

Sermon for Sunday, March 25, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"BOUND AND DETERMINED"  
Acts 21:7-15

Text: "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?  
For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem  
for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" Acts 21:13

St. Paul was going home! As the Phoenician coast rose over the horizon and came into view, he must have stood in the bow of the ship with his eyes straining to see his beloved country again. His heart must have beat with excitement over the thrilling prospect of seeing old friends, visiting old haunts, seeing the familiar sights and places that mean home.

If you have ever been away from home for a long time, you can appreciate how Paul must have felt that day. As the miles speed by and you get closer and closer to home, the excitement begins to rise. As familiar landmarks and well remembered scenes begin to come into view, your heart beats faster and you smile with pure happiness. Such must have been the case with Paul. For many years, weary, strenuous, trying years--he had wandered over the face of Asia Minor and parts of Europe sharing Jesus with the world. When he was tired and hungry, when he lay exhausted on his bed at night, when he walked weary, lonely miles between strange cities, Paul's thoughts must have turned back often to Jerusalem and the happy days he had known there. Now--after years of travel--he was going home.

Going home to Jerusalem must have meant a lot to Paul. As a youth he had left Tarsus to study in Jerusalem. There he had become, as he once put it, a Jew among the Jews. He had loved the country of his fathers and the Holy City of Jerusalem. There he had risen to leadership and prominence, a zealous follower of the ancient laws of his people. But one day a journey had changed all of that. On his way to Damascus he had encountered Jesus on the road. Nothing was ever the same again. He turned his back on all that he had loved. He left behind friends who no longer understood him. He put aside a bright future for now his career meant nothing to him. As he put it, he counted everything less for the sake of Jesus.

As the years went by they took their toll. They had been hard, demanding years and now his youthful vigor was gone. Many of the old friends of yesteryear were dead and surely things had changed in Jerusalem. Yet, excitement must have bubbled in his breast--Paul was going home!

The ship bearing Paul made port first at Tyre on the Syrian coast. There Paul began to get the first indication of trouble ahead. For several days they tarried there with disciples they found. Through the Holy Spirit those fellow Christians warned Paul that he should not go up to Jerusalem. When it was time to sail on, the disciples along with their wives and children went to the shores with Paul and the Bible tells us they knelt there and prayed. Surely their hearts must have been heavy with concern for Paul.

Briefly the ship touched port at Ptolemais and at last they landed at Casarea. From there they would make their way inland to Jerusalem. But in Casarea they met an old friend--Philip the evangelist--and the Bible tells us they tarried there many days. A man named Agabus came down from Judea. He had the gift of prophecy and he took Paul's belt and wrapped it around his own hands and feet as he made a prophecy. "Thus saith the Holy Ghost," he said, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."

Now those first inklings of trouble ahead were being confirmed by God. It was not to be a joyous homecoming after all. In Jerusalem were men with hate in their eyes

Do you remember the story of Isaiah in the Old Testament? The king had just died and Isaiah was deeply troubled, wondering what would happen to his nation. He went to the temple and as he entered he had a vision of God, high and lifted up. Isaiah heard the voice of God, "Whom shall we send and who will go for us?" Yes, who will do service for the Lord? Back came the reply of Isaiah, "Here am I--send me!" Isaiah got his priorities in order. Isn't that the kind of response God wants from us? What service is God calling you to this morning? Can you believe there is nothing he wishes you to do? Can you believe that God is fully satisfied with your service to him this morning? What is God laying on your heart to do and you are holding back? What service is God putting before you that you have not yet accepted? Are your priorities straight? You see, to be surrendered to God's will means surrendered to serve. What this church and what our world needs are brave men and women who, like Paul, are responding to him, "Lord, what will you have me to do." It needs people with their priorities in order.

But note that St. Paul was not only willing to surrender, willing to serve, he was also willing to suffer. He once wrote, "I have suffered the loss of all things for Jesus and count them as nothing." Now, late in his career, when he is worn and weary from years of service, you would think he deserved some reward. Yet, St. Paul cries out still, "For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Yes, willing to suffer. We are not a people given to suffering--at least not very much and not for very long. We are quick to grab our pain pills and our tranquilizers!

Once King David sinned against God. He went to make a burnt offering to God for his sin. He had to buy some wood for the fire and the man--when he saw it was the king--wanted to give the wood to David. But David replied, "I will not offer unto the Lord my God that which doth cost me nothing." Has your surrender and your service to Jesus cost you anything? Take your giving to the Lord's work through this church--how many of us here this morning have suffered anything for what we give to God?

Isn't it a fact of the matter that real surrender and real service often leads to suffering as a reward? What was Paul's reward for years of service? It was to be executed in Rome. What was the reward of the apostle James for faithful service? It was to be executed with the sword. What was the reward of John Huss for faithful witnessing to Jesus? It was to be burned at the stake. And for that matter, what was the reward of Jesus for making himself of no reputation and being born in human flesh? It was to be crucified. The man who backs off from surrender and service that leads to suffering will not change the world.

After Paul's experience on the Damascus road, he was led blind into the city. God told a man named Ananias to go minister to Paul, but Ananias hesitated because of Paul's reputation for persecuting Christians. And God said to him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." In the years that followed, Paul did indeed suffer. He tells us he was beaten, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, put in prison, gone without food, and suffered from some disease he called a "thorn in the flesh". Yet, at the end he is still bound and determined--"I am ready to be bound--I am ready to die."

I don't know what sort of future our world has--I don't know what sort of future our city has--I don't know what sort of future this church has, but I do know this: if there is much future for any of us, it will be shaped by men who are bound and determined--men who are surrendered to God, who are serving the Lord, who are not backing off from suffering for Jesus. Maybe the one question we need to ask ourselves this morning is this: am I bound and determined for Jesus? Are you?