

Acts 21:17–36

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 August 2018

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Well, how do you know that you have truly arrived? What are the marks that would indicate that you had finally made it?

Generally speaking, let me suggest two. You know you've arrived and you know you've made it when you've got enough money that you don't need anything from anyone in here.

As well as you don't need to take anything from anyone who throws you their mess out there. You get to a place in life where you got it and you no longer need to take it.

I can tell you this, you made it. Although the text this morning might challenge our American assumptions on arrival.

Luke has certainly been pointing the reader to the notion that on the day in which we read of him here, he had arrived.

[1 : 21] He made it. For four previous episodes, Luke, like a good screenwriter, has been piquing your interest to this day.

Let me show you how he has hidden it in the text, this heightened expectation of Paul's arrival. While you read of it in verse 17 when he had come to Jerusalem.

He had pointed to that all the way back in chapter 19 and verse 21. Now after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Acacia and go to Jerusalem.

And then in chapter 20 and verse 16, you begin to see Luke indicating as the narrator that Paul was hastening to be at Jerusalem.

So as you have been watching, the narrator has been hinting that Paul is about to arrive. Indeed, not only back in 19 verse 21 when you find him there or in 20 and verse 17, but also he moves on even closer to our text.

[2 : 46] Take a look at chapter 20, verse 22. And now behold, Paul says, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there.

And then finally, in verses 10 through 14, we saw this prophetic discourse of Agabus in chapter 21 that indicates when he arrives at Jerusalem, he's going to be imprisoned, chained with two chains. And so Luke has been pulling the viewer back week by week with rising tension and escalated anticipation with what's going to happen when Paul arrives.

And our text opens when we had come to Jerusalem. Let me put it to you this way. Paul made it. Paul had arrived.

And now we're wondering, how does this episode play out? more pertinently, what will it mean for you and for me?

[4 : 05] Notice the arrival is 10 verses beginning at 17 through 26. The arrival of Paul in Jerusalem is marked by three things.

Luke tells you that there was gratitude gratitude for Paul's Gentile mission. When he arrived, they were grateful.

The two G words for me that leap off the text are verse 17. They received him gladly. And in verse 20, they glorified God.

Arrival meant gladness and glory. No doubt they were glad. Because as you have been watching Acts unfold, he brought to the church on that day a financial gift with representatives from his Gentile mission in tow.

And he lays this bulwark of money at the feet of the church in Jerusalem, knowing that they had been through a hard time on the basis of a famine.

[5 : 15] So he arrives, he enters into church, men are with him, and the table is full of the offerings that have been collected from his Gentile mission.

It's not stated directly, but it's there hidden. When they came to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. I bet they did. I bet they did.

So much so that the next day, the elders are called, and notice James is here, and they hear all that God did in the Gentile mission, and they glorify God.

The first mark of Paul's arrival in Jerusalem is there is gratitude within the church for the Gentile mission. In other words, they are supportive of Paul.

But verse 20 gives way to a concern they had for Paul.

[6 : 13] The gratitude they had for his Gentile mission was wedded to a concern they had for the Jewish community and the message that had gone out about him.

In other words, they felt that while he had come to Jerusalem under the authority of God's mission and brought many to Christ, he was entering into a misunderstanding from the Jews in particular and the Jewish Christians concerning what he had been saying, why he had been out and about.

And it was simply this. The fear is there that these people will have been told, verse 21, that you teach, notice, not the Gentiles, you're teaching even the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, not circumcise your children, nor walk according to our customs.

In other words, this is the issue. The issue. When a Jew became a Christian in the early moment of the Christian faith, what was their ongoing relationship to the law?

In Jerusalem, your ongoing relationship to the law still made you conform to the customs and practices of the law. And to do otherwise would have been a horrific act and a judgment.

[7 : 49] So, their support for Paul gives way to a strategy on behalf of Paul. Notice how they lay it out there in verse 22 through verse 25.

What's to be done? They're going to hear that you've come. By the way, four men in our congregation have undertaken a vow. It's a, it's rooted in number six where Moses allows people within the congregation to take a vow and the only vow that involved the cutting of hair was the Nazarite vow.

And that is a custom that was still going on in the early Jewish congregations in Jerusalem. and they say, in order to let all the church know and all the Jewish Christians be aware that you have not, as they have heard, neglected our customs and our law, you undergo the same vow and by the way, you pay their price.

If you went back and read number six, the price of a Nazarite vow would have been a male lamb, a year old, as well as a female ewe, spotless and a year old, as well as a ram, as well as a big old bowl of unleavened bread, as well as multiple loaves made from fine flour, as well as grain offerings and wine.

So for every individual who had taken this vow, they are indicating to Paul, you do likewise and cover their cost.

[9 : 46] because when you do that, all people will know that you still follow the law.

That is the strategy. There's something implicit here I just want to take an aside on. It indicates, this is the leadership within the church in Jerusalem, it indicates that within Christian leadership, there is this implicit notion, unspoken, that they have the strength, given who they are, to control the outcomes from others who might disagree.

I'm just saying that within religious organizations, there is a majority culture power base that feels they can navigate the outcomes in accordance with what they feel needs to take place.

And so they lay it out there for Paul. They're supportive of Paul. They have a strategy for Paul.

But here's what I'm getting to. Here's the great marks of Paul's arrival. And it deals with the sacrifices made by Paul.

[11 : 18] Verse 26, Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled, and the offering presented for each one of them.

Paul demonstrated an immediate deference of spirit according to their religious custom and a willingness to bear the financial cost on behalf of others.

Let's sit on that for a moment. I mean, those words there in verse 26 are surprising.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself. There was no need for him to even get pure. But he did it the next day.

He was willing to lay aside the free exercise of a life under the word of Christ to complete a custom that had religious significance but was in no way to be obligated.

[12 : 39] You know, in the church today we make a lot of the culture having a narrative of individual freedom.

In fact, we attack the world in which we live by telling them that their cultural narrative of individual freedom is wrong and ought to be challenged.

We live in a culture where the free exercise of your life without constraint is up to your own prerogative and particularly in things that are not essential, things that relate to custom rather than religious obligation.

And yet, within the church, Paul here immediately the next day lays aside his free expression of religious worship to conform, let me put it to you this way, to submit himself to something that he was not obligated to.

I find that fascinating when you think about our day and what you and I often think of. we often are digging in our heels within the church to protect the individual freedom we have in Christ.

[14 : 21] That's an indication that we haven't arrived. Paul was willing to relinquish those freedoms if it would be a means of the gospel moving forward.

In other words, to a Jew he would become a Jew even though he was not under the custom or law of the Jew in order that he might win the Jew.

that's what he's doing here. Paul's arrival is marked by an evangelistic mission under which all of his own freedoms are constrained.

That's not all. There's an indication here that he bared the cost of not only his offering but the offering of the four men. Let me just calculate that cost because I'm not good at how much a lamb costs or a Jew or a ram.

I can't put a price tag on it. But I just googled you know what's the carcass weight of a lamb you want to buy a whole lamb today what's it going to cost you?

[15 : 41] I think on Friday it was going for about \$290 for a complete lamb. You want some lamb? Okay well whether it's right or not I don't know it was Google I'm not I'm just indicating to you by way of analogy I'm thinking to myself what did he really bear?

Well if you take the \$290 out over a lamb and a ewe and a ram then you throw in the bowl of unleavened bread and then multiple loaves of flying flour then you get the grain offerings then you get the wine offerings and you do that times five he's probably here shelling out of his own pocket somewhere north of \$4,000.

Well he must have had a little pocket money he must have been making some tents along the way but the indication of the text is simply that he did it.

There's the irony there's the irony when have you arrived? when you got it and therefore you don't need anything from anyone in here no Paul Paul's Paul's arrival is marked by two things I will give my life to you in all areas of custom rather than fight for my own freedoms and having brought in a mother load of an offering from the Gentile church around the globe I'm willing the very next day to pay for that which isn't mine to be born anyway the mark of Christian arrival is a deference in spirit and a generosity of heart what are the marks of your arrival that you got it according to Paul by way of example that I can give it

I will give the church anything it needs to keep the mission in motion I will submit my personal free expressions to at times customs if it would serve the body I will solicit support for the work of the gospel in the vineyards in which I work and I will willingly bear more personal cost in order to keep the thing moving it's a stunning thing isn't it those first ten verses on arrival not only that think of think of what you and I need to learn from this not just about a deference of spirit or a generosity of resources but for a heart awareness of the Lord

[19 : 15] Jesus Christ who is much more than Paul when he arrived into Jerusalem he didn't have any need of purifying himself but he was more than willing to lay his life down that many might be made pure it wasn't just four grand out of his back pocket it was his life blood given he submitted himself to a world or a church in need with the full gift the ultimate gift of his life that you might actually be made right with God what a wonder what a wonder the arrival in the first ten verses gives way to accusation mob action and arrest that's the second ten verses take a look at verses twenty seven and twenty nine an accusation when the seven days were almost completed the Jews from

Asia that's probably a reference back to the folks near Ephesus the Jews from Asia who probably are now arriving given that Paul had wanted to arrive at the time of Pentecost so this influx in

Jerusalem seeing him in the temple stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him crying out men of Israel help this is the man who's teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place moreover he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled the holy place for he had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple!

that's the accusation let's just lay it out there's about three accusations here first to everyone everywhere he speaks against quote the people that's anti-semitism Paul is anti-semitic secondly he's anti- Moses third he's anti- temple and fourth I've got an anecdotal!

incident that proves the point in Trophimus that's a massive charge let me just say something if you're not familiar with how volatile or charged that charge would have been the temple had an outer court in which Gentiles were able to traverse and be around but then there was a partition about six feet high with sporadic openings that separated the court of the Gentiles to where only Jews could go and then within that there was a court where the women could go and then just to the side of that was Herod's temple where only the priests could do their thing of mediation and the accusation is that Paul had walked a Greek

Gentile through the wall of partition where only Jews could be now we actually know if you like history Josephus describes that partition wall he says proceeding across this that is the court of the Gentiles toward the second court of the temple one one found it surrounded by a stone balustrade that's a good word a balustrade three cubits high and of exquisite workmanship in this at regular intervals stood slabs giving warning that's a description of that wall that separated the Jews from the Gentiles and in fact if you like archaeology we have two tablets today that actually were one in full and one in fragment of those actual words that separated the

[23 : 44] Gentiles from what would have been a Jewish world I mean the full fragment is in a museum in Istanbul the partial fragment is in a museum in Israel and what the stone tablet actually reads is this no stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death which will ensue and even on the fragment in Istanbul there are indications that it was in red ink so the accusation is Paul has taken a man through the wall of hostility the accusation then would have been death not only for Trophimus but for Paul and you can see in the text accusation gives way to mob action look at 30 and 31 then all the city was stirred up and the people ran together they seized

Paul dragged him out of the temple and once the gates were shut and as they were seeking to kill him word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion and he once took the soldiers and shanturians and ran down to them and when he saw the tribune and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul I mean notice the language all the city is stirred all Jerusalem is in confusion and look at the verbs that are welling up within that language running seizing dragging killing that's mob action if you want to know how hot it was you got to look all the way down at verse 36 where Luke tries to indicate that even after everything had taken place and law had kind of stepped in between and the thin blue line held they had to actually carry him such was the violence of the mob trying to swing over the top of the centurions who were getting him onto the steps and to the barracks where he might actually be free mob action oh the naivete of majority culture religious leadership that feels they can put on you a plan that will control the outcomes for those who might not want you it didn't work

I mean it looked like it was going to work for about a week verse 27 when the seven days were almost complete it looked like it's going it's working and then everything blew up in their face an accusation was made mob action is taken and finally we come down toward the end here the arrest verses 32 to 36 that tribune arrested him verse 33 bound him with two chains and if you've been watching these episodes that goes back to Agabus' prophecy that when you get in Jerusalem they will bind your hands and your feet but notice it's the tribune the Roman tribune who by arresting Paul actually saves his life this is worthy of some contemporary discussion as well what is a Roman tribune this isn't the Chicago tribune what is a tribune in Rome well there were two types of tribunes you could be a tribune for the plebes like a man of the people who had been elected to be a mediary between the masses and the Roman fast fading away republic but you could also be a member of a military tribune that is you worked on behalf of Rome and you were a leader of over what probably would have been about a thousand soldiers that's why it actually says the centurions are coming for him or with him so what's happening is you have a an officer of the law that oversees the better part of a thousand people who is now in the midst of the mob action to protect the life of a

man about whom he knows nothing but stands on the verge of being killed in public it took the intervention of civil authority to save

Paul's life this is the rule of law at its best in a culture where mob action breaks out this is an example of the thin blue line on a day when it worked this is in contrast to Galio who we saw a few chapters before who while holding civic responsibility turned a blind eye when Sosthenes was being beaten there is an indifference at times within the individuals who hold responsibility to serve and protect but here was a man named later

[29 : 52] Claudius Lysias who went to work put himself in harm's way held the line and did that which was required I don't know if the stats are true perhaps 50 people got shot this week in Chicago this weekend yesterday alone we do know that we have our own galleos and our own Claudius Lysises we do know that people who have the power to maintain the peace do at times neglect their duty we do know but we just ran into a text here today who gives all the characteristics of someone who did it well oh that oh that we might walk with the fullness of that knowledge what did

Paul make of his beatings because it's another mark of him having arrived I'm not going to read it for the sake of time the second Corinthians 11 he will take all of his beatings and he will indicate they are marks of his weakness that validate his relationship to Jesus he will say that he on this day participated in the sufferings of Christ to put it differently the mark of his arrival when he looked at the church wasn't the day that he got it and didn't need it it was the day that he would give it whatever they needed from him and when he looked at the world the mark of his arrival wasn't that I don't have to take it from you anymore the mark of his arrival here was to be a willing not ready but a willing participant in the sufferings of Christ if the gospel would go forward let me shut it down when will this congregation arrive not when we got it and therefore we won't take it but when we give it we stand ready to embrace it we give it that the gospel would go forward we take it that the gospel will go forward

Lord have mercy Lord help our heavenly father we now look at this table set before us wherein we see our Lord Jesus Christ who has broken down the wall of hostility and taken us behind the balustrade taken us to a place of access through his mercy through the beatings he received the lashes he endured the mocking and spitting he silently went through through the laying down of his life the shedding of his blood that we might walk into the holy of holies and eat with him

Lord we need strength in this day we need strength in this city I pray oh Lord that this meal would strengthen us in the death of Christ that we might give all we have for the mission of Christ and we might be willing to continue to take it for Christ in whose name we pray amen Paul writes that he received from the Lord what he delivered to the church that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me and the same way also after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you do it in remembrance of me if you are a believer in the

[36 : 04] Lord Jesus Christ then you need the strength of his life spilled for you God is body given for you if you have not yet trusted Christ and we ask that you would respectfully refrain from this meal it doesn't make sense to seek strength from one that you are not leaning on but if you know Jesus and want to live well for him feast on him through faith you're going to come down the middle two aisles and there'll be baskets on the outer area once you've received the elements you can go back to your seats from the outside the gifts of God for the people of God come and partake of his meal until