

'HAVING SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE...'

SERIES: PAUL, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

By Ron Ritchie

During my third year of a four-year programme at Dallas Seminary in 1965, I became a little anxious because I had not been selected for a ministry position yet. A week-long missionary conference was held at the seminary that year. Having lived in North Africa for several years, and having come in contact with many missionaries during that period, I definitely felt I did not want to go into missionary work. I did, however, attend the conference because all students were encouraged to attend. But I sat in the back of the auditorium, and brought along a magazine to relieve what I expected to be an uninteresting week. One speaker, Vincent Joy, soon grabbed my attention, however. He struck me as being the most Christ-like believer I had ever met. Although he was a man of very small stature, he soon became a spiritual giant in my estimation.

I had a meeting with him and found that he ministered among Eskimos in Alaska. When I asked him if he had any staff positions open, he replied that they needed someone to run their radio station which reached all of Alaska and Northern Canada. I almost gasped in amazement, as I had earlier run radio stations in North Africa and Philadelphia. What a great fit, I thought to myself. When I told Vincent about this, he became very interested and we talked further. But when I later told my wife, who was born in North Africa, that there was a possibility of taking on this ministry in Alaska, she shivered and said that she was thinking about ministering in a sunny climate, not snowy, cold Alaska. Within a very short time, however, she had come around. "When do we start packing?" she asked. I had rarely been so excited at a job prospect. My professors and all of my fellow-students agreed that this ministry seemed tailor-made for me. Joy and peace were mine in full measure.

But just a few months later I received news that Vincent had been killed in a freak accident, when a tree which he had been cutting down fell on him. A post-mortem later revealed that he had a massive brain tumor. God in his grace had taken him home in this accident. But the joy and peace which I had experienced all year long disappeared in an instant. I really struggled with this turn of events. I felt I had done everything right. Wasn't Vincent a man of God? I asked myself. Hadn't I been walking in the Spirit all through this process? It was a tough summer. All my plans and dreams for a ministry in Alaska came to a shattering end. Amidst the disappointment and the tears, however, I finally came to the point where I could say, by the grace of God, "Not my will but thine be done."

In our studies in the life of the apostle Paul we have seen how God used this man who was filled with the Holy Spirit to accomplish his purposes in ministry, at times with peace and joy, at other times in spite of the spiritual warfare which he encountered almost everywhere he went. As we study the apostle's life, it seems obvious that when he experienced disappointment and lack of clarity as to what to do next, he too, as I did in seminary in 1965, must on occasion have wondered what God was doing. He, too, must have had to say, with Christ, "Not my will but thine be done."

The year is 57 A.D., and we are in the 21st year of Paul's ministry. The apostle has completed the third of his three missionary journeys, having established dozens of churches in Greece and Turkey. Paul has bade farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus and boarded a ship to begin his journey to Jerusalem with his fellow disciples. With him he is bringing the moneys collected from the Greek churches for the relief of the famine in Jerusalem. Paul may have been praying that these monies would be a symbol of unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians, although some scholars feel that he was more concerned with the unity of these groups than were the Jews themselves. Further, as we saw in Acts 20:16, the apostle wanted to be in Jerusalem by the Feast of Pentecost when he perhaps would have opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nation he loved so deeply.

From his prison cell in Rome where he later wrote the letter to the Ephesians, Paul had much to say on the subject of spiritual warfare. According to the apostle, believers are engaged in a struggle between the kingdom

of darkness and the kingdom of light, between the sons of darkness and the sons of light, between Satan and the Lord Jesus, over the eternal souls of men and women in every generation until the Lord finally casts Satan into the lake of fire forever at the end of time. Meanwhile, the way to overcome the evil one is to trust in the strength of the risen Lord and put on the full armor of God.

Like a Roman soldier, Christians should don their spiritual armor, only their dress is the Lord Jesus himself. They should "gird their loins with truth," the truth as it is found in the Lord Jesus. In the same way they should "put on the breastplate of righteousness" so that they would remember that their ground of acceptance before God is in Christ Jesus. Then, they should have "shod their feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Here, Paul is quoting the prophet Isaiah. Christians need a good pair of shoes--in this case the "gospel of peace"--in which they can stand firmly in the midst of the spiritual battle. The soles of the leather sandals worn by the Roman soldiers were patterned with hobnails which ensured that their footing was sound. Christians must always remind themselves of the great word of the apostle in the book of Romans, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5: 1). Since we have made peace with God and God has made peace us, our lives can reflect calmness and courage in the midst of life's spiritual battles.

In Acts 21: 1-16, we find Paul enjoying a period of peace while on his way to Jerusalem, the city of peace, where he will again join the spiritual battle. On his way to the city, he and the disciples accompanying him take the opportunity to visit and encourage fellow believers in Tyre, Ptolemais and Caesarea. It appears that Paul's own disciples, as well as other believers whom he is about to visit, are concerned for his life, and they will seek to convince him not to go to Jerusalem. Everyone seems to share this concern for Paul's life--everyone, that is, except Paul himself. He is at peace and resting in his circumstances.

I. Peace in the midst of a warning, Acts 21:1-6

And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a stright course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

As the ship sailed toward Syria, the Island of Cyprus came into view. The apostle probably took advantage of this teachable moment to relate to his companions the adventures which he and Barnabas had some 10 years earlier. In Antioch at that time, the Holy Spirit said to the elders of the church there, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them." The elders laid hands on the two men, and the Holy Spirit directed them, together with John Mark, to visit the Island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas.

The disciples proclaimed the Word of God in all the synagogues along the main highway which ran east to west, but there was little response until they arrived at Paphos, the administrative capital of the island.

There, one of the first people they met was Bar-Jesus, a false prophet and magician who had great influence over the Roman governor Sergius Paulus. The governor was spiritually hungry, but the false prophet had him under his influence. The apostle, however, through the power of the Holy Spirit, caused the false prophet to be blinded for a time. Sergius Paulus, amazed at the teaching of Paul, and seeing what had happened, believed in the gospel. Paul was recognized as an apostle through this sign, and he made his first Gentile convert.

On our recent pastoral trip to Israel, Ray Stedman and I found ourselves reminiscing over the many ministry opportunities we have shared together, and how the Lord had worked in so many wonderful ways to his honor and glory. Reviewing the way the Lord has worked in our lives in the past confirms the peace of Christ in our hearts for today, and also encourages us for the future.

Leaving Cyprus, the ship set sail for Tyre. In the 14th century B.C., King Nebuchednezzar of Babylon attacked and destroyed Tyre. Later, in 332 B.C., Alexander the Great again destroyed the city. When the King of kings himself, the Lord Jesus, visited the city in 32 A.D., he defeated the forces of the kingdom of darkness by casting out the demon which had possessed the daughter of a Canaanite woman. Paul and his companions looked up some of their fellow-Christians who may have come to Tyre following the persecution that had broken out after the death of Stephen in Jerusalem some 21 years earlier. When they had found them, they remained with them for a week.

During that time, the Holy Spirit did something we need to look at carefully. Verse 4: "they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem." The apostle has meticulously planned his trip to Jerusalem, yet here in Tyre his fellow-believers warn him not to go.

There are several passages we need to review in order to trace Paul's thoughts concerning this trip. According to Acts 19:21, the apostle "purposed in the spirit [or the Spirit] to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there I must also see Rome.'" He went to Greece to pick up the offering for the famine relief fund, hoping to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost. While he was in Corinth he wrote in his letter to the Romans, "...I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Romans 15:25, 26). He collected the money and, taking the offering with him, started out for Jerusalem. Traveling north to Troas, he boarded a ship and sailed south to Miletus. From there he called the Ephesian elders to join him and said to them, "And now, behold, bound in spirit [or the Spirit] I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (Acts 20: 22,23). Now the apostle has landed in Tyre, where he apparently shared with believers there his desire and purpose to go to Jerusalem. But we have already seen how they responded to this news: "They kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem." In other words it was not their idea to deflect Paul from going to Jerusalem, but by the Holy Spirit they were directed to keep telling Paul repeatedly to not go there.

Let us review some of what we know about the apostle. Paul, according to Acts, was commissioned to witness to Gentiles, kings and Jews. We know of his love for the nation of Israel and of his willingness to go to the Jerusalem Council on behalf of the Gentiles. He was willing to collect the offering for the Jewish relief fund and to personally deliver the collection to Jerusalem. We are aware, too, of his stubbornness in the dispute he had with Barnabas over John Mark; his zeal in facing down Peter in Antioch; and his fearlessness in the face of confrontation by the Jews in many of the cities which he visited. He himself said on one occasion that he "did not consider his life of any account as dear to himself in order that he might finish the course and the ministry that he had received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Why, then, this apparent contradiction of viewpoints between Paul and these believers in Tyre?

Perhaps the answer can be found in the context. As I studied this passage, I checked eight different English translations of this section. Some of them were both questionable and confusing. For example, in Acts 19:21 there is a phrase that is rendered "...Paul purposed in (the/his) spirit..." Of the translations which I checked, five indicated that this phrase was referring to Paul's spirit, while two said that this is referring to the Holy Spirit.

How do we arrive at a correct understanding of this text? As I have already said, I believe context is the key. Both in this and the following passage, it seems that Paul in his spirit was planning on how to further unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Jerusalem. Rather than allow the disciples to carry the money there, he decided that he would go with them. But the converted Jews in Jerusalem were trying to keep the peace between themselves and the Jews, and Paul, unfortunately, had a way of stirring up the wrath of the Jews in the city.

All eight editions which I looked at rendered Acts 21 as follows: "...and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem," as "through the Holy Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." But Paul did not heed their warnings. Following a seven-day visit, the apostle and his fellow-workers boarded ship and continued on toward Jerusalem.

I suggest that Paul was encountering spiritual warfare. He had "girded his loins with the truth," he had "put on the breastplate of righteousness," and he had "shod his feet with the gospel of peace," yet he did not discern that it was his own human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, which was drawing him on to Jerusalem. Paul had made his plans to encourage unity among believing Jews and Christians, to deliver the monies to Jerusalem, and to be in the city for the Feast of Pentecost. So when the Holy Spirit spoke loud and clear through the believers of Tyre, the apostle was not in a position to hear what the Spirit was saying to him.

All of us can look back over our lives and recall times when God seemed to be calling us to a certain task, but then, having accomplished that work, it became clear that it was our own plans and dreams, and not the leading of the Spirit, that had accomplished what we believed to be a great work for the Lord. I often wonder if I was really led by the Spirit to go to the schools I attended or whether I was merely pursuing my own hopes and dreams.

In spite of this warning by the Holy Spirit, and the prayers of the saints of Tyre, Paul, resting in the peace of God, leaves Tyre and continues his journey to Jerusalem.

II. Peace in the midst of tears, Acts 21:7-16

And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done." And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

When they reached Caesarea, Paul and his band of disciples stayed at the home of Philip the evangelist, whom Luke refers to as "one of the seven." Earlier, Philip had penetrated the Samaritan community with the gospel. Following many signs and miracles in Samaria, the evangelist was directed to travel from Jerusalem to Gaza, a desert road. On that journey he met with the Ethiopian eunuch, a court official, who came to faith in Christ and was baptized when Philip opened up the Scriptures to him. Afterwards, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip up to Caesarea, where Paul and his group stayed with him on their journey to Jerusalem.

Philip had since married and become the father of four daughters, all whom had the gift of prophecy. After several days, a prophet named Agabus joined the group. Earlier, Paul and Barnabas had met this man in Antioch. There he indicated by the Spirit that there would be a great famine all over the world. This actually happened during the reign of Claudius (42-54 A.D.). Paul and Barnabas were charged with taking an offering from the saints of Antioch to the saints in Judea. Here is what this prophet did on seeing Paul: "And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Once again we see that the Holy Spirit is in charge of the church of Jesus Christ. Regardless of our hopes and dreams, our plans and programs, the Holy Spirit has the final word concerning the activities of the church of Jesus Christ.

Luke then adds the key statement, "And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go to Jerusalem." There was nothing evil in Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem. What was wrong was that his plan spoke louder than the voice of the Holy Spirit, which was given him by three different

groups of disciples, those in Tyre, the prophet Agabus, and by Luke, Timothy, Philip and his four daughters.

But here is Paul's response to their pleas: "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." That wonderful answer confirmed his total commitment to the Lord, but the fact remains that the Holy Spirit had said no to his plans to visit Jerusalem. The disciples could only fall silent: "And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking "The will of the Lord be done!" In other words, "What can we do with a man who cannot discern the voice of the Holy Spirit?"

Why did the apostle Paul so resist the counsel of his fellow-believers with regard to his return to Jerusalem? There are many suggestions as to why he did so. Some say that Paul, anticipating that the Lord was returning at any moment, wanted to give the Jews one more opportunity to hear the gospel. Some even say that, like the Lord, he set his face to go to Jerusalem to die. But that does not correspond with the plan he shared in Romans to the effect that he would attempt to visit Rome and Spain following his return to Jerusalem (Rom.15). Others have suggested that this was one way in which the apostle would have opportunity to fulfill his job description of being a witness to kings (Acts 9:15). But God could have arranged this without Paul's being bound in chains. Finally, some commentators feel that without the apostle's Roman prison experience we would not have the prison letters of Philipians, Ephesians, and Colossians. But, of course, Paul could have written those letters in freedom, just as all the others that were written outside of prison.

The bottom line in all of this appears to be the fact that in the midst of the spiritual warfare of life on earth, despite the fact that he had "girded his loins with truth; put on the breastplate of righteousness; and shod his feet with the gospel of peace," the apostle disobeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit as it was revealed through the disciples. In this passage once again Paul's humanity is revealed, warts and all. But God would use the apostle's poor judgment call to his honor and glory, just as he did with Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter--and just as he is doing with you and me.

I have a dear friend who is a spiritual leader in the worldwide Christian community. This man has surrounded his life and ministry with a board of elders who love him, pray for him and help him find the Holy Spirit's direction for his life and spiritual influence. At this moment, this man is convinced that the Holy Spirit is calling him to minister in a certain direction while his spiritual family are suggesting that he should go in a different direction. They, like the disciples of old, are saying, "since he will not be persuaded, the will of the Lord be done!"

Ever since the day of Pentecost, Christians have been engaged in a spiritual battle, one in which the Lord is using them to deliver men and women from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son Jesus Christ. The key to surviving in this battle, as the apostle himself points out in Ephesians, is to "be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God [we should clothe ourselves with the life of Christ], that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil...having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace..." [so that we have courage and calmness in the midst of the battle].

The next step is for Christians to surround themselves with a community of believers who will pray for, encourage, and help them discern the will of the Lord for their life and ministry.

But understand that, even when you have done everything to the best of your spiritual ability, and even while you are experiencing the peace of Christ, your own hopes and dreams will on occasion drown out the voice of the Holy Spirit. The battle is spiritual. The stakes are high: the eternal lives of men and women, boys and girls. But be encouraged. In spite of all the struggles, "The will of the Lord be done." Whatever must be overruled, our sovereign God will overrule it.

I did not go to Alaska after seminary. Following almost twenty years here in this church, however, I can look back and thank God, as I am confident his will was done. The enemy has many ways to drown out the voice of the Spirit. We must pray for each other and encourage each other, remembering that, in the end, "The will of the Lord be done."

Catalog No. 4104
Acts 21:1-16
Nineteenth Message
Ron R. Ritchie
March 27, 1988

Copyright (C) 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.