

# For the Name of Jesus

Acts 21:1–16

April 7, 2002

“What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” “I am ready . . . to die . . . for the name of the Lord Jesus.” “I am ready . . . to die . . . for . . . Jesus.” That is amazing! Paul did not say these words lightly. He was not grandstanding. His actions backed up his words. The other Christians could not talk him out of it. Finally they said, in an echo of the Lord’s prayer, “The will of the Lord be done.” He headed on for Jerusalem.

“I am ready . . . to die . . . for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Is there anyone in your life for whom you are ready to die? Your husband or wife? Your son or daughter? Your country? The Lord Jesus Christ? Is there anyone worth more to you than your own life? If so, is there any time we are more alive than when we are that deeply in love? What does it take for someone to be lifted out of the pit of self-centeredness, out of the depths of despair, to be turned around, to be made alive, to be brought to love, and to be made ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus?

This runs against everything else we know. We are taught to look out for ourselves. We live in a world where many people are ready not to die but to kill other people. That is happening more every day. People kill for food, for money, for land, for fame, for glory, for meanness, for love, for justice, and even for the name of Allah. Some people are willing to die themselves, only if by so doing they are able to kill a number of other people along with them, so that dying is just another method of killing. But who is willing to be on the receiving end of the killing? Who is willing, not to kill, but to die for another? How does that happen, that we become so willing? How do we absorb the suffering inflicted by the world even to the point of our personal demise?

“I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” It was not always that way for Paul. Earlier in the book of Acts, when Stephen was arrested for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and was thrown out of the city and stoned to death, Paul “was consenting to his death” (Acts 8:1). That is, Paul was willing for Stephen to die for Jesus, not for Paul to die for Jesus. In fact, Paul “was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul was not ready to die, but ready to kill. He was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). Paul wanted to kill the followers of Jesus Christ. What turned him around? Who can turn us around?

There is only one way to account for this. One day, Paul came face to face with Jesus Christ. No, this was not while Jesus was preaching and teaching in Galilee. This was after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And no, this was not while Paul was in church. He was out hunting down Christians. But Jesus Christ came to Paul, and Paul was changed forever. Jesus Christ came to Paul, and he turned Paul’s life around. The risen Jesus Christ came to Paul, and Paul was ready even to die for Jesus. Paul came to believe, to know, and to understand that Jesus Christ defeated the powers of sin, death, and evil not by stooping to their level but by suffering the worst they could do, on the cross. And Jesus did this because he loves us so much that he was ready to die for us. In fact, Jesus did die for you and me. This makes all the difference in the world. By him, the powers of sin, death, and evil were defeated. By him, our sin has been forgiven. By him, we are promised eternal life. By him, we are loved as no one else has ever

loved us. By him, we are turned around. By him, we are lifted up. By him, we are made so alive that we are ready to die for him. That is what happened to Paul. He came face to face with Jesus Christ, and nothing was ever the same again. Can it still happen to us today?

How does Jesus come to us today? Where do we meet him? How do we come face to face with Jesus Christ? He comes to us in the reading of the word of God. I urge us all to read our Bibles every day. Here is the fountain of life. Do not neglect it. God will use that reading to grab hold of your heart and soul and never let go of you. Jesus comes to us in prayer. Paul prayed because he needed to pray, and it was in prayer that he found the courage of his faith. So should we pray, morning, noon, and night. Jesus comes to us in the preaching of the gospel, also. That is why we do this every Sunday. The church did not make this up. Jesus told us to do it. He told us that because he meets us here just as truly as he met Paul on the road to Damascus. We come here every week in the good hope of being encountered by him, encouraged, challenged, turned around, made new and whole.

Jesus also comes to us in the Lord's Supper. Jesus Christ is here today, with us and for us. As we break the bread, we remember his body given for us. As we pour the cup, we remember his blood shed for us. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we not only remember that he gave his life for us, but also we receive him anew in faith, we are overwhelmed with his love for us, and we are moved to worship him, to believe in him, to love him in return, and to obey him.

"I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Are you ready for that kind of faith in your life? Are you longing for that kind of love? Would you like to have that kind of courage? What does it take for someone to be lifted out of the pit of self-centeredness, out of the depths of despair, to be turned around, to be made alive, to be brought to love, and to be made ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus? It takes an encounter with Jesus Christ. So, on behalf of Jesus Christ, I invite you to receive communion. Learn here of the courage of the one who died for you. Receive here the gift of himself to you. Walk away from here with the new courage of one willing to die for the name of Jesus. He may or may not ask that of you or of me. We do not know at this time. But it is important to be ready. It is important to be ready to die for the name of Jesus, because that readiness to die is the way that we live for the name of Jesus. As John Calvin wrote of this passage, "It is only by contempt of death that the servants of Christ will be prepared to discharge their duty. . . . Only those who will freely lay down their lives as a testimony to the truth, will ever be properly disposed to live for the Lord." When we know that Jesus is worth more to us than life itself, when we know that he is our life, then we are made alive. Receive his gift of himself here. Then go into his world truly alive.

It would be nice to go through life without suffering. Perhaps God grants that to some. But for others, this life involves suffering. That does not mean that God is defeated. It does not mean that God is undone. It does not mean that suffering is supreme or ultimate. Instead, it means that God is able to use even our suffering to carry out and fulfill his purposes in the world. The world is a hard place. It does not receive the gospel gladly. It does not like being told that Jesus is Lord. Sometimes, the most convincing witness we can bear to Jesus is our own willingness to follow him to the cross. If we were to run away from it, we would betray our Lord and reveal our faithlessness.

Is there anyone in your life for whom you are ready to die? Your husband or wife? Your son or daughter? Is there anyone worth more to you than your own life? What does it take for someone to be lifted out of the pit of self-centeredness, out of the depths of despair, to be turned

around, to be made alive, and to be brought to love? Can we find here the faith, courage, and peace to say with Paul, “I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”?

*To God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be all praise, honor, and glory  
now and forever! Amen.*

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