

July 23, 2017

Church Planting
I Surrender All
Acts 21:7-14

Opening words: The date was April 9, 1865. The place was Appomattox, Virginia. The event would, for all intents and purposes, end the American Civil War (1861-1865). Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to the Union's Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. The war that many believed would be completed in weeks, took four years. To date, it has been our bloodiest war. Approximately 620,000 died during the American Civil War. In comparison, approximately 405,000 died during the Second World War. Many consider Lee's surrender to be the most famous surrender in the history of the world. Sometimes surrendering is a good thing because it ends the battle. The scripture lesson for today is not about political or military surrender. It is about spiritual surrender. The question for today is, how much are you willing to surrender to God?

This is sermon number fifty-one in my sermon series, *Church Planting*. You remember my task. During the summer months, I am preaching through the Book of Acts. Why make a major time commitment to the Book of Acts? Because, Acts is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally and it will be the Holy Spirit who must revive the church again. Human effort is not enough. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 21:7-14. This week's message is called *I Surrender All*.

Acts 21:7-14 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Billy Sunday once said, "*Conversion is the complete surrender to Jesus. It is a willingness to do what he wants you to do.*" That quote summarizes my whole message in a few words. If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Today, we are in the twenty-first chapter of Acts. If you were with us last week then you will remember, Paul has just left Ephesus. He had been with the Ephesians for three years and his exit was emotional. He was leaving them for one reason. Paul is going to Jerusalem because the saints there are facing a great hardship. In Paul's day, there was no direct flight between Ephesus and Jerusalem. The fastest mode of transportation was by boat. The first few verses of this chapter reveal Paul's ports of call. In verse seven, we are told he sailed to the city of Ptolemais. Today, it is called Akko (or Acre). He stayed there one day and then sailed to Caesarea, a Gentile city, where the spirit had been moving. While in that community, Paul stayed in the home of a man by the name of Philip, who had four unmarried daughters that had each prophesied. The scriptures tell us Paul was visited by a man named Agabus. He was a prophet, who delivered some bad news. He tells Paul, in a dramatic way, not to go to Jerusalem. On his arrival, he will be bound and handed over to the authorities. No one wants to see Paul incarcerated, so they plead with him not to go. But, their words fall on deaf ears. Paul is determined to press on. Paul was not concerned about his own personal agenda. The only thing that mattered to Paul was Jesus. In verse fourteen Paul proclaims, *"The Lord's will be done."* It is one of those things that is easy to say but it is hard to do. Paul was willing to surrender it all to Jesus. This is the question you must answer today: How much of your life are you willing to surrender to God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** I have told you this in the past:

When I was in the Bluegrass State, I served a small membership church between Lancaster and Danville. We averaged about thirty people each Sunday. On Christmas Eve, we would skyrocket to nearly 50. I did then what I do now. I would make the accompanist pick the hymns. The reason is simple: I am musically challenged. The piano player at that church was a woman by the name of Marilee Sharp. I read recently, she is still the accompanist at that church. She has been the pianist of that church for over fifty years. It seemed like every week she would pick the same two hymns. One was, *"There is Power in the Blood."* The other one was, *"I Surrender All."* They are fine traditional hymns. Sometimes late at night I can still hear them singing those classics. They knew the words and they sang them out. (This week I learned something new. I learned the hymn, *"I Surrender All"* was written by Justin Van de Venter (1855-1939) in East Palestine, Ohio. He surrendered his promising art career and decided to follow God's calling into full time evangelistic work.) I will admit it. I am a product of this area, so I am little cynical. They sang, *"I Surrender All,"* but they didn't surrender all. There were certain things in their lives that were off limits to God. Don't get me wrong. They were not bad people. They were not sinister people. However, they were like us, people. Each one of us identifies certain things that we will not surrender to God. Maybe we should write a new hymn called *I Surrender Some*. That leads us to an interesting question. What is it in your life that is off limits to God? Let me ask you this series of questions.

Is your mind off limits to God? When I was in school I claimed Roman 12:2 as my own. "Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by

the renewing of your mind." Our minds are not just computers to be programmed. They are muscles that can be changed. Did you know the average college freshman has seen 200,000 television commercials? The average 21-year-old has seen approximately 10,000 hours of violent programming. No wonder we have shooting in our schools. The amount of violence and sex we adults watch on television is shocking. The choice is ours. Are we going to fill our minds with the things of God, or are we going to fill our minds with the things of this world? Is your mind off limits to God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

If your money off limits to God? God expects us to give sacrificially, but we give out of our surplus. Research tells us, the average church-going Christian gives about 2.5% of their income. That means we spend more money on our pets and our hobbies than we do on God. Did you know 90% of church funds are donated by 10% of the people? Supporting your church is not mandatory. You don't have to give a dime. However, it is something that God expects. Your tithe is not a voting ballot, where if you like what is happening at your church, you give, and if you don't like what is going on, you withhold. You don't give to support an organization. You give to support the body of Christ. However, the choice is yours. Is your money off limits to God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Is your body off limits to God? One of the great debates in our society today is who owns our bodies. Doctors, lawyers, clergy, judges and juries have debated the moral, ethical and legal sides of this issue. The questions surrounding suicide, euthanasia and abortion revolve around the question of who owns your body. This is the answer: God owns our bodies. 1 Corinthians 3:16 goes as far to say that your body is the temple of God. If we viewed our bodies as God's temple, then we would treat our bodies differently. We wouldn't abuse our bodies with food. We wouldn't abuse our bodies with alcohol. We wouldn't have sex with anyone who says, "Yes!" We wouldn't abuse our bodies with various tobacco products. We would treat our bodies as something very precious. The choice is yours. Are you going to treat your body like the temple of God, or not? Is your body off limits to God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Is your time off limits to God? You know the truth. Time is limited. However, time is limitless to God. Psalm 90 says, "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God". Our view of time is one of those things that separates us from God. Like money, we spend our time on things that are important to us. If you haven't noticed, church attendance drops during the summer months. People have no problem telling me they don't come to church during the summer months. I guess they think I understand, but I don't. However, it isn't just the summer months. It is every month. People don't give God the time of day when the weather is too good or too bad. People don't give God the time of day when a special event is going on in their lives. People don't give God the time of day when they are tired or on vacation. You are within your constitutional rights not to worship, but aren't you glad God does not take a vacation from us? The choice is

yours. Are you going to spend some of your time in worship, or not? Is your time off limits to God? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Those are fair questions, but those questions are not big enough. Look at the text with me one more time. The Apostle Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. On his way, he stops in a Caesarea, where he encounters a man who tries to discourage him from going. There is an excellent chance that on his arrival he will be bound and arrested. Once arrested, there is an excellent chance he could be put to death. There is no indication in the text that Paul doesn't understand the danger. He does understand the danger, but it doesn't matter, because nothing in his life was off limits to God. Unlike my congregants in Kentucky, and unlike us, Paul was willing to surrender it all. In other words, he was willing to die. Paul was willing to surrender it all. Next to Paul, our sacrifices appear very small. While Paul is singing, *I Surrender All*, we are composing our song, *I Surrender Some*. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** There was another man who sang, *I Surrender All*. His name is Jesus. You remember the scene.

It is one of the great scenes in the Bible. Jesus's time in this world was coming to an end. It is Thursday of Holy Week. The Seder meal has been completed. There is nothing else to do but pray. Jesus asks several of the disciples to go with him to the garden to pray (Mark 14:32-36). They say, "Yes," but before long the disciples are asleep. Some say the reason they feel asleep was the wine at the meal. For all intents and purposes, Jesus is alone. The Gospel writers tell us what Jesus prayed in that desperate hour. Jesus knew what was coming: the agony of the cross. In other words, death was waiting for him. Do you remember his words? Jesus said, "Father, not my will, but your will be done." In other words, Jesus said, "I surrender all." Today, I am not going to ask you to surrender your very life to God. We are not at that point. However, I am going to ask you to appreciate Paul for his complete trust in God. And, I am going to ask you one last question, how much are you willing to sacrifice to God?

Time goes so fast. Twenty-four years ago, in 1993, I was part of a volunteers-in-mission's trip to the Philippines. I remember we were on that island nation for two weeks. We stayed at Harris Memorial College outside of Manila, which at the time, was owned by the women's division of the United Methodist Church. That school trained young women for Christian service. We were part of a medical missions group. The people of the Philippines were great, but the trip was hard. The heat and the humidity were oppressive. The electricity was undependable. Every day we experienced a black-out, which the Filipinos called a "Brown-out." We only had running water forty-five minutes a day, from 6:15 am until 7:00 am. The food was foreign to my taste. I found the pollution oppressive. I found the poverty to be overwhelming. The best part of any volunteer-in-mission's trip is the people. That trip was no exception. The people on the team were great. The missionaries who called the Philippines home were great. I met one woman there I will never forget.

She was a Filipino woman who had lived in the United States. I will be honest with you. I can't remember her name. One day over lunch, another plate of rice and fish, I asked her where she had been in the United States. She listed off several cities. Then, she ended by saying, she spent most of her time in New York. I pressed on and asked her where in New York. She answered, New York City. I asked her, "What were you doing in New York City?" I couldn't believe her answer. She said, "Singing!" Not being able to stop myself, I pressed on even more, where did you sing in New York City?" Her answer still makes me pause. She said, "The Metropolitan Opera; I was a professional opera singer." I said, "Do you ever miss the Met? Are you going back to the Met?" She simply answered, "No. The pollution of this land has ruined my voice. I will never sing professionally again." I said, "I'm sorry." She smiled and said, "Don't be. Helping my people is what God wants me to do." I do not know her favorite song but I would have loved to hear her sing, *I Surrender All*. She surrendered her gift of music. How much are you willing to surrender to God? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Do you remember the words of Billy Sunday? He said, "*Conversion is the complete surrender to Jesus. It is a willingness to do what he wants you to do.*" And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**