

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 20:17-21: 40

Did you know, there're a million ways to say good-bye.

I found a website that lists *so-longs* in more than 450 languages... I brought with me a few pop-culture good-byes. *Maybe you've heard these fun farewells...*

"Peace out, Girl Scout..." "See you in the funny papers..." "Later Gator..." "I'm outta here..." "Keep your head down..." "Gotta Jet..." "See ya, wouldn't want to be ya..." "Catch ya on the flip side..." "Keep it 'tween the white lines..." "Shalom Ya'll..." And of course my favorite, "Don't let the door hit ya where the Good Lord split ya."

In contrast, Acts 20 contains one of history's most meaningful farewells. It was delivered by Paul to the Ephesian elders on the beach at Miletus. It was a good-bye packed with principles for God-pleasing ministry.

Paul's time in Ephesus had been extremely fruitful. He had lived, labored, loved, and preached in Ephesus for three years. And his ministry had a far-reaching impact.

Acts 19:20 tells us, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed." We're told "all Asia" - an entire region - heard God's Word while Paul was in Ephesus.

Paul sunk deep roots in the church at Ephesus.

That's why if he had docked it would've been a long layover. His many pals would've demanded to see him.

At the time Paul was in a hurry to return to Jerusalem. He'd been port hopping down the Turkish coast. Spring had

sprung and Paul knew the Day of Pentecost would be celebrated in Jerusalem with or without him.

It had always been in Paul's heart to preach Jesus to the Jews. Pentecost was a harvest feast, and that's what Paul was spiritually expecting - a harvest of souls.

So he sailed 28 miles past the port of Ephesus to the beach at Miletus. Paul loved the Ephesians, but with limited time he decided to host a one day leadership summit. *He'll bless the church by encouraging its elders.*

That's where we pick it up in Acts 20:17, **"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church."** We'll read Paul's sermon to the elders, but often words alone don't give you a feel for the occasion...

Strong bonds existed here. Paul and these elders had shared the same foxhole and weathered the same storms. Eventually, when Paul boards the ship to leave, tears wet the sand. Grown men cry. They weep because he told them, **"they would see his face no more..."**

This reunion isn't just **"another day at the beach!"**

Verse 18, "And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you..."

Paul was no an ivory tower preacher. He wasn't aloof from people. He was a neighbor to the folks he served.

Paul was among them, "Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews..." Everywhere Paul had gone he was persecuted - and most often by the Jews.

Paul came “*serving the Lord with all humility...*” Too many pastors develop an **entitlement mentality**. They make a few sacrifices; then think God, and people owe them. But not Paul. He was a *giver*, not a *taker*.

He reminds them, “*how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you...*” As they say in sports, Paul left it all on the field. Why hold back a kindness for a rainy day, when today might be our last.

“To spend and be spent” - was Paul’s motto. The Apostle’s goal was to die with nothing left in his tank.

Verse 20, “And (I) taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”

Everywhere Paul traveled he was forewarned about trouble in Jerusalem. Yet the warnings didn’t deter him.

He says in verse 24, (In fact) “none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Safety was not his preoccupation.

Paul had but one *pressing priority* - to finish his race with joy - to faithfully preach the gospel of God’s grace.

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no

more.” Paul knew this was his last visit with the Ephesians. He would never travel this way again.

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” And at the end of my time with you this is what I hope to say. My goal as your pastor is to proclaim to you the entire enchilada - all 66 books - “*the whole counsel of God.*”

Too many pastors preach part and parcel of the Bible. They dwell on pet subjects. But what people really need is the entire counsel of God. It’s been said, “[It takes the whole Bible to make a whole Christian.](#)”

Then Paul tells the elders, verse 28, “[Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock...](#)” Notice, before a pastor *takes heed to the flock* he should first *take heed to himself*. [Pastors burn out on ministry for God, because they don’t receive ministry from God.](#)

Hey, the neediest person I know is me! Any man’s ministry won’t last long, or be very successful, if you’re pouring from an empty cup. Every minister’s first priority is to take heed to himself, *then* to God’s flock.

“Among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” A pastor or elder cares for God’s flock, as a shepherd does his sheep. He leads and feeds them. He oversees and undergirds.

But a pastor realizes it's God's flock - not his own. The flock belongs to God - they're loved by God. They were purchased with the blood of His only Son Jesus.

Once a son bought his parents an exotic, tropical, talking bird. He paid thousands of dollars for this rare bird, and sent it to them as an anniversary gift. He thought it would keep them company in their old age.

Well, after a few days he called his dad and asked him how he liked the bird. The father replied, **"It was delicious. Your mother and I ate every bite!"** *And pastors need to know sheep are not for lamb chops!*

The flock cost God the blood of His Son. He wants His flock to be *nurtured* not *sacrificed* for the pastor.

And God also wants the flock protected. Paul says, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Faithful shepherds *feed the flock*, a wolf *feeds on* the flock.

"Also from among yourselves men will rise up..."

Wolves come from two directions - from *without* the church and from *within*. When the devil can't defeat a church, he likes to join it. He can sabotage it from the inside, as easily as he can attack it from the outside.

Wolves come **"speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."** Here's how you identify a wolf - *rather than create Jesus followers, he creates his own followers*. He draws folks after himself.

“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” *With spiritual predators on the prowl can there be any hope for the prosperity of God’s flock?*

Yes! It’s His Word that builds us up and guarantees our inheritance. Our safety is in the Scriptures. Paul taught them to continue in the word of God’s grace.

Verse 33, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” Paul wasn’t after their money. Often he worked secular jobs to provide for himself and his entourage. Paul never let himself be a financial burden.

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Paul lived to exemplify that it’s more fun to be a giver than a taker.

And by the way, where did Paul get this quote from Jesus. It’s often called, “**The Supreme Beatitude,**” *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”?* *We have no idea.* It’s not in the Gospels. Paul had another source.

“And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.

And they accompanied him to the ship.” As Shakespeare says, “Parting is such sweet sorrow.” The elders leave encouraged and instructed, while Paul sets sail with the Ephesians on his heart.

Acts 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.” Here a map is helpful...

These are all port cities on what is today the Turkish Riviera, or the Turquoise Coast in southwest Turkey.

Paul and his entourage were skipping along the coast, looking for passage on a larger ship that could cross the Mediterranean and land them in Israel.

“And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.” The Phoenician ports of Tyre and Sidon are in modern-day Lebanon - north of Israel.

Luke says, “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.”

Obviously, Paul isn't in a first class cabin on a Carnival cruise. He hitched a ride on a freighter. Paul's goal *was who he could reach, not how he would roll.*

When the ship finally docked in Tyre it had carried Paul 400 miles - across the Mediterranean, under the island of Cyprus, and to the shores of Phoenicia.

Verse 4, “**And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days.**” I’m sure Paul was *tired* when he reached *Tyre*, but notice how he recharges his batteries...

Rather than seek isolation, he finds fellowship.

Never underestimate the renewing power of hanging out with other believers. Christian fellowship was strategic even for a hearty believer like Paul.

And pay attention to verse 4. The phrase translated “**finding disciples**” implies an extensive search. Paul went out of his way to locate the local Christians. He had to “**find**” fellowship. It didn’t just come to him.

And this is what’s involved for us to find meaningful fellowship. **It takes nothing to attend church, but you have to find fellowship.** You have to exert some initiative and search outside of your comfort zone. Rub shoulders with multiple folks until you find your niche.

It’s funny, talk to some people who attend our church for a few weeks, and they say they’ve made all kinds of connections. *This is the friendliest church on the planet...* Yet other folks have come for years, and still feel like a stranger. *They complain we’re unfriendly...*

What’s the difference? Well, those who really get plugged in went out to “**find disciples,**” whereas those who never did, “**sat back and waited to be found.**”

Hey, Paul found disciples, and they had a message for him, verse 4, “**They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.**” NT scholar FF Bruce translates “*through the Spirit*” as “**under prophetic inspiration.**”

Earlier in Acts 19:21 we're told, "Paul purposed in the Spirit... to go to Jerusalem." Yet here the Holy Spirit throws up a warning sign. Thus a question arises, **was it the Holy Spirit's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem?**

And to me the answer is clear... ***I have no idea!*** And I'm not alone. Good Bible commentators are divided.

If you've been a Christian for very long you realize discerning God's will is not an exact science. Often, our vision gets murky... Yet Paul's life gives us hope...

Its twist and turns demonstrate, that if we're sincere, God is faithful. *He gets us to where we need to be!*

God wants us in His will more than we do. **I learned long ago to put my trust in God's willingness to guide my life, more so than in my ability to listen to God.**

Verse 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." Paul and the Phoenicians had become fast friends. When he sets out for Jerusalem, they go out to see him off. Realize, Paul is rejecting their warnings, yet the Phoenicians refuse to be judgmental.

Rather than get mad because he doesn't heed their advice, they still love him, pray for him, support him. Apparently, they trusted his intentions, and realized, it's up to each believer to follow God's will as they see it.

Luke continues, “When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.” Ptolemais was the ancient name for the Israeli port of Acco - a short voyage from Tyre... *Paul found fellowship everywhere he went...*

For “On the next *day* we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist...” Caesarea is 30 miles south of Acco. It was the Roman capitol in Israel. And if you’ve ever been with us to Israel you know why Philip settled in Caesarea. It’s a gorgeous, seaside town. The water and sky are the bluest blue.

And Paul “entered the house of Philip... who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him.”

Paul’s host, Philip, appears three times in Acts...

In **Chapter 6** Philip is “*one of the seven*” original deacons in the first church at Jerusalem... In **Chapter 8** he leads a revival in Samaria, and an Ethiopian to Christ... **Here**, he and his family are living in Caesarea.

Verse 9, “**Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.**” Philip’s girls were special - both *sexually pure* and *spiritually sensitive*... Most dads are always reminding their daughters of God’s will, but Philip’s daughters spoke God’s will to their dad and the church. The Spirit blessed them with prophetic gifts.

And you've got to admire Philip... a servant in the church, an evangelist to the lost, and a godly dad to his daughters. And this trifecta is the mark of a great man.

Can he juggle the balls at church, in the world, and at home... *Is he faithful in all three arenas?* It's been said, "We come into the world head first, we leave feet first, and in between it's all a matter of balance."

Philip lived a beautifully balanced life. Some guys do well in the world, but fail at home and neglect the church... Other men serve the church and safeguard their home, but have no witness in the world... What made Philip great was he excelled in all three arenas!

Verse 10, "And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea." We met Agabus back in 11:28 when he predicted a famine.

These verses give us a glimpse into the life of the early church, and **the important role of prophecy.**

The Holy Spirit was active. Through unplanned, ecstatic communiques God spoke through both prophets and prophetesses to the church. God instant messaged His people through prophecy. *He still does.*

And "When (Agabus) 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.'" Here, Agabus acts like an OT prophet. He delivers a message with visual aides.

Remember, Jeremiah buried a sash... Ezekiel laid on his side and dug a hole in the wall of his house...

Here Agabus also goes theatrical. The prophet grabs Paul's belt and turns it into handcuffs. There's an arrest in Paul's future if he goes to Jerusalem. Twice now, the Holy Spirit has warned Paul of danger awaiting him.

Verse 12, "Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 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."

For a *sold-out Paul* it was Jerusalem or bust! Nothing was going to persuade him to steer clear of Jerusalem, not even the threat of death. If necessary, Paul was ready to lay down his life for Jesus' sake in Jerusalem.

The highest award given by the US government for an act of bravery on the battlefield is the Congressional Medal Of Honor. Over the course of our history 3,512 medals have been awarded, usually by the President.

It's interesting, more Medals of Honor have been awarded for falling on hand grenades to save fellow soldiers, than any other act of valor. Since falling on a live grenade is usually fatal, these medals are awarded posthumously. Yet here, Paul falls on the grenade before the pin is pulled. He's told his trip will end in incarceration, but he's determined - *wherever it takes - whatever it costs*. You have to admire Paul's courage.

Verse 14, “So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.”

Apparently, everyone heard the prophecy correctly. *There was danger for Paul in Jerusalem.* But people applied the prophecy differently. In light of the warning, Paul stiffened his resolve to go anyway. Whereas his pals wanted him to reconsider and change his plans.

They all understood the prophecy. It had come from God, but they differed in its application. And this highlights how subjective it can be when we discern God’s will. The same warning can be discerned by one person as a mere caution, and another as a stop sign.

Paul and his pals obviously saw this differently and debated the matter - but in the end they stuck together. Paul’s friends respected their leader. They recognized his authority, and followed him though they disagreed.

And here’s a lesson for us. *What happens when you disagree with someone over God’s will in a situation? Especially when that someone is a person in authority.*

What do you do when your pastor, or boss, or parent makes a determination concerning God’s will - an interpretation that affects you - and you object?

Paul’s pals had the right approach. They disagreed with Paul, and were quite vocal in letting him know. Yet when he rejected their advice, they submitted to his authority, trusted God to guide him, and still followed.

They even helped Paul pack. Luke writes, “**And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.**”

For some of us this is a tough pill to swallow.

It's often difficult to submit to someone else's authority, especially when we differ on a critical issue.

It reminds me of the hand dryer in the employee restroom. Above it a disgruntled worker wrote, "For a message from the boss, press the button." Someone harbored bitterness. He felt his boss was full of hot air.

And it would've been easy for bitterness to develop in Paul's pals. It's no problem following, until the leader takes a path you don't want to travel. A friend once told me, "It's not really submission until you disagree."

Realize, I'm not talking about a decision that's *unbiblical or immoral or unethical*. Those are easy choices - you follow the right *principle* not the *person*.

What I'm talking about are subjective, amoral issues.

What do you do when your pastor - or husband - or boss chooses a path you're not so sure about? He even has you carry some baggage. The consequences of his decision will effect you as well. *What do you do?*

Here's what Paul's friends did...

First, they recognized Paul's intentions were good. He was definitely *hard-headed*, but nobody doubted he was *soft-hearted*. His desire to go to Jerusalem was because of his love for Jesus and his love for the Jews.

Second, they might not have agreed with Paul in this matter, but they trusted God to guide him. Rather than abandon ship because they disagreed with the skipper, they remembered Who was ultimately at the helm. On the Road to

Damascus God knocked Paul off his high horse. God did it once, He could do it again if necessary. They believed two truths: *that Paul followed Jesus*, and even more so, *that Jesus would lead Paul*.

Third, they kept the comma. Read verse 14 without the first comma, "*We ceased saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'*" They could've said, "*We give up! Why waste our breath? If Paul wants to jump off a cliff, let him jump!*" But thankfully, that wasn't their attitude.

They kept the first comma. Read verse 14 with the comma, "*we ceased(,) saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'*" They stopped debating and questioning, and trusted that God would lead their leader. That's faith.

Paul's pals are a good example to us... They saw his **good intentions**. They **trusted God to override** any mistake. And they gave Paul the **benefit of the doubt**.

Verse 16, "Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge." The year is probably 58 AD. Jesus' resurrection had been over 25 years earlier. There were now people like Mnason who had believed for a quarter of a century. They were recognized as "*early disciples*."

"And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." Jerusalem is 65 miles southeast of Caesarea. When he arrives he gets a warm welcome.

“On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James...” This was the half-brother of our Lord Jesus. At the time he was the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

“And all the elders were present. When (Paul) had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord.” *But they had a concern...* “And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...”

The church leaders in Jerusalem appreciate the freedom enjoyed by the Gentiles. They acknowledge that a right standing with God is obtained *NOT by keeping the Law, but believing in Jesus*. Yet there were Jewish believers in the church who leaned hard toward legalism. They trusted in **grit** more so than in **grace**.

The church leaders go on in verse 21, “But they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.” *This just wasn't true!*

Paul never told Jews they couldn't circumcise their sons. Nor did he advocate abandoning Jewish custom. If a Jew wanted to maintain his Jewishness; *then fine!*

Paul just pointed out that obedience to the Law could not make a person right with God. You can be a devout Jew and still be dead in your sin. Righteousness isn't earned by good works. It's a gift of grace. A right standing with God is obtained and maintained by grace through faith in Jesus. And

because Paul championed grace, he was branded an enemy of Judaism!

James knows Paul is headed for a showdown with the Jewish hierarchy. He predicts it in verse 22, **“What then? The assembly (that is, the Sanhedrin) must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.”**

James knows what’s about to happen, but his response to it is questionable... **“Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.”**

Here’s James’ suggestion. Four Jewish men are to take a vow. Here’s how it might’ve worked... *They’d take time off from work. Enter the Temple and shave their head, as a pledge to God. Over the duration of their vow their hair would grow again. At the vow’s conclusion they would returned, shave a second time; then offer their shaved hair as a sacrifice to God.*

James is saying if Paul financially supports the vow-takers, while they’re out of work - and even joins them in the ritual - he can make a statement to the Jews that he isn’t opposed to their customs and rituals.

James saw this as a show of respect to the Law that stopped short of compromising the Gospel. And Paul agreed. In 1 Corinthians 9:20 Paul wrote, **"To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as**

under the law, that I might win those who are under the law..." Paul was willing to relate to people culturally, to win them over spiritually.

This is what Paul believed he was doing here.

And James wants to be clear he's not compromising the Gospel. He reaffirms freedom for the Gentiles in verse 25, "But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality." James refers to the decision reached in Acts 15 by the Jerusalem Council, that was already guiding the Gentile churches.

Now it seems like James and Paul have concocted a good plan. *Will it work? Not hardly.* It ends in disaster.

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, 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 teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." James and Paul had a plan, but their plan backfired. The radical, legalistic Jews, or "Judaizers," who opposed Paul throughout Galatia and Asia were based in Jerusalem.

Paul is now on their home turf. A confrontation is inevitable... It's said, "Everywhere Paul went he either sparked a riot or a revival." In Jerusalem, it was a riot!

Verse 29, (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut." A sign hung above the door into the Court of Israel, the inner sanctum of Jerusalem's Temple, that read, "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." A Gentile who went beyond this door would surely be stoned.

So when Paul's enemies saw him on Jerusalem's streets with Trophimus, who they knew was a Gentile, they used it to falsely accuse Paul of escorting an Ephesian into the Temple. It was a lie born out of their hatred toward Paul and their prejudice toward Gentiles.

The Jews grabbed Paul. Dragged him out of the Temple and proceeded to stone him. "Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

On the northwest corner of the Temple Mount Rome had built a fortress - a police precinct to help keep order in the Temple. As many as 1000 troops were stationed in the Fortress of Antonio. When news of the mob reached the Fortress, a garrison was dispatched. The Romans arrive in the nick-of-time to save Paul.

Verse 32, “(The commander) immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they (the radical Judaizers) saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”

The Roman soldiers broke up an illegal lynching!

“Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.

So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!” The Temple Mount was out-of-control. Police were fighting off a frenzied mob.

“Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the 4000 assassins out into the wilderness?” It was a case of mistaken identity. The Roman commander thought Paul was an Egyptian, who three years earlier stirred up trouble in the Temple. He’d led a group of Jews to the Mount of Olives and commanded the city walls to fall. When they didn’t, the mob turned on him.

“But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city (Tarsus was a prominent place); and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

This is incredible poise under fire. Rather than be concerned with getting to safety, Paul asks the Roman if he can address the mob that's just threatened his life.

Paul sees this as the moment he's waited on for the last 20 years. It's his opportunity to preach to the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem - the establishment of which he'd once been a part of. He was the rabbi who had murdered Stephen. Paul is now blind to all but one ambition - to preach the Gospel to his countrymen.

“So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying...” Paul had spoken Greek to the Roman Commander, but he addresses the Jews in Hebrew, his mother-tongue!

And we'll study his message next week...