

Amazing Grace

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[0 : 0 0] to the second section that we have in Acts chapter 21 from verse 17 where Paul arrives in Jerusalem well but first I want to ask a question about the Holy Spirit and about guidance and if any of you were able to pick up, if you picked up what seems to be contradictory advice here from the Holy Spirit was Paul right to be so determined to go to Jerusalem given the advice of friends in verse 4 in other words is the spirit given contradictory advice can you look back to chapter 20 and verses 20 to 23 now this is the kind of thing that causes some people to stumble in verse 22 Paul says and now compelled by the spirit I am going to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen to me there

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me and then if you go forward to verse 4 of the chapter red chapter 21 finding the disciples there we stayed with them 7 days they urged Paul not to go down to Jerusalem and then in verse 11 and 12 we have that story of Agabus and he says he came down from Judea as a prophet and he took Paul's belt tied his own hands and feet and said the Holy Spirit says in this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles when we heard this we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem so it seems that there are two groups of people under the guidance of the Holy Spirit saying you shouldn't go to Jerusalem but Paul says that he is guided by the Holy Spirit and he must go to Jerusalem do you think that that is contrary advice was Paul right in going to Jerusalem or was he wrong in going to Jerusalem

Paul was correct Paul was correct okay the prophecy was handed to him so Paul was correct so the other people if we take it on the basis that Paul was correct were the other people misguided by the Spirit in what they said was the Spirit not really speaking to them in which case how do we understand guidance there is a question as well that I think Paul will be able to give it to one Paul okay so in reality we don't have a contradiction what we have is the Holy Spirit says the same thing to all of them the Holy Spirit says to Paul well he is compelled by the Spirit to go but he says when you get there you undergo great hardship and suffering and then when he speaks in verse 4 well we are not told what he says to the friends but they receive a message from the Spirit and so urge him not to go and then Agabus also from the Spirit tells him that he will receive great suffering when he goes to Jerusalem and the response of his friends to that prophecy is don't go so it's not that the Holy Spirit was saying don't go the Holy Spirit was saying this is what will happen when you do go Paul was willing and ready to go even with that suffering but his friends were less convinced and they because they loved him and because they knew how significant he was they wanted him not to go because of the prophecy that they'd heard he was clearly focused on God's will God is compelling me to go and I'm willing to go and I'm willing to suffer and I'm willing to die that is the commitment that I have and he knows that he will follow in Jesus' footsteps and he's willing to suffer as a follower of Jesus and as I mentioned at the very beginning there's kind of a way in which

Paul's sufferings do mirror the sufferings of Jesus he's wrongly accused he's brought before the people and he's given a hard time and he's beaten up and the crowd say away from me they want him away the same baying crowd for his bud of course is different in many other ways as well but the response of his friends while the advice was the same from the Holy Spirit the response from his friends was natural they loved him they heard the same advice prayerfully and the Spirit guided them also but their response to the Spirit was different from Paul's Paul said yes I'm willing to go and suffer they were saying no don't go just as Peter and the other said to Jesus don't go up why will you go to Jerusalem they want to kill you there and yet if you notice in verse 14 of that passage after they were weeping with Paul and he was having his heart broken by that they recognized he wouldn't be dissuaded they gave up and said the Lord's will be done so they were acquiescing with what the Lord was saying clearly to

Paul and in Romans 8 17 we were reminded as Christians you might say what has this got to do with me what's this got to do with my life because Romans 8 17 reminds us that we also will suffer for Jesus Christ as Christians it might not be to the same degree and it might not be in the same way sadly a lot of our suffering comes from the way we're treated within the church but not always but we will suffer and that is made clear in every part of Scripture when we suffer and we struggle when we go through difficult times we can't come back to God and say He didn't tell me about this it was always going to be a bed of roses it's never been like that and he has always made clear that we have the privilege as Christians of undergoing suffering in Jesus name we are opposed and we are mocked and we are walking a different road from the world around us because of Jesus Christ and that road is a bumpy road and it's a difficult road and as Christians we need to man up and woman up and recognize that part of our Christian lives that it isn't yet heaven we are not yet in glory it's not a walk in the park for us to be Christians now we're given provision we're given power we're given comfort we're given life but we must recognize that there is great suffering in being a Christian to a greater or lesser degree and you know within this church here there will be people that have suffered far more for their faith than others and people are going through deeper darkness than some others will ever go through and that brings us back in a sense to the whole thing about being family supporting and encouraging and being with and being a shoulder for those who are struggling and suffering rather than being condemnatory but the great thing is that Paul recognized he had a task if you go back to that verse in chapter 20 and at verse 24 when he talks about what lies ahead he says, listen I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace that's why he was going to Jerusalem he was going because he had a task he had a God given task to testify to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and as I said I can't remember when it was we're immortal until our task is done and that's the same for you and me in our Christian lives and I implore especially the young people here to recognize as Christians that you have a task you have a walk to walk and you have a task to fulfill for Jesus Christ a great task not just the young people but I'm just saying that because you're at the cusp of your lives you're at the very beginning and it's significant and as Christians we all have a work to perform we have to set our face to our Jerusalem as it were for Jesus Christ and recognize that we have this tremendous privilege we have this great honor we mustn't allow

[9 : 34] Satan to tell us our lives are worthless and meaningless and are going nowhere in Christ we have the task the glorious task of testifying to the Lord Jesus Christ whatever that works out whatever workplace you're in or place of study or home you have this great task of being an ambassador for Jesus Christ but there is great suffering and that last section I'm not going to deal with that at all the last section that Neil read that just unfolds unravels some of the suffering that Paul underwent immediately that he arrived in Jerusalem so don't live can I encourage you and have to encourage myself not to live in a trivial place step up to the mark for Jesus Christ step up to where he will have you live your life with your gifts with your talents with your individuality and with the grace he's given you step up to the mark and stand up and be counted for Jesus Christ whether it's suffering or not whatever it is that we would step up and serve Jesus Christ now we come to this third question and we're nearly finished it's a really difficult session we're not going to spend time on it really we don't spend time on things that are really difficult can you explain and this is the third section really in chapter 21 sorry it's the second section we read Paul's arrival in Jerusalem can you explain how Paul practically gives an example of being all things to all men 1 Corinthians 9-22 in the section from 17-26 so he arrives in Jerusalem and the first problem he faces is not with the Roman authorities or with the Jews but with the Christians with James the leader of the church in Jerusalem and he takes Paul aside and he says listen he says more than that but he says listen there's lots of Jews have become believers here but they hear reports about you and they hear that you want to deny the Mosaic law and that you want to deny them the rights to do certain things and we've already discussed this in the great big Jerusalem council which we looked at a few weeks ago and he says well look how about putting them right we've got some guys here who are fulfilling a Nazarite vow they've saved their heads they'll be fasting for 40 days we don't know what they were vowing about why don't you join them why don't you pay their expenses and just to assure them that you haven't completely abandoned the law of Moses oh you do that and

Paul does he does is he not abandoning the Gospel of Grace by taking part in these Jewish rituals is he not do you think then how Paul has given an example of being all things to all men here can anyone give me any help with this it's quite a difficult section saying that in case I don't get any answers Paul why is he doing this why is he allowing himself to come under this Jewish ritual is he not denying the Gospel of Grace well these guys are Christians they're Christians well these guys are Christians this is the Christian Jewish Church it's the traditional church of Jerusalem

Paul has one of the reasons Paul is so determined to come back if you can think back if you've been really really attentive is because he's gone around all the Gentile churches collecting money for the famine among the Jewish Christians there was a famine in Jerusalem and they collected money and he was determined to bring it back and present it to the Jerusalem Church the mother church the Jewish church that were Christian and that's why one of these is so determined to come back and then when he comes back there's this kind of event this happening I'll maybe just bring it to a conclusion because it is quite significant if you let me finish if you remember because we've looked at this before there's a transition period between the Old Testament Church and the completely New Testament Church and the Jewish believers if you remember that they have come from a Jewish tradition, Jewish background and so they bring to their faith a lot of their Jewishness and this isn't about the essence of the faith this is about custom it's not about the Gospel that's already been cleared up we see that but when James meets with Paul they're delighted to meet together and we're told that Paul tells in detail of all the things that have happened in the Gentile ministry and we're told that the Jerusalem Church they praised God and they were delighted about that and later in chapter 24 we're told that they accepted the collection and praised God for the Gentile churches so there was a good atmosphere but then James talks about how Paul is being misrepresented and it's not to do with the Gospel it's to do with their own traditions their own laws, their own customs as they say in verse 21 so that this church was still hanging on to some of the Old Testament customs it wasn't to do with the essence of the faith they were still saved by grace they were still considering the kosher laws of what food to eat, the Nazarite vows that these guys were involved in, different ceremonies, different customs, different religious practices that were incidental to the faith and so as Paul being all things to all men so ultimately as Neal says it would reflect well for people outside of the kingdom they could see that he was willing to compromise on things that were secondary just customs, Jewish things that he himself had been brought up with and he said yeah I can undergo that purification

I can pay their expenses, it's no problem I'm not abandoning these things because it's just a transition period, it's good not to do with grace, this was nothing to do with affecting the Gentile church, this was to do with the Jewish believers there was misunderstanding, there was gossip and Paul was going to be conciliatory he was going to be accommodating in order to diffuse a potentially difficult situation now, what would be a modern day parable? I don't know a modern day similarity, a similar situation maybe it would be for me, this is maybe not an exact parable but maybe for me to go up to say the free church in the western Isles and if I was asked to preach and they still used the authorized version of the Bible and they still sung the 1650 Psalms, it would be for me to go and absolutely go along with that and not to say what will I use a different version of the Bible and then we sing hymns and we sing from the sing Psalms and make some kind of deal as if it was black and white as if it was significant for me to get my way, you would be conciliatory, you would be polite, you would be respectful and you would recognize that these things are not of the essence of the faith, that cultures and communities do things differently and we respect that and we recognize that and we would act in that way, that may be just a very small example but we are unswerving in the essentials, the gospel essentials but we are flexible on other things it's dangerous when you live your Christian life thinking everything is black and white because you get yourself in a bad corner all the time because Paul makes clear here that not everything is black and white, there are grey areas and if you take your stand on the grey areas, you're a fool and you make a fool of the gospel and you make a fool of Jesus

Christ because it is of the essence of the faith that we stand for, not for secondary customs or traditions or things that are secondary to the gospel and I think the lesson from a chapter like this for us is the amazing grace of God the amazing grace of God that changed people changed these people who became Christians to be open and graceful inviting apostles into their homes at just the drop of a hat amazing grace of God that enabled Paul to change from being a murderer of Christians to being a Christian who himself would eventually be murdered willing to suffer because he recognized the preciousness of what he possessed and his wisdom his conciliatory nature when dealing with the traditional Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the way he diffused situations by his grace and by the wisdom that he was given we learn from that in our own Christian lives

[19 : 50] Lord God help us to take from these narratives of scripture lessons for ourselves as to how to live and how to serve and may we remember and know what is of the essence of the faith may we never move from the freedom of grace may we never be enslaved by the traditions or by the customs that we sometimes elevate to wrong positions but enable us to be free and to be accommodating and to be conciliatory enable us to be wise as we face suffering may we not shake our fist heavenwards and say why are you doing this God recognizing that to follow Christ is to suffer temporarily as we bear his scars and as we follow him until we know the perfect freedom and freedom from suffering in glory and grant us an open heart an open homes and a willing spirit to be a family together in Christ forgive us when we fall so far short of the standards of grace

For Jesus' sake, amen.