

Acts 21

Introduction: From infancy we are by nature self-centered people. Have you ever heard of a child whose first full sentence was something like, “That’s OK mom, just take your time – I’ll be fine.”? When we put our faith in Christ we receive a new nature. We are new creatures. There is now something within us that longs to put Jesus before ourselves. But those new Christ-centered creatures still live within these same self-centered old bodies. And that’s a problem. In Acts 21 we’re going to see how we can begin to address that problem.

Proposition: Learning to put Jesus before ourselves is part of our spiritual growth.

- I. 21:1-8 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Knowing That We Need Fellowship
- II. 21:9-14 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Ready to Face Adversity
- III. 21:15-26 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Flexible for the Benefit of Others
- IV. 21:27-40 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Willing to Face Persecution

I. 21:1-7 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Knowing That We Need Fellowship

- A. When Paul & Co. landed in Tyre they found disciples to stay with (v.4). They did the same when they got to Ptolemais (v.7) and the same in Caesarea (v.8). Before this chapter is over this group will connect with the believers in Jerusalem. Wherever they go they look for other Christians. Wherever they go they look for Christian fellowship.

Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Knowing That We Need Fellowship. Let me explain what I mean:

Explanation: We all form relationships for a lot of reasons: business, work, family, neighbors and so on. Maybe we hang out with people because we find them attractive or we think that they’re cool. All of these reasons are no doubt OK at some level. But we should consider this: Our naturally selfish tendencies can mean that, at our worst, we will form relationships based on purely selfish motives. This really should not be.

If we’re going to put Jesus before ourselves, we need to be intentional about forming relationships based on our relationship with Christ. This will help us grow that spiritual side of us as we should. We need to relate to others at that deeply spiritual level. That’s Christian fellowship.

Application: That means more than occasionally coming to church on Sunday, singing and hearing a message. It means truly connecting with others, finding a ministry, understanding and appreciating exactly how God has wired you to fit into the body of Christ. It means forming relationships for purely spiritual rather than selfish reasons.

If we put Jesus before ourselves then we’ll know that Christian fellowship will help us grow spiritually and better serve Him.

- **Learning to put Jesus before ourselves is part of our spiritual growth.**

B. 21:8 *Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven*

- i. The Bible teaches that the *evangelist* is one of the offices to which God appoints people in order to build His church (Eph. 4:11). Philip has the interesting distinction of being the only man in the Bible who is specifically called an “evangelist”, which means one who proclaims the Good News.
- ii. Philip is also *one of the seven*. That means one of the seven deacons, or servants, of the church who were chosen in Acts Chapter 6. Stephen, the first martyr, was another.
- i. We last saw Philip in Acts 8, in which he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. He then went on to preach in other cities and eventually stopped in Caesarea. That's where we still find him here in Chapter 21. Paul and his party stayed in the home of Philip.

II. 21:9-14 **Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Ready to Face Adversity**

- A. 21:11 The Holy Spirit communicated through Agabus that adversity awaited Paul. If we look back at v. 4, this is probably happening there too. The other believers thought that meant that Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem at all. They thought he should avoid the adversity.
- B. Just like Peter who told Jesus to avoid the cross, they assume that adversity can never be a part of God's plan. How did Jesus respond to Peter?

Matthew 16:23 (NKJV) But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

- C. Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Ready to Face Adversity. Just like Jesus, Paul knew that this adversity was coming all along. For Paul, facing adversity was part of putting Jesus before himself. In the last chapter he said this:

Acts 20:22-24 (NKJV) ²²And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴But 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.

- D. We don't like adversity, but adversity may certainly be part of the Christian life. If we go back to Paul's first missionary trip here's what we find him saying to the churches:

Acts 14:22 (NKJV) [He was] strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Application: I don't know what kind of adversity you are presently facing, but as you pray for God to remove the trial, please consider that God may have a plan in it. He may be using it to grow you and teaching you, like Paul, to put Jesus before yourself.

- **Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Ready to Face Adversity.**

III. 21:15-26 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Flexible for the Benefit of Others

Q: Why would Paul go through all this rigmarole to maintain these Jewish traditions?

A: In order to reach more people with the truth of the Gospel.

Paul did not have to pay these expenses for other men. He may have even been upset about the rumors circulating about him here in Jerusalem. He never said that the Jews shouldn't circumcise their children. But now that the rumors were out there, what good would it really do to argue about them. He decided to dispel the rumors with his action rather than his words. By being flexible and listening to the counsel of the Jerusalem church, he knows that whatever happens, he's doing his best to maintain unity in the church and be a faithful witness to his Jewish countrymen. This was part of Paul's philosophy of ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NKJV) ¹⁹For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰and 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; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²²to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

- **By being flexible for the sake of others, Paul is putting Jesus before himself.**
- **Learning to put Jesus before ourselves is part of our spiritual growth.**

IV. 21:27-40 Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Willing to Face Persecution

A. To grasp the reasons behind this riot, we have to understand that if you were a devout Jew, the last thing you ever wanted was for Greeks – or any non-Jew – to enter the Temple Courts. There was a special designated area called the Court of the Gentiles, beyond which no one but a Jew was allowed to go. There was a sign there warning non-Jews that if they went any farther they might just be lynched.

B. What the Jews from Ephesus say about Paul is completely untrue (v.28). They somehow imagine that Paul is defiling their holy place by bringing in his Gentile friends (v.29). In reality Paul was doing nothing but practicing good Judaism. He was paying expenses associated with his own Jewish vow and going one step further by paying the expenses for other Jews pertaining to their own Jewish vows. He is truly being a Jew to win the Jews. But it backfires.

C. Of course what happens here to Paul here is certainly very extreme. We will probably never have to face anything like this. But some people do.

- **Putting Jesus Before Ourselves Means Being Willing to Face Persecution**

Illustration: In Acts 7 we looked at the stoning of Stephen, one of the leaders in the early church. Like Phillip he was one of the seven deacons. Because he put Jesus before himself he ended up dying for his faith.

Illustration: In Acts 12, James the son of Zebedee, one of the original twelve apostles was the next recorded follower of Jesus to die for his faith. He died because he put Jesus before himself.

Illustration: From the website Persecution.com (Accessed 2/5/09)

Since October, three Christians imprisoned for their faith have died in Eritrean military prisons, according to Compass Direct News.

Mehari Gebreneguse Asgedom died on Jan. 16 from torture and diabetes while in solitary confinement at the Mitire Military Confinement Center. Asgedom's death followed the revelation in January that another Christian died in the same prison, Compass reports. Mogos Hagos Kiflom was said to have died as a result of torture he endured for refusing to recant his faith, but the exact date of his death was unknown.

In October, Teklesenbet Gebreab Kiflom died while imprisoned for his faith at the Wi'a Military Confinement Center. He reportedly died after prison commanders refused to give him medical attention for malaria.

These latest deaths reflect the Eritrean government's harsh treatment of believers. The Eritrean government targets Christians, often placing them in metal containers that are extremely hot during the day and cold during the night. Nearly 1,800 Eritrean Christians are believed to be under arrest because of their religious beliefs, held in police stations, military camps and prisons in 12 known locations across Eritrea.

[View this story on their website.](#)

Conclusion:

As we leave here today, let's seriously consider how Jesus may be asking us to put Him before ourselves. Learning to put Jesus before ourselves is part of our spiritual growth. We've seen that we can do so in at least four different ways.

- He may be asking us to make a greater commitment to fellowship with other Christians – attending a small group or getting involved in some kind of ministry.
- He may be asking us to be ready to face adversity. Every trial that we willingly face can be part of our spiritual growth.
- He may be asking us to be flexible for the benefit of others. We may have to deny ourselves certain rights or privileges, not because they are bad, but because others will benefit by our self denial. Mothers may have to willingly, joyfully sacrifice for their children. We may have to sacrifice time for a friend in need.
- Finally, He may be asking us to be willing to face persecution. You probably won't be beaten by an angry mob like Paul was, but there may be those random remarks or unfair accusations. You may be excluded from your old circle of friends because they now view you as “the Christian” who doesn't know how to have fun any more – when that really means you no longer get wasted out of your mind. Your persecution may be more subtle, but it may still be there.
- So just remember that **learning to put Jesus before ourselves is part of our spiritual growth.**