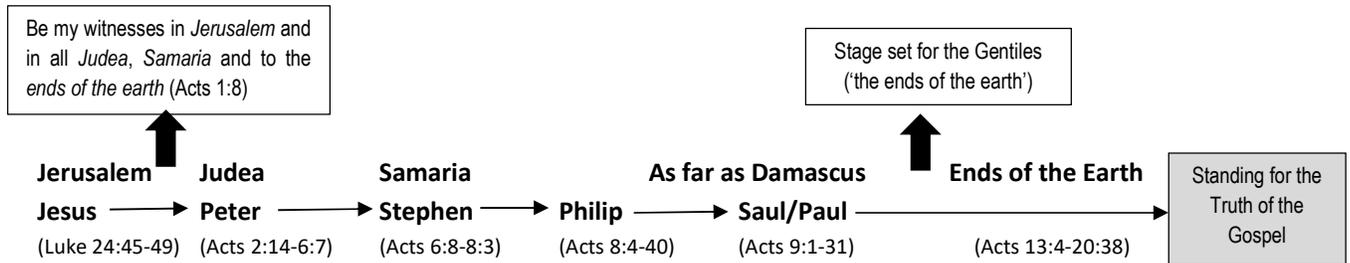


Talk – Act 21:1-36 – Arresting Times

Talk Outline/Handout

Where we have been...



1. Travel Warnings

Prediction #1 - 'I know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me (20:23)

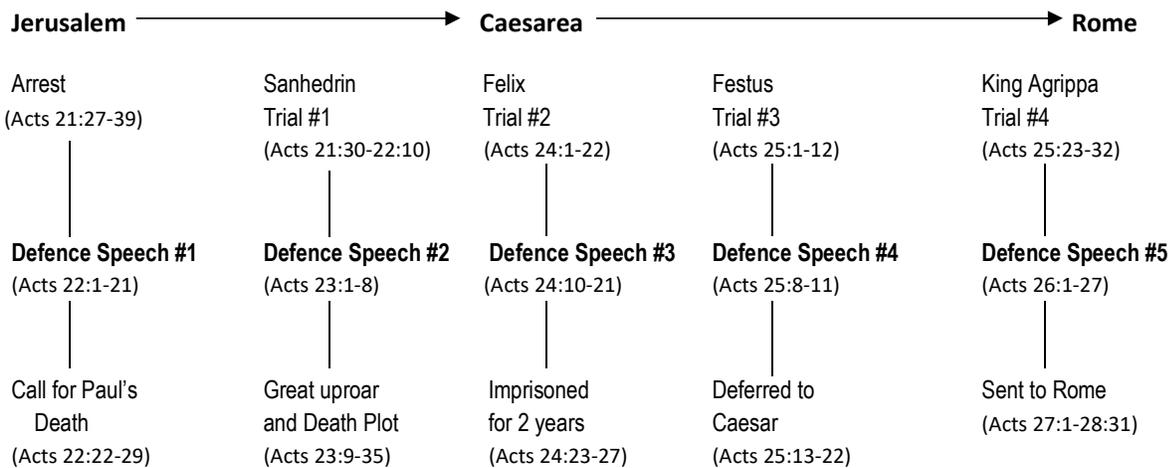
Prediction #2 - 'The Holy Spirit says, The Jews in Jerusalem will bind [Paul] and will hand him over to the Gentiles (21:11)

2. Good First Impressions

3. Trouble strikes

4. Rescue

What is to come...



Question: Am I ready, not only to be bound, but also to die...for the name of the Lord Jesus?

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Reading

Acts 21:1-36

Central Truth

Be ready, not only to be bound, but also to die...for the name of the Lord Jesus'

Purpose

I want to listener to be challenged to recognise that standing for Jesus is more about his interests than their own. And that is a good thing!

CHECK TIME

Talk

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father,

We know you have lots to say and that you say it most clearly in your Word – so we ask that you speak clearly to us now.

Help us to look at your apostle Paul, and what you asked of him, and how he applied your commission – and so challenge us in that way we might learn in the next few minutes.

And help me, to draw out of Acts a helpful lesson for us today.

In Jesus name. AMEN

PAUSE

I am ready?

- Could you imagine any situation where these words came out of your mouth...
'I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die'
 'I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die'
- It is the kind of statement that heroes say in the movies.
- Perhaps a statement you would hear from someone as the set off to war.
- It is the kind of statement you would use when you had your back up against it.
- Certainly not, a statement you would use in safe, comfortable, conservative Adelaide.

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- I mean, could you imagine leaving for work/uni tomorrow – and shouting out to your flatmate as you shut the front door – ‘Have a great day, for me, I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die’!
- Well that is what the Apostle Paul said to his friends in Acts 21 as he got ready to leave for work.

Acts

- Friends, let’s head back to the *Acts of the Apostles* – and finish moving our way through this amazing book.
- This is the fourth year and the last section that we look at in the book of Acts.
- We have moved through it section by section (and as you can see on the outline) we have seen how the good news of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, was declared,
 - first to the Jewish people starting in their capital Jerusalem,
 - then out to the region of Judea,
 - before spreading to the Samaritans starting in Samaria
 - getting as far flung as Damascus and Asia Minor as even Gentiles heard and accepted the news about Jesus.
- There has been some opposition along the way, but by and large, Acts has given us a record of the massive growth of the first Christian church as witnesses testified to what they had seen, heard and been taught by the Lord Jesus.
- As we return to Acts we also return to Jerusalem – to the city where Jesus concluded his ministry and was killed, buried and rose.
- Turn with me to Acts 21 (page 1102) – it would be rude of me to proceed before you had time to turn it up. Acts 21.

PAUSE

- Imagine yourself planning a business trip – which starts with promise but then goes pear-shaped. That’s what we have in this chapter.
 - We start with some *travel warnings* – ignored
 - Then some *good first impressions*
 - Before *Trouble strikes*
 - And then thankfully – and *unexpected rescue*.

Travel Warnings (21:1-16)

- So first: Travel Warnings

Illustration:

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- Quite a number of years ago, I was planning to travel to Nigeria - by God's grace the church in Nigeria had exploded in number and they were desperately looking for people to train the newly appointed pastors in how to understand the Bible.
- Weeks before I was due to fly out, there was a riot in the compound right next to where I was going to teach.
- So, I did the dutiful thing – checked Dept of Foreign Affairs as to whether it was safe to travel – it wasn't.
 - I spoke to my church leadership – they told me not to go.
 - I spoke to my family and they all said to skip it.
 - So, what did I do?I followed their advice and cancelled the trip!
- That is *the exact opposite* to what we find before us here with Paul!

Explanation

- In Chapter 20, Paul has been meeting with the lay leaders of Ephesus – and reviewing the ministry.
- In verse 22 – Paul makes it clear what he thinks he should do next – he says: *'compelled by the Holy Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen to me there'*
- Now look at the prediction that follows in the next verse – *'I only know'* says Paul, *'that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me'*
 - That is not quite the pitch that I would put on the travel brochure, if I wanted to compel someone to go somewhere!
- Yet Paul, knows his job. He says: *'I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace'*.
- This resolution is important to grasp, because it drives what we read in all the chapters that follow.
- Paul, is clear on what he is to do – to testify to the gospel of God's grace
- Yet, he is unclear on what that will look like in practice, but only that hardships lie ahead.

Application

- Brothers and sisters – if you have been saved by the gospel of God's grace – it is likely that you are a descendant of one of the gentiles that Paul reached in his mission journeys recorded in Acts.
- We can be very thankful that Paul did his job!

PAUSE

- In Chapter 21 – we see the journey begin – and it does not take long for the next travel warning to be issued – verse 4 *'Finding the disciples [in Tyre] and staying with them'* – the day came for him to depart ...and *'through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem'*. Paul, knowing his job ignores and travels on.
- They reach Caesarea to stay with Philip the evangelist. And while there a prophet named Agabus arrived and in verse 11 we get the next travel warning - Agabus takes Pauls' belt, binds himself and

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announces “*The Holy Spirit says: ‘in this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over the Gentiles’* – and the travelling companions with him all pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

PAUSE

- It seems like a lonely place to be under the compulsion of a commission.
- I have no doubt that Pauls’ friends, the prophet and his travelling companions – all had his best interests in mind in trying to dissuade him from travelling on to Jerusalem.
- In fact – did you notice that, it was the Holy Spirit who compelled him in the first place, and yet each travel warning was given ‘through the Spirit’.
- We know that the Holy Spirit doesn’t contradict himself, so why compel someone only to warn them that hardship will come?

Illustration

- Trinity City now has a rich tradition of sending Missionaries or Global Partners out to the world to proclaim Jesus.
- They have gone to places that may *need* the gospel, but that does not mean they *want* to gospel.
- *[At 5pm]* our three current global partner have all gone to places where there are security issues – such that we can’t name the place or even give their surnames.
- For each, they have and will face hardships that will make their commission harder.
- Do you think for a moment – when God put it on their heart that they should go – that everyone else around them all got exactly the same flash of inspiration – such that they all said ‘sure, go, no problem, we can’t think of anything that you should do more!’
- Not on your life - every single one of them, prior to going would have been told by someone, by many - ‘don’t go!’
- *[5pm]* Today we commission our Small Group Leaders. Do you think for a moment when they bring up in conversation at work that they are thinking of taking on a leadership role at their church that their work colleagues, would have patted them on the back and bought them drinks for doing such a selfless job – Not on your life. They would say, ‘why waste your time doing that?’
- And let me make this even more personal – if you are a disciple of Jesus – think back to when you became a Christian – and think about the first conversation you had with any of your unbelieving friends – when you told them that you had given your life to Christ – I can bet my last dollar, that that conversation was met with either stunned silence or possibly even ridicule.

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- When God by his Spirit chooses to compel someone, to give them a job – then he also prepares them for it. Three times, Paul is told what to expect – that standing for Jesus would be hard – And Paul was prepared
- In fact, so prepared that in verse 13 he says *‘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’*

PAUSE

Good First Impressions (21:17-26)

- Well Paul goes – and verse 17 - he arrives in Jerusalem, things don’t seem so bad – good first impressions
- He is greeted warmly
- In fact, he gets to catch-up with his old mate James (from the Jerusalem Council), the leader of the Christian (and largely Jewish) church in Jerusalem – and they swap encouragements
- Paul tells of all that has happened in his ministry to the Gentiles – and hearing this the believers in Jerusalem praise God.
- James then tells of how thousands of Jews had become Christians.

- But there is a slight cultural issue that needs to be clarified.
- James explains – verse 21:
‘The Jews (those who have become Christian) have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses (and the law), telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs’.

- Let me just explain what is going on here – as it is going to become important in the next section.
- Jewish culture holds three things dear – their *nationality* (as the OT people of God), their *laws* (as given to Moses), and their *temple* (as the place they meet with God).
- Now a new Christian understanding says that we find all three in Jesus – our *nationality*: in Christ (that is why we can be called Christians), - the *law* is fulfilled completely in Jesus – and the *place* we now meet with God is in and through Jesus.
- Those Jewish cultural markers were all pointers to Jesus and now in Acts they are fulfilled.
- That does not mean for someone who has grown up as a Jew and become a Christian, that those things are redundant.

Illustration

- In a similar way, if we were to gut the interior of this building, remove the pews, the chancel screen at the back – and replace it all with funky new chairs and trendy polished floor boards – it is likely that next Sunday many in our 9am Church family would be fairly upset! For them the pews and the architecture of this building have many levels of significance.

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- The Jews have heard stories about Paul – and have wondered if he has undermined their cultural staples – so James moves to address that quickly.
- He suggests that Paul join four Jewish men in their purification rites, pay their expenses to show his support, abide by the law and present himself at the end of the purification days to the temple. In doing so all would see that the claims about him being against the Jewish customs were false.
- And that is what Paul does. Happy times.

Application

- We could spend some time thinking about what it means to be all things to all people – as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 9 – but let's leave to another time.

PAUSE

Trouble Strikes (21:27-31)

- Third part of this travelogue – and Trouble strikes.
- Some Jews (not Christian) from the province of Asia turn up and see Paul in the temple area.
- Immediately they stir up the crowd – verse 28:
'Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches people 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'.
- Notice how they accuse Paul of the three key cultural staples – *nationality, law and temple*. And for good measure they throw in some *racism* – accusing him of bringing unclean people into the temple court (which the writer Luke explains as a misunderstanding)
- The whole city is aroused and come running. This is not good. Seven days of purification rites thrown out the window all based on false assumptions.
- They seize Paul and drag him from the temple area and throw him out of the city gates.
- There they try to kill him.
- This is where the friends, the prophet and the travelling partners could all say:
'I told you so!' 'Coming to Jerusalem was a bad idea' 'Why didn't listen to us in the first place?'
'You are stubborn, pig-headed, and now you could quite possibly lose your life – and all because of a misunderstanding!'

Application

- Friends, **standing up for Jesus is about being more concerned for his interests than your own.**
- Standing up for Jesus is about being more concerned for his interests than your own.
- What Paul has put on display here is a desire to serve Jesus even if it costs himself.
- His commission was to go to Jerusalem and beyond and at no point was he promised an easy ride.

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Explanation

- Earlier this week, along with some other more distinguished church leaders around Australia, I was asked to write a short answer to this question: ‘What are the major challenges facing Australian churches in 2018?’
- Well, it is far above my station to be able to speak for all Australian Churches, but here is what I said:
 - **Christians face the continued challenge to be *in the world but not of it*.**
 - The challenge for today is to proclaim Christ to a world where *love, truth, and obedience* are all self-centred and fluid. And often, the world interprets our love as oppressive hate.
 - Christians are therefore caught in a dilemma. We don’t want to retreat into our nice safe Christian comfort zones and just shrug our shoulders while non-believers hurtle headlong towards eternal destruction.
 - But when we engage with the world, we’re constantly pressured, in various ways and to varying degrees, to do that which may compromise core Christian convictions.
 - It’s a lose-lose-lose situation – we either:
 1. *Stay silent*, and feel guilty because we know we should speak up;
 2. *Speak the truth*, get slammed for being a bigot;
 3. *Tell people what they want to hear*, and feel bad for letting Jesus down and confirming people in their rebellion against God.
 - A lose-lose-lose situation.
- Friends, Standing for Jesus is hard work.
 - We see that in what Paul faces.
 - And we see that in what we face.
- But that doesn’t mean we should run away.

And I say that, because look at what comes next.

Rescue (21:31b-36)

- A Rescue
- Verse 31 - While the mob was trying to kill Paul news reached the commander of the Roman troops – so he gathered some of his officers and soldiers and ran down to the scene and stopped the beating.
- Arresting Paul, ordering him to be bound, he then asks what crime was committed – and verse 34 – *‘some in the crowd shouted one thing and some other another, and since the commander could*

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not get the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks'
(presumably to Paul's own safety and to keep the peace).

- From an unlikely place - the Roman authorities - Paul is rescued.
- Permit me to make two closing remarks:

First – Hardships in the Christian walk will happen – it should not stop us declaring Jesus.

- Notice, that the travel warnings all came true.
- What the Holy Spirit had said – prison and hardship would be faced – came to be
- What the prophet Agabas said – Paul would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles – came to be
- What Paul said he was ready for – to be bound and killed – came to be.

- And what this sets up is the first of what will be five defence speeches (which you will see on the outline) where Paul gains the opportunity to proclaim the gospel of the resurrected Jesus – an opportunity that he would not have to the same degree if he had not been bound, imprisoned and put on trial.
- It is those defence speeches that we will look at over the coming weeks – as we move to the end of Acts.

Application

- Friends, we cannot know what God has instore for us.
- Who here has any idea what tomorrow may bring – but even if that is some kind of hardship, then what we are called to do, is leave that fate to God.
- And in whatever circumstance we find ourselves – recognise that it will be an opportunity to declare that you have confidence in Jesus.
- If you follow in the footsteps of Paul – that opportunity will show itself in what you say and do: Like him – will you say: 'I do what I do for the name of Jesus' and then back those words up as you walk into the face of hardship, and stand firm for Christ.

Second – God is in control

- I find it wonderful, that despite the apprehension for all those around him, that Paul stuck to his commission to stand firm for Jesus.
- And more, I think it is wonderful that God in his sovereign power raised up an unlikely champion to protect Paul when it looked like it was the end - A Roman commander was sent running.
- It gives me confidence to think that as we live faithful to what God asks of us, that he also has the resources to raise up who he wants, when he wants, to look after us.

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- And most beautifully, most amazingly, even if that means we lost our lives for him – then he has that covered as well – because he has raised up the most unlikely of champions – his son Jesus – to walk us right into heaven.

Application

- Don't let anyone tell you that putting your trust in Jesus is a bad idea.
- And to prepare yourself – ask yourself this question:

'Am I ready, not only to be bound, but also to die...for the name of the Lord Jesus'

Are you ready?

Closing Prayer