

**THE BIG IDEA: Following Jesus closely leads to feeling community deeply.**

The Take-Off

Last week we saw Paul begin his "farewell tour" and today, in chapter 21, we'll see that continue until he finally arrives in Jerusalem.

If you just start reading in verse 1, you'll notice that Paul's on a ship that stops A LOT!

I only have 3 points today, and the first point is extremely important because we need to remember WHY Paul is on this ship.

He isn't cruising. He isn't eating green eggs and ham on a boat.

He's following Jesus, and he's following Jesus closely.

You need to remember that fact, because all the things that he will encounter in the sections of Acts 21 that we'll look at today happen as a result of that one statement, and it's the first part of today's Big Idea...

**Following Jesus closely leads to feeling community deeply.**

Now, that sounds like a great Big Idea, and it is one of the better ones I've had recently, but as we'll find out, it sounds better than it actually feels.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

First, let's talk about how Paul followed Jesus.

**1. Like Paul, we must follow Jesus closely**

- a. All Paul has ever done is follow Jesus
- b. From the first moment that Jesus chased Paul down and knocked him on the ground, Paul has followed Jesus
- c. From the moment the scales fell from Paul's eyes when Ananias prayed for him in Acts 9, Paul has followed Jesus
- d. Why? Because Jesus is all Paul's got!
- e. Paul has pushed all his chips to the center of the table - he's all in on this gospel mission
- f. Acts 20:24 he said his life was worth nothing - all he wanted was Jesus
- g. In Philippians 1:21, Paul basically said if he could pick one word to sum up his life, it would be Jesus
- h. If I'm following a car in a strange place, guess how I follow? Closely. Like "swerve through 3 lanes of traffic to make the same turn" closely!
- i. Why? I don't know where I'm going!!
- j. Is it any surprise that Paul wrote the words we find in Galatians 5:25? "If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."
- k. Paul's very life depended on following Jesus closely, so I guess you could say he was pretty motivated!!
- l. The obvious question that we've got to ask ourselves is: Are we following Jesus closely?
- m. Do we live with an ear to the ground - ridding ourselves of as many distractions as possible - in order to hear him?
- n. Are we "keeping in step" with Jesus?
- o. Greek word is "stoicheo" and it means to proceed in a row as the march of a soldier
- p. To do that, it means that sometimes we only see the person directly in front of us, not the place where we're going.
- q. This requires TRUST!

**2. Like Paul, we must follow Jesus closely in community**

- a. Please don't miss the obvious: as Paul followed Jesus closely, he developed close relationships with others who were also following Jesus closely
- b. The result of this is Biblical community
- c. There's a word that you read a lot in Acts, and especially in this chapter: "we"
- d. As we read through the first 16 verses of Acts 21, you'll notice that Luke (the author) goes to great detail to share the itinerary of the ship's travels, and at many of these stops, Paul found disciples with whom he'd had past relationships
- e. The big point here? Paul did not follow Jesus closely on an island!

- f. The Christian faith is not a big game of Survivor where we hope to prove we love Jesus more than anyone else by outlasting and outwitting one another.
- g. No, the Christian faith is lived out in community with people who are trying to "outserve" one another
- h. Romans 12:10 in the ESV says we are to "outdo one another in showing honor"
- i. This only happens in the context of community
- j. 54 times in the Bible we find commands about how we're to treat "one another"
- k. So the people that think they can follow Jesus closely without that leading to community with the body of Christ are sadly mistaken and grossly disobedient to those commands
- l. That would be like you telling me you love me and want to hang out with me but that you don't really care for my family
- m. You would be a fool to think I'd want anything to do with you
- n. Never make the mistake of believing that you can love Jesus but not his bride
- o. And so let me ask the obvious question: are you living in community with others who are following Jesus closely?
- p. Are you encouraging others and being encouraged by others, or is Sunday the only day that Jesus comes up in conversations with other people?
- q. Are you sharing with others what you're reading in the Bible?
- r. Have you been a consistent, contributing member of a Community Group here at The Gathering, or are you simply a Sunday morning consumer?
- s. Like Paul, we must follow Jesus closely in community, and that's good news and bad news all at the same time.
- t. Let me explain why.

### 3. Like Paul, we will pay a price to follow Jesus closely in community

- a. This is the part that gets a little sticky for us.
- b. We love the IDEA of community, but we struggle with the PRACTICE of community.
- c. For starters, it doesn't happen automatically!
- d. Remember what we read last week about Paul's ministry in Ephesus? Acts 20:31 says he worked day and night with tears to build community.
- e. Acts 2:42-47 lists a ton of great benefits of community, and it all starts with 3 words: "they devoted themselves"
- f. The word for devoted literally means "to be steadfastly attentive, to give unremitting care, to continue all the time in a place (that's one place, not a 6 church rotation!!), to be in constant readiness for someone, to wait on them constantly"
- g. It costs something to build community, and very few are willing to pay it. But the benefits? Deep relationships that can only come from deep commitment to follow Jesus closely together. Let's follow Paul through the ship's stops on the way to Jerusalem to see:
  - Acts 21:1 / they "tore" themselves away from the elders of Ephesus
  - Acts 21:4-6 / good disciples begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, they all knelt on the beach to pray and say good-bye
  - Acts 21:8-14 / after prophecies by Philip's 4 daughters (women are valuable to the ministry!!) and a man named Agabus, everyone pleaded with Paul not to go, so much so that Paul had to tell them to stop because their grief was hurting him!
- h. That's the sticking point of community, isn't it?
- i. We want it, and so we try it, and then it doesn't happen as quickly or as easily as we'd hoped, and so we back off.
- j. And yet - JUST LIKE THIS DOG LICKING A LIME - there's something about Biblical community that draws us back for more. [VIDEO]
- k. Let me ask you a quick question: would the people in this family react to your departure or my departure the same way the people in 3 cities reacted to Paul's?
- l. Community, quite honestly, costs too much for a lot of people and they are unwilling to pay it.
- m. It costs us TIME to build it and it costs us TEARS to leave it.
- n. But in the middle of all that is a payoff that makes it worth it once we try it.

### The Landing

And so we can see that **FOLLOWING JESUS CLOSELY LEADS TO FEELING COMMUNITY DEEPLY.**

It's hard, yes, because loving - especially loving one another the way the Bible calls us to - always leaves us open to hurting.

There is no other way, because if we're following Jesus closely in community with others who are following Jesus closely, eventually there will be a final good-bye.

But don't hold back. Don't love less because you're afraid that it might hurt more. Love one another fully and live in community deeply.

John 13:35 tells us plainly that the one and only way EVERYONE will know we're following Jesus closely is if we truly, deeply, and at times, painfully love one another.

This will be the love that changes the world, and when the time comes, the love that unselfishly launches people we truly care about out into service that could take them away from us.

I invite you out of the bleachers.

I invite you to come and follow Jesus closely, and find out what real community is all about.