

Ready to Die for Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of August 1999. The preacher is Gavin Ward.

His sermon is entitled Ready to Die for Jesus and is from Acts chapter 21 verses 1 to 36.

Have you seen the advertisement on TV? It's a bloke sitting in a train and he's just looking ahead in the train and we get a view of him through the window.

And then as he's looking around the train sitting still, he looks around, he looks out of the window and his eyes see something and his eyes are fixed on it and he can't take his eyes off what he's looking at.

And then the train starts to move. So he sort of slowly gets out of his seat and he's still sort of looking. He's like this and he's still sort of looking at whatever's happening. And the train starts to move. So he turns around and still looking at what he's looking at, he starts to run.

[1 : 0 3] And the train moves quicker out of the station and he keeps running. And you can just see him moving past the windows. He gets to the end of the carriage and he goes through the door into the next carriage and he's still running, looking and looking and looking, until bang, he runs into the end of the carriage.

And that's the end of the ad. Have you seen that ad on television? And it's advertising a car and I can't think of what car it's advertising. What car is it advertising? Mitsubishi? Is it?

Well, the ad's obviously very effective, isn't it? No one knows what car it is. But you remember the ad. He's got his eyes fixed on something, hasn't he? Well, God calls us to be like this too.

He calls us to have our eyes fixed on him, not to be distracted by other things around us, but to be focused.

And often this can be difficult for us, difficult to maintain focus on God in a world that has so many different things happening around us, so many distractions for us.

[2 : 0 5] So how can we remain focused on God and what God desires for us amid all the distractions of the world today? Well, today's reading about Paul and as he arrives in Jerusalem might help us out.

Paul's eyes are firmly fixed on going to Jerusalem, not because it's something that he really desires for himself, but more because God has set him on this path.

He's operating with an attitude of serving God and not people. Let's have a look at it. And as I say, it's on page 905. We know, as a bit of background, we know that Paul is pretty keen to get to Jerusalem.

We've read in chapter 20, if you've been here when Paul was, Barker was preaching on it, that in verse 16, he's eager to get there on the day of Pentecost.

He wants to make sure he's there on the day of Pentecost, so he bypasses Asia. We also know that Paul's keen to give a collection to the Jerusalem church because they're poor. And he's been travelling around amongst all the churches, collecting money so that he can get to Jerusalem to give him this collection.

[3 : 15] And we read about that in 2 Corinthians and Romans 15. But most importantly, in verse 22 of the previous chapter, we read that Paul is a captive to the Spirit.

We read that God is the one who's driving him towards Jerusalem. God has things under control. And Paul feels no option but to be carried along and driven to Jerusalem, to obey God's word.

And Paul knows that there's trouble afoot when he gets to Jerusalem. He's been warned. In verse 23, we read that he has been warned by the Holy Spirit in many places, that he faces prison and hardships there.

And we can also read from Romans 15 how he actually asked the Roman church to pray for him, to pray for protection when he got to Jerusalem. He asked the church to pray for him.

So he's very single-minded about getting there though. And chapter 21 opens up with him leaving the Ephesians and Paul Barker would have told you about the emotional time that that was and the heart-wrenching, gut-wrenching time that that was.

[4 : 21] And the first few words there, we had parted from them, doesn't really capture just the torture, if you like, that was involved in wrenching themselves away from those Ephesian elders.

Anyway, he says farewell and he takes off. And in verse 3, we find that he finally lands at a place called Tyre where he looks up the disciples there, if you like, and wants to spend some time with them and probably while the ship's being reloaded again.

And this church in Tyre was established after the persecution of Stephen earlier on in Acts. What do we notice here? Well, we notice in verse 4 particularly that when he looked up the disciples, through the Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

Well, now, we've just sort of discovered that in Acts chapter 20 that it was the Holy Spirit, he's captive to the Spirit and he's going to Jerusalem. What's going on now? Through the Spirit, he's not to go to Jerusalem.

It doesn't make much sense. Well, it's possible, and I think it probably is, that the Holy Spirit told the disciples in Tyre what was going to take place with Paul in Jerusalem.

[5 : 33] And the words there specifically say they. It was through the Spirit they told Paul not to go. With their relationship with Paul, with their desire for Paul not to receive any harm, they're the ones who've taken over and said, well, we've been told what's going to take place in Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit, don't go.

Don't go there because of the harm that will come to you. Why would they do this? Well, they do have very strong feelings for Paul. They're very attached, attached to him.

And we see this demonstrated as Paul leaves. And we saw it on the video too that they all went down to the shore and they all prayed. They took their families along and like with the Ephesians, they prayed with Paul.

So it's very understandable that they didn't want him to go to Jerusalem to face persecution. And we see this relationship that Paul has with churches even demonstrated more so when he comes to Caesarea over the page in verses 8 to 14.

And we read there in verse 8 that he stays with Philip, the evangelist. This is the same guy who baptized a eunuch in Acts chapter 8, an Ethiopian eunuch.

[6 : 43] And we last hear of Philip in Acts 8 where he says he's proclaiming the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. But our particular interest here is in verses 10 and 11 where this prophet Agabus comes to talk.

And the prophet's from Judea and he's already been, he's already prophesied about a severe famine earlier on in Acts. And he performs an enacted prophecy.

An enacted prophecy. A what? Well, these enacted prophecies are things that have happened in the Old Testament. There was a guy called Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 20 who, get this, walked around stripped and barefoot for three years as an enacted prophecy.

Stripped and barefoot, he walked around for three years and he was prophesying against Egypt and how a king, the king of Assyria, would come and lead all the Egyptian captives away.

Another example in Ezekiel chapter 4 we read about Ezekiel who drew a map of Jerusalem on a clay tablet. He put the tablet on the ground and then he lay beside the tablet on his left hand side facing the tablet for 390 days.

[7 : 58] And then he turned over because he must have been getting sore turned over and he rolled onto his right hand side for 40 days and lay surrounding the tablet facing that. That's an enacted prophecy and in that particular case it was because he was enacting out the siege of Jerusalem that was going to take place by the Babylonians before the people in Jerusalem got led away as captives.

And these enacted prophecies specifically enable people to see the reality and the gravity. I mean there's nothing like actually seeing it to realise the reality and gravity of what's going to take place.

and they're also focused a lot on God's plans for the future. So what does Agabus do? Well Agabus you didn't realise Paul was an Essendon supporter did you?

Agabus which is probably just as well because they're going to win the flag. What does Agabus do? He gets a scarf or not a scarf a belt and Paul would have worn this around his waist like this as we saw in the video with his clothes and Agabus grabbed it and he wound it around his hands like this and probably around his feet it was probably slightly longer than this one and he says that the person who owns this scarf is going to end up like this and be taken away by the Gentiles in Jerusalem.

He's giving the people there at Caesarea a clear indication of what is going to take place with Paul when he gets there and he's possibly going to face imprisonment or even possibly death but the prophet demonstrates that by this enacted parable prophecy I should say.

[9 : 39] And what's the reaction of the people with Paul that we read? Well we read that they urged him not to go and there's a sense here of them begging of pleading him pleading with him not to go but there's a sense also of it being very unsuccessful.

Let's face it I mean they really loved Paul. They didn't want to see him hurt. They didn't want him to suffer at all. I mean it's a bit like us here today. I mean how would we feel if we knew something like that was going to happen to our own minister here in Paul Barker or Phil or Warwick.

I mean we'd feel the same if we knew that they were going off to face persecution somewhere and they felt that that's what they should be doing. We'd try to talk them out of it if we knew that that's what they were facing.

Well what's Paul's answer here in verse 13 the first half of verse 13 he says what are you doing weeping and breaking my heart?

This is very very emotional sort of stuff very strong. I mean he's got a strong bond with them he knows the pain that he's causing them by what he's doing he knows the love that they have for him and he knows what faces him in Jerusalem and he expresses this with this term breaking my heart it's a term we use today you're breaking my heart you're tearing at my heart you're cutting me to the core very very strong language and Paul is drawn by the emotions of these people drawn to stay with them drawn with the anguish of his love and his concern for them and his relationship with them but Paul is drawn by even stronger ties to the God whom he serves and even though he's got this strong emotional tie to his own people he wants to serve God and he's drawn by his love to serve

[11 : 40] God he will not be distracted from what God has planned for him remember he's a captive to the spirit and so in verse 14 we read that since he would not be persuaded we remain silent except to say the Lord's will be done they handed the matter over to God sometimes we can be torn between emotional ties we have with people and serving God sometimes when we're serving God when we're trying to live a life that displays our own Christian life perhaps we're trying to live a life of something that God has laid something on our hearts we know definitely what God wants us to do but we can be dissuaded by others from doing it perhaps dissuaded by people who love us very much who have our own well-being at heart people who really want the best for us but these people may not know what God has placed on our hearts when Vicky and I began talking to people about what

God had placed on our hearts to leave work full time in my case and the plans that God had prepared for us many of the people we spoke to were supportive of us doing what we were doing and gave us some good counsel and suggested some pretty practical sort of things for us to do but there were some people who we spoke to who out of their love for us and out of their concern for us started to focus on the cost of what we were doing on the lost opportunities in terms of business and promotion and financial tried to tell me that I was going through a midlife crisis which I don't think I am but they were trying to tell me that and that was out of their love and concern for us and they said very practically they said look you can still serve God you can still go to work at Yarra Valley Water and do all those sorts of things and you can serve God on the weekends and things like that and I could have and in the evenings and I could have but we knew what

God had laid on our hearts and had planned for us and we knew we were operating in his will and we had a peace and we still have a real peace about what God has for us and has planned for us we wouldn't be turned aside by what others were telling us but we understood they were saying to us out of love now God may not be calling you to such a drastic move he might be but maybe he's not but God may be laying something on your heart and as you discern his will and as you pray about the matter and as you read and study God's word and as you talk to other Christian friends and those who you respect about it you know for sure what God is telling you and laying on your heart you feel a peace perhaps about the plans can I suggest what we learn from this is that you listen to the advice of others and take note of wise counsel that others will provide but ultimately you do what God wants you to do and this is not a recipe to be radical or different or controversial because it feels good to be radical or a rebel or because you can get your own way or an opportunity to be a rebel or do something different but remember you must be sure that it's

God who's running the show that you are a captive to the spirit but we must be serving God and not people Paul's intent is even greater here in the second half of verse 13 he says for I'm ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus in June Vicky and I took a break and went up for a few days up to Canberra to catch up with relatives there and while we were in Canberra we did a couple of the touristy things something we don't normally do there and one of the visits we made was to the war memorial in Canberra and it's a very sobering place to go to if you've been there you'll know what I'm talking about and while I drifted away quietly by myself at one stage and I went into an area where they had a video running footage of the second world war and particularly they were focusing on the war in the Pacific and the Japanese kamikaze pilots and I stood there shocked as I stood watching these young guys in planes bombing their planes into ships and they were destroying the ships and they were destroying the planes and they were destroying themselves and they were completely focused on wanting to get into that ship and the guys to destroy it and they decided that that's what they wanted to do and the guys on the ships were firing guns back at them because they knew they had to destroy this plane before it got to their ship otherwise their ship was going to go down and sink and their lives would be lost and they knew the gunmen on the ships knew that these young men in these planes were determined that these pilots were determined to hit their ship because these pilots were prepared to die for the emperor of Japan and for

Japan as itself now Paul expresses a similar view here he's been told what faces him in Jerusalem and he expects that that could even lead to death but if God's in control if this is God's plan then he's prepared to die for it not for the emperor not for any worldly leader not for any nation on earth but for the name of the Lord Jesus it's something we don't face in Australia today dying for the name of the Lord Jesus there are people around the world today who do face that situation and face that question are you prepared to die but for us can I ask you tonight are you prepared to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus when you go to work or to school or chat to neighbours or friends or relatives this week and you start talking about the weekend even tomorrow what will you report on what happened on the weekend will part of that report be that you came to church tonight will part of that report be that you read the bible or even prayed over the weekend when you hear someone exclaim

[18 : 35] Jesus name blasphemously and it's getting more and more prevalent these days it's just an accepted part of our language what do you do do you just accept it and walk away ignoring it what about when you're invited to be part of a discussion which you know is wrong what about when the discussion might be around ripping people off it might be about not being completely truthful in dealing with others perhaps it's a business decision perhaps it's a discussion backstabbing someone putting someone else down perhaps it's some minor fraud or minor scam that's going on what is your attitude in those situations are you serving the living God are you prepared to stand up for your faith are you prepared to stand up for the name of the Lord Jesus no we may not face physical death here yet for our faith but we are constantly under pressure we constantly face suffering for the name of the Lord

Jesus Paul is not prepared to die here because it sounds like a good idea or because it would be something honourable to do or because someone told him in the Caesarean church that that's what his attitude should be no Paul is prepared to die because he's focused solely on serving God he's a captive to the spirit and Paul is not doing this in his own strength but in God's strength the same strength that Samson used when he knocked over the walls and destroyed those Philistines back in Judges the same strength that's available for us today at the end of chapter 21 we see how Paul arrives in Jerusalem and he meets with the church there and the same old issue of Jewish and Gentile relations is still on the agenda it's still alive but these

Jewish Christians are not Paul's opponents in Jerusalem and he deals with the matter very quickly and he gets involved in a Nazarite vow and he sponsors fellows to do that once again of course we see Paul making concessions on behalf of church unity which he's done many times and then we see Paul arrested we see him up against his real opponents the Jews and they accuse him of teaching against the Jews and the law and the temple towards the end there in Acts 21 and that's the same accusations that Stephen faced the same accusations that they pulled him away for and martyred him and Paul's also accused of defiling the temple by bringing Greeks in to the temple area the holy temple area these are trumped up charges and as we saw in the video and as we know from God's word a riot breaks out and they try to kill Paul and he's arrested or perhaps even rescued by the Romans who come in and he's arrested by the Gentiles the prophecy of Agabus with the tied hands is fulfilled in terms of

Paul being captured by the Gentiles no there's someone else who had a focus on getting to Jerusalem there's someone else who knew of persecution and trouble which would meet them there there's someone else who was warned by their closest friends not to go to Jerusalem someone else who was arrested on trumped up charges there's someone else who was unjustly accused and misrepresented there's someone else who was determined to do God's will alone this someone else was executed in Jerusalem this someone else rose from the dead in Jerusalem this someone else was far greater than Paul and we give thanks to God that Jesus was not dissuaded by the protests and the warnings and the impending pain and suffering the arguments of others and friends and the false accusations we give thanks that in God's strength he continued down the path

God set for him that we might have eternal life through him this same Jesus knows the pain of suffering and persecution that we may endure this same Jesus gives us the strength to serve God and not people how can we be focused on what God desires for us amid all the distractions of today through the strength which only God gives as you strive to serve God in your life and not people be encouraged that God will give you the strength to complete the path he set for you and to withstand suffering which will come along the way and be thankful that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was focused to do God's will even to death on the cross let's pray heavenly father thank you for the great example of Paul that he was focused in getting to Jerusalem that he was focused in meeting and in serving you and in fulfilling your plans for him father we pray that you might give us that same focus thank you father that in your strength we are able to live for you and to face up to the suffering that we might receive and thank you father for that and that as we do suffer for your name's sake that you might give us that strength to live for you this week in Jesus name

[24 : 44] Amen which también has in cities with