

**Acts of the Apostles: Acts 21
Lesson 34 by Faber McMullen, Union
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LIVING A LIFE WITHOUT FEAR

Fear is something we're going to talk about today. For many there is a fear of dying. It reminds me of a story I heard in seminary. After dying in a car crash, three friends died and went to heaven for orientation. They were all asked the same question: "When you are in the casket, and your friends and family are mourning over you, what would you like to hear them say about you?" The first guy said, "I'd like to hear them say that I was one of the greatest lawyers that ever lived, and I was a great man." The second guy said, "I'd love to hear them say that I was a wonderful husband and car mechanic who made a huge difference in the lives of my children. The third guy said, "I'd like to hear them say, 'HEY LOOK! HE'S MOVING!'"



Fear is a great destroyer. If your head is full of fears, there is no place for dreams and potential. People's decisions are often based in fear, but that seldom has a good result. This morning we will look at Paul's Third Missionary Journey. During this time, I'd like to make a few observations about fear, decisions, hard circumstances, and God's will. In a nutshell, the passage we will read this morning shows us that Paul had no fear. The bottom line

for today's teaching can be summarized by the following spiritual principles:

1. There is **NO ROOM FOR FEAR** in the heart of a believer (2 Timothy 1:7).
2. God promises to give you wisdom in the face of decisions (James 1:5).
3. God does not promise you smooth sailing at all. He promises you a smooth landing (1 Corinthians 10:13).
4. God will be there for you every step of your journey. He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

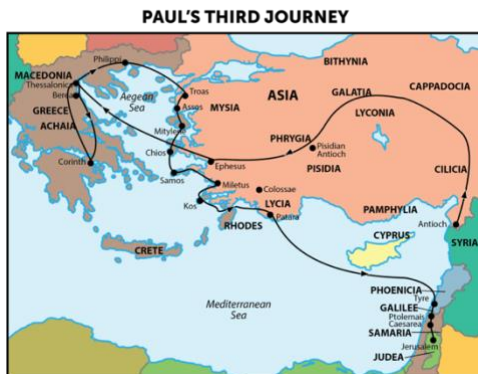
The Bible has a lot to say about fear. Often when angels appear they bring a first message "Do not fear." The apostle Paul lived through every difficult situation that can be imagined, and yet he had no fear. He wrote the young pastor Timothy, and he instructed: ⁷ *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.* (2 Tim 1:7, NKJV).

John, who was the disciple closest to Jesus himself, tells us, ¹⁸ *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made*

perfect in love (1 John 4:18, NKJV). An overall theme of the Bible is that we are not to live lives dominated by fear.

Today's message also includes a little bit about decision making. We all have decisions to make because decisions determine the next turn in our lives, and often affect the final outcome of our lives as well. All spirit led believers desire to be following God's will for their lives, but it can become very confusing when those decisions lead to hardship. We are going to focus on Acts chapter 21, which is bringing us to an end of our study of the Book of Acts. The final chapters are a sequence of events leading to the end of Paul's life. Again, and again, he is persecuted and jailed; all the while persistent in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. During today's message, I'm going to make some brief observations about how much these incidents are like the life of Saint Patrick, simply known as Patrick by the Irish people. Today is St. Patrick's Day and Patrick is a model believer for each of us to follow.

Please stand with me as we read from Acts 21 - Warnings on the Journey to Jerusalem



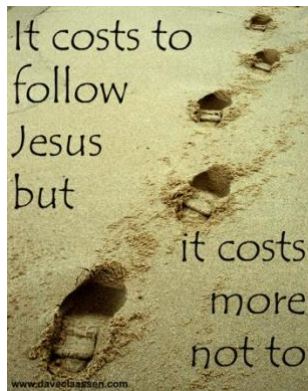
21 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. ⁴ And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. ⁵ When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all

accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. ⁶ When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. ⁸ On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰ And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

¹² Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:1-14, NKJV).

Paul has ended his third missionary journey, and he felt led to go back to Jerusalem. In the passage we just read, we see Paul landing in Tyre where he found disciples who “through the spirit” begged him not to go to Jerusalem. What might have been confusing for Paul is that those disciples were telling him of terrible things to come while they were led by the Spirit. In fact, when they got to the house of Philip the Evangelist, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea and explicitly showed Paul that he would be bound in Jerusalem. So, was God telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem? I don’t think so because Paul was continually and persistently led by the Holy Spirit. I think that sometimes the Holy Spirit gives us warnings of trials to come. If it is not to change the course of our journey, what reason would it have? Why would this be so? I think one reason is to give us a chance to count the costs of discipleship.



In Luke chapter 14, Jesus talked about counting the costs of discipleship before entering the task. He gave the analogy of a person wanting to build a tower, and that all the costs of building that tower had to be counted lest an unfinished tower be a reason for ridicule. He also likened it to a king who is wise to count his troops before going into battle. Jesus is very clear that whoever does not carry his own cross cannot be a disciple.

²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ³³ So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27, 33, NKJV).

Paul is clearly being warned of the costs. This is the same man who was stoned and left for dead. He was shipwrecked, and he suffered every hardship imaginable (2 Corinthians 11:16-33). And here again, God is showing Paul the costs associated with his discipleship. I think one of the greatest lessons we can learn of Paul is to see that he is never overcome with fear in the face of a challenge.

Fear is one of the most dominating aspects of many peoples’ lives. We are not to make our decisions based in fear. Fear will lead you to depression, and fear will lead you to ineffectiveness in your life. When we are overcome with the desire to fear, we must remember that the joy of the Lord is our *only* strength. God does not promise us that He will keep us from the battle. He promises us that He will be with us in the battle. God wants to confront the fears of our lives. Many of us are afraid of being with certain people, or we’re afraid of being with no one, being lonely. We can become terrified and paralyzed by our fears. Our fears make our lives and our ministry ineffective.



Let’s think back to our Torah study. As the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, Joshua’s troops were fearful. Remember the spies said, “³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. ³³ There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their

sight.”(Numbers 13:32-33, NKJV). Church, do you see yourself as a grasshopper in your own sight instead of as a conqueror of the Promised Land that God has set before you and promised you. How do you become a conqueror?

Joshua assured his troops that they were to stay in the Word and realize that the Lord their God was with them. ⁸ *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* ⁹ *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; **do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.***”(Joshua 1:8-9, NKJV).

And, of course we are all reminded of young David who wasn't afraid to take on the giant Goliath. In his last teaching, Kelton reminded us that God had prepared David in hardship. David had wrestled and killed a lion and a bear. When it happened, he probably wondered why in the world God had sent him the hassle of a lion and a bear. But, when he saw the giant Goliath, he began to understand why these difficulties had happened. And David knew from whence came his strength. Let's look for a moment at 1 Samuel chapter 17.

¹⁰ *And the Philistine said, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.”* ¹¹ *When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, **they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*** ⁴⁵ *Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”* ⁴⁶ *This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.* ⁴⁷ *Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands.”* ⁵⁰ *So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David.* ⁵¹ *Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.* (1 Samuel 17:10-11, 45-47, 50-51, NKJV).

Friend, if God has brought you to it, God will take you through it. There is no sword, no shield, no javelin, no poverty, no abuse, no loneliness, and no circumstance that can take you down. God will often warn you in advance, but it may still be His will for you to go into the battle. You get down and get real with the power of the name of Jesus, and get in the fight.



Like Paul, St. Patrick (who I mentioned at the start of the message) was a man who did not make decisions based on fear. He was a Roman Briton, probably from what is now the country of Wales. He had grown up in a Christian home, and when he was a young boy, Gaelic warriors invaded from Ireland and kidnapped him. They took him to Ireland where a chieftain made him a slave. He was put in charge of tending sheep, and one night the Lord came to him in a dream and told him

when and where to run to the coast. He did, and there a ship was awaiting him.

His family was so joyful when he returned. He ended up going to seminary in France, and during those next few years, he had a dream in which he saw the people of Ireland begging him to come to them. Convinced that it was God calling him, he returned to the land of his slavery. He made his way back to Ireland and he began sharing the gospel to all who would listen. Every spring in Ireland, the High King in Tara had the privilege of lighting a huge bonfire to commemorate a new cycle of the year. This was the king's privilege alone.

On that night, on a distant hill that the king could see, Patrick lit a huge fire on the Hill of Slane. The king dispatched a battalion to confront this person who had done such wrong, and when they arrived on Slane, Patrick explained to them that Jesus was the light of the world. It was in Jesus and only in Jesus that the Irish people could be saved. Until then, the Irish had worshipped multiple gods of the sky, earth, water, and probably fire. Patrick convinced them that there was one God in heaven who was the ruler of all, and He loved them and had come to earth to die for them. Patrick understood the power of the name of Jesus. Patrick understood the comfort of being surrounded in God's love. Listen to the words of Patrick's poem of faith and the declaration of his trust in God: "The Breastplate."

*Christ be within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in
danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

In 432 A.D., Patrick built a church on the site of the present day St. Patrick's Memorial Church - the first ever Christian church in all of Ireland. It's considered the cradle of Irish Christianity. Patrick's ministry lasted 29 years. He faithfully preached the gospel, baptized converts, and he appointed clergy over the Irish church. He baptized over 120,000 Irishmen and planted 300 churches.

Several leaders of the church in Ireland have well summarized his life. Rev. Sean Brady concludes, "He was a man who came to face and help his former enemies who had enslaved him. He came back to help them and to do them a great favor -- the greatest favor he possibly could. "Rev. Earnes concurs, "I honestly feel that what Patrick taught Ireland was that there is a cost to discipleship, but it's a cost worth paying. And I believe, to bring this right up to date, the church of St. Patrick must be constantly saying to people, 'Discipleship demands of you, but it's a cost that Christ will help you to pay.'"

Patrick was no doubt inspired by reading the Book of Acts. He learned from Paul; as can we. Will you ask God today to help you move into a new sphere of your life that does not operate on a foundation of fear, but rather on a foundation of faith? He is waiting. Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by

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