

“Surrender”
a sermon on Acts 21: 3 – 15
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Surrender. What comes to mind when you hear the word “surrender”?

Do you think about military surrender like the famous Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay that marked the end of World War II? A surrender that was met with resounding celebration throughout the Allied nations. Maybe the image of President Truman and Mrs. Truman making a Victory sign to the shouting crowds of Washington, D.C. in response to this specific military surrender comes to mind.

Being in the state of Alabama, do you think about Rosa Parks and her refusal to surrender to segregation laws when she did not give her seat up to a white man on a Montgomery, AL city bus in 1955? This event and the events that followed may inspire you because of the strength and courage that it took to not surrender to the laws and norms of society in the 1950s and 60s.

Do you think about people who are fighting some sort of disease or addiction? People often say in these situations, “Don’t surrender! Don’t give in! Keep fighting. Keep battling that cancer, that addiction, that disease. Don’t surrender to it.”

You may think of the song “Surrender” by Cheap Trick. The chorus says “Mommy’s alright, daddy’s alright, they just seem a little weird. Surrender, surrender, but don’t give yourself away.”

The dictionary defines to surrender as “to cease resistance to an enemy or opponent and submit to their authority.” Surrender. Forfeit. Abandon. Concede. Give in. Quit. Relinquish. Submit. Yield. Throw in the towel. Put up the white flag. Surrender. So it certainly seems that to surrender has a negative connotation in our society, doesn’t it? After all, we live in a culture

where messages like “Just Do It” surround us. Especially in the world of athletics, we are bombarded with messages of encouragement and anti-surrender. Babe Ruth said “it’s hard to beat a person who never gives up.” Arnold Schwarzenegger said, “When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.”

As a through and through Clemson tiger fan, I was fortunate to be able to go to all of the home football games growing up. Frank Howard, one of the football team’s former coaches, was gifted a rock from the Death Valley in California. In 1966, Coach Howard decided to put this rock at the top of the hill in the Clemson Death Valley. In 1967, he told the team that if they were going to give 100%, then they could rub the rock for good luck. Rubbing Howard’s rock and running down the hill before the game has become a beloved tradition at Clemson. As the hype-up music plays and the crowds await the team to arrive, they always play a sound clip of Frank Howard saying, “Give me 110% or keep your filthy hands off of my rock.”

But friends, how do we give 110% if we don’t surrender to the Lord’s will? The text today paints a beautiful, but challenging image of what it means to surrender to the Lord’s will. From the text, we can pull several examples of total surrender and examine what they mean in our own lives.

#1: Total surrender means the willingness to let go of our life’s comforts. Verses 5 – 6 read, “When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.” The people in this narrative did not know what was ahead in their journey. They did not know when or where they would once again see their friends and families. Because we live in a time where we have access to constant communication through technology, it’s hard to

put ourselves in their shoes. But I want you to try. I want you to imagine booking a one-way flight to a distant land. There is no WiFi or cell service in this place. There is no postage system. And you have no idea how long your stay will be or the people you will meet or the things you will do. Can you imagine what that ride to the airport would be like? Can you imagine the tears shed as your loved ones wave goodbye as you enter the security line?

Friends, who is in your comfort zone? I am incredibly blessed to have a wonderful relationship with my family. I have an older sister who is my absolute best friend and my parents have always been the most supportive and loving parents I could ask for. I talk to these amazing people at least twice or three times a week. They are my biggest cheerleaders. They are my best listening ears. They have the best shoulders to cry on. They are my comfort zone. I can't imagine leaving them with no plans of return. With both of my parents entering new chapters in their career lives, I can't imagine giving up communication with them to see what amazing things they are going to do. With my sister getting married in November, I can't imagine giving up the opportunity to gain a brother and, potentially, become an aunt. I can't imagine giving up their advice, their wisdom, their encouraging words, and their love and support. While this text is certainly not prescribing that we leave our loved ones, it is telling us that total surrender means the willingness to let go of the things and people in our comfort zones.

#2: Total surrender means the willingness to not conform. A year ago, I took a women and religion course at Samford. One of the many valuable lessons I learned from that class was to pay attention when women are mentioned in the bible because it's always important; and this text mentions four women. Verses 8 – 9 read, "On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied." When I first read this

passage, I didn't even register the sentence, "He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied." But there's so much that we can extract from this one sentence.

During this time, women were expected to marry, have children, and take care of their families. These were the expectations and norms of this time in history. And yet, written for us in this text is an example of a very unconventional family. First, there is no mention of Philip's wife. While we cannot know with certainty what that means, it is possible that Philip is a widower. What we do know is that he has four unmarried daughters with the spiritual gift of prophesy. In a time when women were expected to marry and have children, these women were likely virgins. In a time when women were expected to speak last, these women speak up. These four daughters likely traveled with their evangelist father to preach the good news of the gospel. These women are an example of total surrender because they did not conform to what society knew, but rather, listened to the Holy Spirit and used the spiritual gifts they had been given.

#3: Total surrender means the willingness to put aside our own will and "let the will of the Lord be done." The prophet Agabus demonstrates to Paul and the disciples the way in which Paul will be greeted when he reaches Jerusalem. Verse 11 – 14 read, "And coming to us, [Agabus] took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, 'Let the will of the Lord be done.'"

"Let the will of the Lord be done." Surrendering our own control and surrendering to the will of the Lord is perhaps the most challenging lesson of the three.

Japan occupied Korea in the 1930s and 40s. During this time, Japanese culture, religion, and language was forced upon the Koreans. A requirement of the Koreans was to worship at the Japanese Shinto shrines which contained a picture of the Japanese emperor and a picture of the Japanese sun goddess. This was a trying time for Korean Christians for refusal to obey would result in imprisonment, harassment, and financial hardship.

One day, a Christian school teacher named Ahn Ei Sook defied the Japanese authorities. During a required rally at a Christian school, a Japanese official called out, “Attention! Our profoundest bow to Amaterasu Omikami [the sun goddess]!” In unison, the whole crowd bent over in a deep bow except one – Ahn Ei Sook. She was imprisoned and tortured for six years. By knowingly defying the Japanese authorities, she was willing to let go of her comforts, not conform to what was expected of her, and followed the Lord’s will. Just like Paul’s willingness to die in Jerusalem, Ahn Ei Sook was willing to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.

So, friends, surrendering to the Lord’s will is not weak. Rather, surrendering to the Lord’s will is the strongest and most courageous act. So, let us surrender, knowing the sacrifice made for us. Let the will of the Lord be done.