

In C19 of Acts, Paul signals his decision to go to Rome, via Jerusalem. And in C20, Luke reveals that Paul felt compelled to go to Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit, even if it meant that he was to die there, for the sake of Jesus.

Let me briefly enter an aside. We live in age of religious terrorism, in which some consider it good to die for what they think their faith wants in actions of killing others. This is not the way of Christ Jesus, who died to give others life. It was not Paul's intention. The Gospel is the way of the cross not the way of the gun. Whereas the family and friends of terrorists often urge them on to kill others and themselves Paul's Christian family increasingly urged him, as he journeyed to Jerusalem not to go there, for fear of his meeting suffering and death.



When Paul Wanted To Go To Jerusalem, What Did The Disciples Say?		
Disciples in Tyre	DON'T GO!	Acts 21:4
Disciples Traveling with Paphos	DON'T GO!	Acts 21:12
Disciples in Caesarea	DON'T GO!	Acts 21:12
WHY?	DANGER!	Acts 21:11
Did Paul Go To Jerusalem?	YES!	Acts 21:17

The Ephesian elders weep as they let him go, bereft because they know they will not see him again. The Tyrenian disciples, knowing in the Spirit that he will suffer in Jerusalem, urge him not to go. Perhaps they hoped that God would find another way if Paul avoided the way He had given. But Paul remains resolute.

Then Agabus comes to Philip's house and through his warning words the disciples plead with Paul not to go.

A question: what do you think Paul the person is like?

A zealous man immovably committed to his chosen course?

A clever man yet steeped in attitudes that put teaching above feelings, who can think well but not feel well?

How does your picture of Paul relate to what we see here? And indeed further on in his journey to Rome.

Luke reveals to us a man who is not so learned that he's above feelings. He's not a stoic doing what must be done, whatever the pain it brings.

He's a man deeply touched by his companions' compassion. Yet also a man who feels their compassion as a temptation, so that he bursts out asking, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?" Their concern pounds at the door of his commitment to Jesus. They would break it down. They would have him not go.

Sometimes the greatest temptations we face are not expressed in the lures of the world, of wealth, fame and achievement, but in the fears, the worries, the concerns of those who love us. That can be hard when those who love us do not share our love of the Lord. They don't appreciate our commitment. They don't understand our service. They feel caught up in a competition for our love. They may even demand the terrible choice: it's us or Jesus, it can't be both.

Yet how much stronger the temptation when fellow Christians plead with us to act differently, for their fear of the suffering we will face. The fears of Paul's Christian friends was a battering ram against the convictions of his heart. And Paul was deeply affected, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?"

I see his question is an appeal to them to see that his thinking, his feelings, his actions are bonded to a deeper love than the love of himself, to his love for Christ Jesus. As lovers often do, he discounts the value of his own life to be true to the one he loves.

The disciples' responding cry, "the Lord's will be done." is not to me a hapless surrender to divine fate but a profound recognition of the greatest importance – when the cross of our faith challenges our life choices, the only way through is to surrender to the Lord's will in faithful, trusting love.

Here Paul's personal experience validates the truth of what he had by now written to the church in Rome, in C8 v 38-39:

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What do you think:

Was going to Jerusalem for Jesus easy for Paul?

Was going to Gethsemane for us easy for Jesus?

Is Christ's call to take up our cross for Him easy for us?

How did Paul do it?

How, indeed, did Jesus do it?

How might we do it?

Like anything difficult we learn how to do it by progressing in easier steps, by perseverance and by a deep desire to succeed – a motive worth making a sacrifice for.

Taking up our challenge of going to Jerusalem for Jesus flows from a host of earlier sacrifices of our love for Him, of giving up Sundays to meet with others in worship, of giving up TV time or family time to clean the church or attend a meeting to learn about Jesus, or to lead the church or to practice worship or to run an activity of outreaching love. In our own time, in our own lives, Christ's love for us invites us, like Paul, to set aside the worth of our own lives to do the work He gives each of us, for the gospel of His grace.

May the Lord's will be done in your lives, and my life and in our life together. Amen.

[picture from the web, thank you to whoever created it]