

Date : 30th August 2026
Theme : The work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and service.
Topic : Overcoming hardships so as to finish well
Passage : Acts 20:22-24
Key Verse : *... And 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. Acts 20:22-24 nkjv*

Introduction:

In Acts 20:24, Paul expressed his deep commitment to testify of God's gospel of grace. The 5 words *...finish my race with joy...* would be the GOLD standard for Christian service. He modelled a life fully surrendered to God's mission, prioritized the gospel message over his personal safety or life itself. His goal was to finish well.

His audience: Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders making this declaration a powerful summary of his life's dedication. To talk of the challenges ahead and to impart his own attitude toward suffering as insignificant compared to finishing well.

1. Unpacking his closing message:

- *And see, now... Acts 20:22*
After sharing his past hardships, Paul concludes with the word *see* = *idon* (Greek), to observe, understand the spiritual significance of what lies ahead.
- Did Paul know what would lie ahead?
Not in detail; but the Lord did reveal that hardships in the form of chains and tribulations awaited him. Tribulations are afflictions from circumstantial pressures or antagonistic people.
 - From persecutor to being persecuted
Paul started out as persecutor of people of the Way. Now he would be the persecuted for Jesus' sake. How would he face such a dramatic reversal and inverted status?
No doubt the future is unknown as only God holds the future; but the secret to our handling the unknown depends on our attitude when suffering strikes unexpectedly.
 - His focus determined his future
Paul determined his future sufferings when he decided *...none of these things (sufferings) move me*. It was a choice Paul made. He viewed physical sufferings as temporary and not to be defined by external pressure.
From his letter to the Ephesian church later on, we learnt that Paul saw clearly that the whole issue revolved around spiritual warfare - Satan's schemes of intimidation from sufferings and hardships.

2. What can we learn from Paul when the way forward is uncertain?

Two issues surface from the phrase *...none of these things move me*.

- a) These things are threats that move us away from doing what God wants.
Satan's primary attack on God's servants is to silence their witness by isolation (imprisonments), exhaustion from hostility and direct pushback from mob violence.

b) Courage when facing an uncertain future

Courage is a choice we make, instead of fear.

Paul chose courage long before he encountered intimidating circumstances.

...none of these things move me was the decision he had made before difficult times happened.

c) Arrest and imprisonment

...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... Acts 20:23

The end of Acts records the details of *...the things that will happen to me there...*

- Arrested in Jerusalem in AD57. Imprisoned for about 4-5 years during this period. (2 years detained in Caesarea under Governor Antonius Felix, later Porcius Festus).
- AD59-60 Survived the dramatic shipwreck Acts 27. Reached Rome early AD60. 2 years of house arrest, guarded but free to receive visitors and to preach.
- During his Roman house arrest, wrote his 'prison' epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).
- His execution with which he concluded...*Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness....2 Timothy 4:8*

3. Secret of finishing well

Paul summed up the gold standard of values that he lived by. Acts 20.

(Acts does not record his death. Secular history estimates AD65/66 in Rome).

a) **What things did not deter** him from the race? *...none of these things move me...*

We can see from Paul's responses to crisis, that he refused to be moved.

- i) In Acts 20:19 Paul described serving the Lord with many tears and trials, caused by the **plots of the Jews**. (*...served with many tears...Acts 20:18*). Rather than quitting or retaliating, Paul reacted by continuing to preach, teach publicly and from house to house.

- From the start, at Pisidium Antioch, because of the overwhelming response of Jews and Gentiles in the city to his preaching, envious Jews stalked him relentlessly and **persecuted** him.
- The persecution never stopped no matter which city he went. At Lystra, Paul was stoned (an ordeal from which nobody would survive) but Paul did. Acts 14:19-20 Imagine having to live and still preach with this kind of persecution. Paul had to be on high alert all the time and be ready to high tail it to the next city.
 - Humanly speaking, why didn't God block the Jews, leaving Paul to his work?
 - From the spiritual overview, this hastening was necessary before Nero's purge of Christians in AD65. Immediately after the Great Fire of Rome in AD64, state-sanctioned scapegoating of Christians began, blaming them for the fire. Church tradition places the execution of key apostles, like Peter, Paul and Simon the Zealot, around AD65.

ii) Danger from **'false brothers'**

- While Paul was actively raising leaders to help him further the work of the gospel, 'false brothers' also arose, opposing him.
 - Specific individuals who abandoned Paul later in his ministry, then aggressively disparaged his preaching, like Alexander the coppersmith. *2 Timothy 4:14*
 - The Judaizers – teachers who claimed to follow Christ but insisted that Gentile believers be circumcised and obey the Mosaic Law, to be saved. *Acts 11,15,21.*
 - There were 'false brothers' who secretly tried to spy on the freedom believers have in Christ. *Galatians 2:4*
 - The 'super-apostles' who undermined his authority in Corinth and preached a 'different' Jesus. *2 Corinthians 11:5, 12:1*

iii) **Intense physical punishment** for preaching the gospel

- From Jewish authorities and communities during his missionary journeys
 - Paul mentioned 5 separate times of formal corporal floggings (39 stripes) by Jewish leaders to discipline dissenters within the synagogues. *2 Corinthians 11:24*
 - Driven out and expelled, forced to flee cities under the threat of violence or death (lowered in a basket in Damascus *Acts 9:24,25*).
 - Hostile crowds tracked him across regions – crowds from Antioch and Iconium tracked Paul to Lystra, stirred up local crowds and authorities against him, leading to riots and physical assaults, like stoning. *Acts 14:19*
 - Personal anguish and unceasing sorrow for his Jewish kinsmen, underlining his profound desire for their salvation rather than personal bitterness. *Romans 9:1-3*

b) **Why was Paul so resolute despite a future of suffering awaited him?**

Paul was forewarned of impending suffering in Jerusalem by prophet Agabus. Caring disciples wept and begged him not to go there; but Paul was resolute *...I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 21:13*

He was driven by one ambition *...that I may finish the race*
To the Corinthian church he later wrote about this race.

i) Only those who finish it gets a prize. *1 Corinthians 9:24*

To Paul, living the Christian life consistently was a race. It involved a race against time.

Christians prepare for that moment of time in the appearance of our Lord Jesus. At that moment we shall stand before Him to receive the prize for finishing well. That prize is an imperishable crown. *1 Corinthians 9:24*

ii) Thus, the present momentous sufferings cannot be compared to the glory the Lord had prepared for all who finish well. *Romans 8:18*

iii) Every work and sacrifice for the Lord counts, so we are steadfast, immovable.
1 Corinthians 15:58

... *Great is your reward in heaven...* (for suffering persecution) *Matthew 5:13.*

Application

Which aspect/s of Paul's secret of finishing well impressed you?

- His gold standard values *Acts 20:18-24* ☐
- His zeal for the Great Commission ☐
- His attitude regarding an uncertain future ☐
- His evangelism process ☐
 - prayer ☐
 - preaching ☐
 - his defense in case-making ☐