stopped beating him and then they arrested him and that's just the beginning then of this last segment of the book of his arrest his imprisonment his trials the plot on his life and then his long journey to Rome to stand trial there under Caesar.

We've got to leave him there but I want to stop and conclude by asking you what are you living for? Why do you want to live? Why do you want to go on another day? What's your purpose?

Is it to finish your race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given you? The task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace? Is your purpose obvious to those you live around?

[49:40] Now it will look different in your life than it looked in the apostle Paul he's called his calling was a missionary evangelist it will look different in your calling as a mother as a father someone with with a calling in a job that you're in it will look different in your life but it will still come home to this base that we are to exist for the praise of his glory for the testifying of this gospel of his grace to be a platform on the platform on which his grace is seen as you graciously love his church and promote its unity that you have in Christ as you rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those who weep so let's not forget our purpose and why we're still here and why we draw breath another day and why we go back home into another week let's not be conformed to this world's purposes and be alert off base and off track but let's let's keep our focus clear the Lord

Jesus set his face to complete the will the father had given him the apostle Paul set his face to go to Jerusalem complete the task let us be determined let us not be moved from living for the glory of God and his grace unconverted friend the Lord has gone to great ends to bring this gospel of grace to you he gave his own son to be damned in the place of sinners he he sent Paul and other missionaries and this gospel has made its way into this this very place this morning that you might hear the gospel but you know it will do you no good unless you receive this Savior and in him forgiveness and in him eternal life because salvation is found in a person the gracious Savior himself and he who has the son has life but he who has not the son of God has not life embrace

Christ take him as he's offered to you to be your Savior and your Lord take him you can't divide him you can't cut him up and take parts take him as he's offered Savior and Lord and he will save you and you will join this great family of God made one in Jesus Christ let's pray we thank you father for your word this word of your grace and for leading us right back to Calvary to see our Savior crucified thank you for the grace that flows from his wounds to cleanse us from our sins and thank you that you are more full of grace Lord Jesus than we could ever be of sin draw others today by your matchless grace to trust in no others but to trust in you alone and oh please forgive us for the ways that we we lose our focus and we lose our purpose in life and thank you for giving us the the weekly Lord's Day to come back and to be reminded again why it is that you feed us and give us life and breath and everything else that we might live to the praise of your glory so Holy Spirit compel us to not live for the worthless things that the world without Christ lives for but give us a heart that is compelled to magnify your grace both with our words and the gospel but also with our lives even in the the unity of the body here that together we might show and tell what a wonderful gracious God you are do it for your name's sake we ask in Jesus name amen