

Acts 21:1-16: Would You Let A Stranger Into Your Personal Business?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA January 7, 2018

I. Introduction

Do you have close trusted friends that you confide in? Or do you keep your personal life personal? If you do open up to others, would you ever do it with a trusted Christian who's a relative stranger to you? How does God expect us to do relationships? Does He want us opening up to each other, helping each other even though we may not know each other that well?

II. Acts 21:1-16: How Are Christians Supposed to Do Relationships?

21:1-6, Paul said goodbye to the Ephesian elders but not before telling them what waited for him in Jerusalem: "chains and tribulations" (20:23). This was disheartening to them, to think that they would no longer see Paul alive, which is why they were all brought to tears as they prayed with him and said goodbye. Leaving Miletus, Paul and his companions set sail for Jerusalem. They come to the island of Cos, which was about 40 miles south of Miletus and famous for the birthplace of Hippocrates, the father of medicine. From there they go to the island of Rhodes then to Patara the seaport of Lycia on the south coast of Asia Minor. Then they board a large cargo ship headed for Tyre in the Province of Syria; it was about a 400 mile journey (Tyre was about 110 miles northwest of Jerusalem). They were in Tyre seven days as the ship unloaded and loaded its cargo. Paul and his team found the church of Tyre and lodged with its members. These coastal churches (in Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea) were likely started by Philip and others who were scattered after Stephen's death (Acts 8:1, 4, 40; 11:19, see also Acts 10 regarding Caesarea). The point is Paul was a relative stranger to the brethren in Tyre; they may know him by name, but not personally, at least not well enough to direct this apostle's itinerary. They tell him not to go to Jerusalem. Why would they get so personal with him? And when Paul and his team leave, the whole church, including women and children, go to say goodbye and they kneel down and pray with them. They treat Paul (and the others) like he's a close relative for whom they are very concerned. Would you let a relative stranger talk to you like this? Would you open up to a relative stranger like this? Why do they, why does Paul?

21:7-14, from Tyre they go to Ptolemais and stay with these brethren one day. Then they go to Caesarea, the capital of Judea Province. It was about 60 miles south of Tyre and the official residence of the governor of Judea (like Pontius Pilate). They all stay with "Philip the evangelist"—this is one of the seven deacons the apostles appointed in Acts 6:5-6. Luke calls him "Philip the evangelist" likely to distinguish him from Philip the apostle (1:13). Luke mentions that Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied and that after they were there many days a prophet named Agabus arrived (he's the one who prophesied the famine in 11:28). Why all this talk of prophecy? God wants Paul, them and us to know that the things of this life are not happenstance nor are they out of His control. So the Holy Spirit makes explicit what He's been saying all along to Paul and everyone he visits (20:23): Agabus takes Paul's belt and binds his own hands and feet and says, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him to the hands of the Gentiles.'" And this time it's not just those Paul is visiting but his own team, including Luke, who in tears plead with him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul acknowledges their tears, which break his heart, but he's resolute in his will to go. He tells them that he's not only ready to be bound but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus, at which point they cease, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

21:15-16, after this they went up to Jerusalem and some of the brethren from Caesarea went with them, including a man named Mnason with whom they were to lodge (either on the way to or in Jerusalem). Mnason was an early disciple, meaning that he may've been one of the individuals who believed in Christ at Pentecost or one of Jesus' disciples prior to that. Would you go with Paul after hearing over and over what they were going to do to Paul in Jerusalem? Would you stick by Paul like this, knowing the dangers he was about to face?

Was Paul disobeying the Holy Spirit by going to Jerusalem? It seems like he was, but he actually wasn't. Every time the Spirit spoke to the believers Paul visited, He wasn't telling them that Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem. He was simply revealing what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem. In fact, the Lord made it crystal clear that Paul was not only to go to Jerusalem but Rome (19:21; 20:22-24; 21:14; 23:11). Then why did the brethren keep trying to prevent Paul from going? Because Paul is not simply an apostle to them; he's family and he's about to go to Jerusalem where he might be killed. So they took the Holy Spirit's words as a warning to Paul instead of a prediction. It's interesting that when Paul finally makes it to Jerusalem, the actions of Israel's leaders will serve to further Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. That is, they want Paul dead, so they let the mob seize him, but he ends up in the hands of the Romans. And this ultimately places, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, in the most strategic place to reach Gentiles: the ancient capital of the world, the influential city of Rome.

How are Christians supposed to do relationships? Would you let a stranger into your personal business? First, we were always meant to live in community, surrounded by brothers and sisters who help us through this difficult life. How do we know? God is a community of three: the Father, Son, and Spirit. And we are made in His image, which is why from birth God placed us in a community. That is, even if we have no siblings and our parents have no siblings, we're still in a community of at least three or two. God never meant for us to live life alone. Second, when you believe in Christ and become part of Him, you gain an instant family which includes brothers, sisters, mothers, children... even homes to live in (Mark 10:29-30). Third, this family is supposed to be there for you and you're supposed to seek and receive their love, support, and guidance (Ephesians 4).

That's why the people of Tyre and Caesarea and elsewhere, who didn't know Paul personally, provided him food and a place to live. But that's not all, they get in his business too, even though he's the great apostle Paul. They're not thinking of him as an apostle but a brother in Christ whose life's in danger. And when they can't persuade him, it brings them to tears when they have to say goodbye. The world may see Paul and the people of these churches as strangers. But in Christ's Kingdom they're family. That's why Luke and the rest go with Paul to Jerusalem even though they may suffer the same fate as Paul. Why? Because you don't turn your back on a brother.

Do you see the Christians around you the way Paul did, even though they may be relative strangers to you? Would you let them get into your business and point out something you need to hear? Or do you keep your Christian life to yourself? The Lord provided you a large family to support you. Avail yourself of that family.

