



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 21:1-16

Acts

"Finishing the Course"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're continuing our study in Acts chapter 21 and we're going to look at verses 1 through 16 this morning. This is not only a new chapter in the book of Acts, but, really, something of a new chapter in the ministry of the apostle Paul. Paul will go to Jerusalem; he'll be arrested. He will end up in Rome as a consequence of it, and these things begin to change at this point. So it's a turning point in the book. Paul has been in Miletus on the coast of Asia Minor. You'll remember he had a very emotional and informative reunion and visit with the elders of the church at Ephesus. And now, he's continuing on his journey back to Jerusalem. We read in verse 1 of chapter 21:

"When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again. When we had finished

the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea."

You may remember Agabus from our studies back in chapter 11. He came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Whenever anyone left Jerusalem, whether they're going north, south, east or west, they went down from Jerusalem or going to go up to Jerusalem. He went to Antioch with some others and prophesied a famine in the world. Well, he appears again, here in Caesarea, with a prophecy.

Verse 11: "And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." ' When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging 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 bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!' After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for your goodness and your grace. And we thank you for the great privilege we have to gather together on this Sunday morning and open the Scriptures up and read them. It is a privilege. Every Sunday we do so that, and every Sunday or most Sundays I mention that as a blessing, and it is. To possess your Word,

the revelation that has come from you is a privilege beyond estimation.

This book is unique. There's no book like it. Books have been written that are majestic in their literary style and entertaining, and even helpful and full of wisdom. But no book compares to this because this is your inherent Word. It's your revelation, and to read it is a privilege. To read it is beneficial.

We are always blessed by reading it. It always has an effect, and so we thank you for the privilege of possessing it, reading it, and then for the added privilege of spending time together considering its meaning. And, fortunately, Father, we do not do this in our own strength. We are not left to ourselves to understand the text that we have read. We do put time into it and we try to develop lessons.

We give thought to it as we sit and listen and ponder it. And by your grace, as children of yours, believers in Jesus Christ, new creatures in Christ, we have new hearts, we have new faculties, we have the abilities to do these things that we didn't possess in the old life. You've regenerated us, you've recreated us and so we're new creatures. But even that is not enough. We are blessed with a teacher, with the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

And we count that the greatest of all blessings to not only possess your Word but to possess your divine teacher, the one who guides us and directs us in understanding it. And we pray for that this morning. We pray that the lesson that is given will be helpful, but the Spirit – that the Spirit of God would make our hearts receptive for it, to make us discerning and make us a people who think this morning and are blessed by the instructions given. We look to you to do that.

Teach us, build us up in the faith this morning. Bless us spiritually in this hour. And we pray that you bless us materially and physically as well, because we think of those who are in difficulty who have asked for our prayers, who are in various types of distress, whether physically or emotionally. We pray for them. We pray for healing; we pray for encouragement.

The Holy Spirit is not only our teacher, our protector, our guide, but he's our comforter, the paraclete, the one who encourages, and we pray for that. For those who are in difficulty, encourage them, and if it be your will, heal them. Bless our nation. We face days of decision with the election that's approaching. We pray that you give the people of this nation wisdom and that good and wise leaders would be appointed.

And we pray that, because you are the one that appointments governments. You set them up and you bring them down. Nothing happens by chance. And all the governments of the world are, ultimately, the governments that you placed for one reason or another. And so we look to you to bless sovereignly this land.

You've blessed it so much, Father. We have enjoyed peace and prosperity. And yet, we must confess that many in the church have used that, not to spiritual advantage but have been lulled to sleep or diverted from the course that you've set us on. The church has become worldly, and we must look to ourselves and examine our own hearts and confess that even that is true of us here. And so, Father, deal with us.

Deal with the church throughout this land and throughout the world. Revive it, make it enthusiastic for your truth and the desire to serve you. And do that for us in this place. And do that this morning. Convict us of our sins, convict us of our hardness of heart, convict us of our indifference to the things of God and the things of your Son.

And give us a reassessment of ourselves and a renewed interest in your truth and an increased vibrant love for your Son that we might do the things that we do for Him and for His glory, for the sake of His name. So bless us to that end in this hour. Bless us tonight as we assemble again in this place to celebrate the Lord's Supper and remember Him, and remember Him with thanksgiving for what He did for us on the cross. What we have that is of any value, what we have that is eternal is His doing from beginning to end, and we thank you for that. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] We're about a week away from Reformation Day. And one of the great artists of the Protestant Reformation was Albrecht Dürer. He was a German and is probably best known for his engraving, *Praying Hands*. Some of you may have a reproduction of it on your wall at home or you often see it on cards in a gift shop. But one of the most interesting of his engravings is entitled *Knight, Death and Devil*.

It pictures a knight dressed in full armor, mounted on a horse and traveling to a city on a hill. All around is danger. On one side death stares up at the knight with a grin on its face and an hourglass in his hand, a reminder that life is short and full of uncertainty. Behind him is the devil with a grotesque head and a long spear in his hand. Along the path are barren trees, a lizard, a skull, reminders that the way he traveled is hard.

But the knight remains steadfast, courageous; looking straight ahead, looking towards that city, undistracted and resolute in finishing his course to the city on the hill. It is an allegory of the way of faith and a picture of the Christian soldier, and it gives an illustration of Paul on his path in Acts 21. His missionary journeys were now over. Back in chapter 19 when he was in Ephesus, he had purposed in the spirit to go up to Jerusalem.

In other words, the Holy Spirit was directing him in his path. It would be his last visit to the city. He would be arrested there. Paul would continue to be a missionary to his last days. But from that day on he would be a missionary in chains.

And Paul was no stranger to trials. From the beginning at his conversion in Damascus, the Lord said that Paul must "suffer much for My name's sake," and he did. That phrase, "for My name's sake," is significant. It, or at least the idea of it, appears in our text, and it was central to all that Paul did, the main motivation for all that he did. The name represents the person; it defines the person.

But in the Old Testament as well as the New it did much more than simply distinguish one person from another. It defined that

person; it represented that person. It was a saying "for my sake." So the Lord told Paul that he would suffer for Christ. And Paul was completely willing to do that, to suffer anything for the one who had suffered so much for him.

Paul's chief end in life was to glorify God, and that is to be our chief end as well. We are to pray that His name be hallowed. That's how our Lord instructed us to pray in Matthew 6, that we seek to have His name glorified, His person glorified. And we are to do that in the things that we pray and in the things that we do, the way we live our lives. We are to live our lives in a way that he be glorified.

Paul did that eagerly; Paul did that gladly. His motive in life, his motive in ministry was not self-protection, it was not self-interest. It was Christ first and His glory. For Paul. "to live was Christ and to die was gain." That is what compelled him to go on to Jerusalem, obedience to the Holy Spirit and service to Jesus Christ and the Lord's people.

It was not an easy journey. All along the way there were warnings of danger. He told the Ephesian elders, in chapter 20, that "in every city he passed through the Holy Spirit solemnly testified to him, saying "bonds and afflictions await me." Still he went forward. He went forward with courage knowing that it was God's will that he go to Jerusalem to be a help to the church there and be a witness to the Jewish people.

There were three stages in Paul's journey to Jerusalem which Luke records here in verses 1 through 16. The first stage is given in verses 1 through 6, where Paul traveled by ship from Miletus on the coast, the western coast of Asia Minor, down to Tyre which is on the Phoenician coast. Little needs to be said about this. He took the old established sea route to the islands of the Mediterranean until he arrived at Tyre on the Syrian coast just north of Judea. There, the ship had a layover of seven days while it was being unloaded.

And knowing that there was a church in Tyre – not a church that Paul had established – probably a church that had been established

early in the history of the Jerusalem church, perhaps during the time of the persecution which we read of in chapter 8. But knowing that there was a church there, Luke writes that they looked up the disciples and they stayed there. Well, the church had gifted men. It was very much like a 1st century church. And among the gifted men were prophets, and these prophets warned Paul of the dangers that he faced in Jerusalem.

Luke writes in verse 4 that they were telling him through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem, which at first glance seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit was warning the apostle not to go there. And some, in fact, have taken it that way or at least left that open to interpretation. One bible teacher went so far as to say that Paul went to Jerusalem because he wanted to celebrate the Jewish holy days, and stubbornly rejected the Spirit's counsel, that he was being willful. But to impute willfulness and obstinacy to Paul is completely out of harmony with the context. He told the Ephesian elders, in chapter 20, that he was going to Jerusalem because he was "bound in spirit."

And that's how the New American Standard Bible translates it, but we can translate that more literally "bound in *the* Spirit, in the *Holy* Spirit to go there. The Holy Spirit testified to him about the dangers in it. He mentioned that, but he also said "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course." And he later tells the church of Caesarea, as we will see, that he was not only willing to be arrested and bound, but he was willing to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

That was Paul's motive. Not willfulness, not selfishness but selflessness, service to Christ, glory to Jesus Christ. That's what was impelling him on. The Spirit of God and the desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we know the nature of the service that Paul was rendering Jerusalem.

He speaks of it in Romans 15:26-26, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. So there's a great deal of information given to us on why Paul was going to Jerusalem. It was not to

celebrate the feast up there. He would do that, but that was not his motivation and his reason for going. He was going on a mission of mercy.

There had been a terrible famine in the region, and he had taken up a collection from the churches of Macedonia and Greece to deliver to the needy church of Jerusalem. It was to help the saints and also be a witness to the Jewish people of the love of Christ. And through Paul, this would happen. He would be a blessing to those Jewish people. Paul was the apostle to the gentiles, but he never lost his love for his own people.

They were his brothers according to the flesh. It was only a few months earlier, when Paul was in Corinth about to leave and come to Jerusalem, set out on this journey back to the city of Jerusalem, that he wrote the book of Romans. And in the book of Romans, he expresses his deep affection, his great love for the Jewish people. He wrote back in chapter 9 where he writes how – that he had "great sorrow and unceasing grief" in his heart for them. They were in unbelief, and he knew the end of that unbelief.

That just broke his heart. He had great, great sorrow for his people. And then he wrote, "I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Not many of us could say that. Maybe none of us could say that.

Paul was willing to suffer hell in their place. He couldn't do that. That was not possible. But he could die serving the saints and being a witness to the Jews, and he was fully prepared to do that. So we look at this and we can see there's no selfishness or indication of that at least from the text that we read.

But what are we to make of this statement they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem? Well, Luke means that, through the Spirit, these men, these prophets were able to foresee Paul's suffering. The warning was their interpretation of the prophecy, not the Spirit's warning. They were telling Paul, Luke

writes, not the Spirit was telling Paul. They were speaking their words; they were not speaking the Spirit's words.

So Paul was not rejecting the believers' application of it which was made with good motive, a concern for Paul. But that concern would have turned him aside from his mission. And Paul knew what his mission was, and he would not be turned aside from it. With a complete lack of concern for himself, he was determined to fulfill his assignment just as the Lord had done when the Lord went up to Jerusalem. Luke wrote about that, and he wrote that "He set His face to go to Jerusalem."

The Lord what would be awaiting Him there, a cross. He knew that danger was ahead, that great difficulty was ahead. But He knew that was His mission and He set His face to go there. And Paul does the same. At the end of the seven days, Paul left.

The whole church escorted him to the ship: the men, their wives, the children. And they're on the beach; they all knelt down and prayed. This was not a church, as I had said earlier, that Paul established and these were not old friends of his. But the bonds that bind believers are strong. Perhaps you've been a city where you've never before and you meet Christians that you've never met before.

They're strangers, but as soon as you find out they're fellow believers and you have a bond in Jesus Christ and that you're in Him together, there is suddenly a warmth. There is suddenly a bond that takes place and you become friends. And that, evidently, happened so that by the end of the week they were just like old friends. It's a moving scene, this prayer on the beach. Paul must have prayed for their spiritual welfare.

And in light of what has been said, in light of what they know awaits Paul – "bonds and afflictions" – they must have prayed for his safety. They must have prayed that God would bless him. This is one of the ways that we are enabled to follow the path that God has set before us. God sets difficulties before us. The way that God has set

before us in this life is not an easy way, and we must be strengthened for it.

And one of the ways in which we are enabled to do that, to be resolved, to be obedient is through the prayers of the saints. Not by our own strength, not by our own spirit or own resolve but through the help of fellow believers who pray for us. And they did that for Paul. And I'm sure that the prayers of these saints in Tyre were effective. They were effectual prayers that strengthened Paul and enabled him to finish the course, to finish his mission.

The prayer meeting ended. They went home, and Paul and his companions sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais on the second leg of his journey to Jerusalem. Ptolemais was just north of modern Haifa. It was ancient Akko. Today it's called Acre.

They greeted the brethren there. They stayed a day, then they went on to Caesarea the next day. Caesarea was a magnificent city. We've talked about it in the past. It was built by Herod the Great.

It was built to be the port for Jerusalem. It's where Cornelius lived. It is where the gentiles first received the Holy Spirit. And we now read that Philip, the evangelist, was living there. Philip appeared earlier in the book of Acts.

In chapter 6, he was chosen as one of the original deacons of the church of Jerusalem along with Steven. Luke identifies him as one of the seven. But he's mainly known for his ministry as an evangelist to those outside the pale of Judaism. In chapter 8, he carried the gospel into Samaria following the great persecution in Jerusalem led by Paul, or Saul as he was known at that time. Then, in the midst of that revival, at the height of that revival, the Lord told Philip to leave and to go south to Gaza.

He did; he went down to Gaza and there he met a eunuch from Ethiopia, a man of importance, a servant of Queen Candace of that empire. He was sitting in his chariot. He was reading a scroll. He was reading the book of Isaiah. And the text that he happened to be

reading, that he had by the providence of God come to when Philip arrived, was Isaiah 53.

Philip approached the chariot. He came up into it; he interpreted the text for the Ethiopian. The man believed, realized that this passage of Scripture is about the Messiah. It's about Jesus Christ, it's about the one who had recently suffered in Jerusalem, and he believed. He was then baptized. He went on his way home to Ethiopia "rejoicing," and the gospel was carried into Africa.

Philip then was snatched away by the Spirit. We read that he traveled up the coast of the Mediterranean north, until he came to Caesarea, and that's where he settled. Twenty years later, his family had grown up. And we read now that he had four unmarried daughters "who were prophetesses." Now, Paul the apostle to the gentiles meets Philip who began the outreach for the gentiles.

They must have had a lot to talk about, and we can imagine the conversation that went on between those two as they talked about those original days in the church of Jerusalem. Perhaps Philip told him a lot about Steven and spoke at length, no doubt, about all these things. They had ministries that were very similar to one another, and their lives teach us a great deal about how God leads us in life, through the Holy Spirit, and how He uses us all along the way. Philip is very instructive in that way.

By implication, we learn a great deal about God's dealings with us and how He leads us in this life. Philip began in Jerusalem with a very active, high-profile ministry. He ended in Caesarea, where the Lord gave him a rather obscure ministry. But at each stage, he was where the Lord wanted him to be, making him useful in different places and in different ways. In the 20 silent years that had passed since Acts 8, Philip and his whole family had become active and useful in the local church there in Caesarea.

He was doing the Lord's work no less there in Caesarea than he had been in Jerusalem and he had been in Samaria and he had been down in Gaza. He was where God wanted him, doing different things.

Not a high-profile ministry, a rather obscure ministry. But doing just what the Lord wanted him to do. And now the man whose persecution of the church was the occasion for the beginning of Philip's ministry. was in his home, following the path that God had given him.

And, again, Paul was reminded what a hard path it was, when a prophet came down from **Jerusalem**. His name was Agabus, and he had a prophecy for Paul. That is significant, because Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses right there in his home, right there in that meeting. But it wasn't one of them that gave the prophecy but Agabus. And if a church was meeting in Philip's home, that may reflect Paul's teaching that the women remain silent in the churches.

Not because are not equal with men spiritually. They are. And they could prophesy and they can teach, and they can teach well. And they can know the Word of God as well as a man, and many of them know the Word of God better than men. This is not a matter of spiritual equality.

It is a matter of authority. It is a matter of leadership, a matter of headship in the church, a matter of the divine order. And in this meeting, Philip's daughters remained silent. They didn't prophesy. Agabus spoke. He'd spoken before.

We mentioned that earlier. He spoke in chapter 11. He had come down from Jerusalem to the church in Antioch, and there he prophesied a great famine all over the world. It happened. Now, he prophesied of Paul of what would happen to him in Jerusalem.

And this was the work of a prophet. This is what a prophet did. He gave revelation about the distant future. And we have a Bible filled with such prophecies about our Lord's return, about what will happen in the last days, about the Kingdom that he will establish on the earth, about the new heaven and the new earth. We have a great deal of prophecy in the Bible about the distant future, and maybe it's not all that distant for us.

But a prophet also gave revelation about the immediate future, about the events of the day. A prophet's function was to reveal hidden

things and make known truth that was unknown. And here, Agabus does that. He foretells the immediate future for Paul and does so in a very demonstrative way. Verse 11: "Coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

This was very much in the prophetic style of the Old Testament. We have a number of examples of that. Jeremiah is one. He, on one occasion, put a yoke on his neck to prophesy the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. And there are many other examples of that.

Isaiah acted out some of the prophecies. Ezekiel did the same, and others as well. Many examples, as I say, of prophets doing these demonstrative things to illustrate and communicate the prophecy they were giving. And that was the style of Agabus, as he wrapped himself with the long sack that Paul used as a belt, to show that the gentiles would arrest and imprison Paul. He'd be bound in Jerusalem.

Well, the response of the people is predictable. They began to beg Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. But again, Paul would not be dissuaded. "What are you doing," he asked, "weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

And Luke does not fault the apostle Paul for his response. He does not say that he was wrong. What he does say is, "Since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!' " And it would be. Paul knew God's will and knew that it must be obeyed regardless of the cost. So he was resolved to do it.

And the others finally submitted as well. Again, it was a case of his friends misapplying the prophecy, interpreting it as a warning. But Paul understood it correctly. He knew it confirmed what the Lord had told him many years before from the very beginning, that he must suffer much for Christ's name. All the prophets from city to city were not intending to warn him away from going to Jerusalem but to

prepare for the immediate future, prepare him for the experiences that he had to suffer when he arrived in that city.

His friends finally understood that. And so God's will would be done. He would go, and he would carry out his mission and he would finish the course. Now, I want to say just a word about prophets and this passage because it has some bearing on how we walk with the Lord. And I want to do so, particularly, because there are some in evangelical circles who maintain that the gift has not ceased and that prophets are for today and that they have great bearing on how we walk in this world and follow the Lord's will.

They use this text and the prophecy of Agabus as a proof of their point in order to prove or in order to argue that in the New Testament there were actually two levels of prophetic ministry with two different levels of authority. The first was associated with the apostles, and it was infallible. It produced the Scriptures. The second is prophecy of a lesser significance and a prophecy or prophetic ministry which may be fallible. In other words, it may have mistakes, it may have errors.

And the first has ceased. They acknowledge that; no more Scriptures being revealed. But the second type of prophecy continues according to them. There are prophets today like those of Agabus, doing what Agabus did. He foretold a famine for the world and danger for Paul.

So the church, it is maintained, can expect that kind of guidance today, the same kind of guidance that was given there, guidance for the immediate future. We can know the thing that are going to happen tomorrow or next week or whenever. And to show that there is this second level of prophecy, this different type of prophecy or lesser authority than the Scriptures, it's argued that Agabus is an example of that. And Agabus is an example of that because his prophecy was fallible. And they seek to point out two errors that he made in the details of his prophecy.

He said that the Jews would bind Paul and they would deliver him to the gentiles, when, in fact, it was the Romans who bound Paul and he wasn't delivered to them. The Romans rescued him from the Jewish mob. Now, that's true of course. But to interpret the general statements of Agabus as errors is to make them far more specific than he intended them to be. This is simply a manner of speaking, a way in which Agabus spoke, much the way Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost.

You remember he's filled with the Holy Spirit. He stands up among the multitudes of Jews that were there gathered in Jerusalem. And he charged the Jews with crucifying Christ. You "nailed Him to the cross," he said, "by the hands of wicked men." But they didn't actually nail Him to the cross. It was the Romans who nailed Him to the cross.

But they did it. The Jews did it by the plots, the machinations of their leaders. And the meaning of this statement is very clear in that you're guilty of what took place. It's as though you nailed Him to the cross. And here, it is the same.

It was due to the violence of the Jews that Paul was bound. They were ultimately responsible. The Romans never would have seized and bound him had it not been for the Jews, and so they bear the responsibility. And that's the meaning of the prophecy. Agabus made no errors.

The New Testament gives no support for two levels of prophecy, one infallible and the other fallible. In fact, if that's the case, if there are fallible prophecies today, how do you distinguish them from false prophecies. It creates nothing but confusion and it has no support in the New Testament. Now, that is not to say that all prophecy and all Scripture is equally significant. Not all Scripture is equally significant.

We go through the genealogy of the Old Testament, and we wouldn't say they are every bit as significant as John 3:16 or Romans 8:28-30. But all Scripture is equally inspired, equally inerrant and

authoritative. And the danger of the claim that prophecy continues today is that it can subtly, and often does, undermine the finality and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. When people think that revelation is ongoing, they begin looking for prophetic leading rather than the direction given by the illumination of Scripture.

And think about it for a moment. If you have a great decision before you and you begin to search the Scriptures to find direction and guidance and seek to, by the wisdom God gives, apply the principles of Scripture to your situation. And then you learn, "Well, there's a prophet right over here. Just ask Jim; he'll tell you what the Lord has." What are you going to rely upon, your ability to interpret the Scripture or an oracle from God?

Well, of course, when people think there are prophets in their midst and they have the Word of God for them or some work of knowledge, they're going to begin to lean on them and look to them, and pretty soon the Scriptures are going to be ignored. And that often is what happens. Prophets were given for a particular time, a particular purpose. They were given to the church until the completion of the canon. They were given to give direction to the people of God in lieu of the Scriptures.

Now that we have the Scriptures, now that the canon is closed and the Holy Spirit is our possession as well, who is our teacher, who is our guide, who interprets the Scripture for us, we have all that we need. And it is for us to be responsible and to search the Scriptures and to study them. What this text shows us is not some second level of prophesy for today or how we might find God's will through modern-day prophets, but how God's will is worked out for us in our lives and how we are to respond to the will of God when we clearly understand it. And what it indicates is, one, our path is not always easy. Very often, the path of life that we have is a difficult one.

It is frequently hard, and we need to be ready for that and willing to suffer hardship for the name of Christ. I'm reminded of Luther – when I come to this text and I think of Paul going up to

Jerusalem – and how he went on to the Diet of Worms, to stand trial for his beliefs. His life was in danger; he knew that. He had been accused of heresy. The emperor, Charles V, had banned the sale of all of his books.

There was real fear that he might be arrested and executed as John Huss had been 100 years earlier. Huss, who had pre-protestant beliefs, was given safe passage to the place where he was to defend his position. And then having defended, the authorities broke their word and burned him at the stake. And there were many who felt Luther was in the same kind of danger. In fact, friends warned him not to go.

But Luther went. He wrote: "I shall go to Worms though there were as many devils as tiles on the roof." And with the same resolve and courage, Paul went on to Jerusalem. He felt tremendous pressure. He must have felt a great deal of pressure to turn aside from his friends and not go.

Their concern for him was genuine and it was well meant. But as he says, it was breaking his heart, and breaking his heart because he knew their concern for him. But he knew the will of God. He knew that he had to obey God at all costs. That is what God has called us to do, all of us.

He hasn't called you and me to figure it all out. He's called us to be obedient to Him and follow His leading. He hasn't called us to a life of ease, a life in which we seek our comfort above all things. He has called us to seek and to do His will even when it means great sacrifice. Sometimes it does.

We don't have the ability, the capabilities to understand all of the things and the way in which God leads us. And we are not to interpret God's guidance and try to do that by our own happiness as though that's the touchstone for God's will for us but to lean upon and rely upon His Word. We are to be faithful to His principles and be faithful to them in hard situations. Paul knew that God's will for him was hard. He knew that His will for him was to go to Jerusalem with

the gift for the saints and there to be a witness for Jesus Christ, and so he went.

Three days later, Luke writes, they began the last leg of their journey and started "up to Jerusalem" which is about 55 miles southeast of Caesarea. It is up in the hills of Judea, so it's a rather steep ascent to the city. Some of the disciples from Caesarea went with them, and they brought Paul and the others to the house of an old disciple named Mnason. And there they stayed with him there in Jerusalem. He was from Cyprus.

Luke describes him as "a disciple of long standing," a disciple of the Lord from the beginning of the Jerusalem church. They stayed, as I said, in his house. It must have been a very stay, a very interesting experience. It gave Paul and Luke another opportunity to visit with a man who had knowledge of those early days of the church. Luke probably took a lot of notes from Mnason and used them in his writings, used them in the writings of the book of Acts.

But this old disciple must also have been a great encouragement to the apostle Paul, as well as to the others. He was a man who had many years in the faith, who had been through much. He'd been through the persecution of the church of Jerusalem recorded in chapter 8. He'd been through other difficulties. He had been through a life of trials. He was a seasoned veteran who had persevered in the faith.

Those are the people who offer encouragement to others who face hardship because they've come through it all. They've come through it with a testimony to God's persevering, His preserving grace. That's what Paul would need and what Paul would get. God is faithful. God is sovereign.

Paul knew that and he knew God's will. These are the reasons he was able to go forward and not turn aside. And those are the convictions that we need in order to advance in the way that God has for us. We know God's will by studying His Scriptures and by being faithful in prayer, by learning the principles of Scripture. That is why it is so necessary for us to be students of the Word of God.

Don't we see that all through the Scriptures. We saw it last week in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders. What he commended to them was God and His Word. And his claim to them, his defense of his ministry was that he did not shrink from telling them the whole will of God. He preached the Word of God, all the doctrines of Scripture.

That's what he commended to the Ephesian elders. He commends that to us. And all through the Scriptures we find the same exhortation. Come to the end of Paul's life in 2 Timothy 4:2, what does he say to Timothy, some of the last things that he will say to him? He's about to leave this world.

The responsibility of ministry will be falling to Timothy in a way that it had not fallen before. The apostles were on the way out. A new generation was taking over, and his great exhortation to Timothy was this: "Preach the word; in season and out of season."

When it's popular, when people want to hear it, when people don't want to hear it, when they don't care about it, you stay on course, Timothy, you preach the Word. And what he would say to you and me is "You study the Word of God." Study the Scriptures. This is his main means of guidance for his people, the Word of God. Be students of the Bible, be faithful in prayer.

We need to know God's Word. We need to understand His principles and be obedient to them. It's not enough just to know them. You don't have to be a Bible scholar. It benefits us very little if we know Greek and Hebrew and we know the theology of the Word of God and we don't obey it.

Obey the things that we learn; do what is pleasing to Him. That should be our goal 'cause that's how we will glorify Him. Now, that may mean going through some hard experiences, as I have said. It may mean continuing in some difficult relationships, a hard marriage or challenging situations at work. In everything, we are to be faithful witnesses to Christ, in what we believe, in what we say and in what we do.

My old Hebrew professor, Dr. **Waltke** – I shouldn't say my "old" Hebrew professor; he's not all that old. But my former Hebrew professor, Dr. Waltke, told of a conversation he had with a Christian man who had taken a job that he said a Christian should not do. He told the man that, told him that he was wrong. The man replied, "But I have to live, don't I?" And Dr. Waltke answered, "No, you don't have to live."

What we are called upon to do is take up a cross and follow Jesus. You don't have to live, and many saints throughout the history of the church have proven that. What we do have to do is obey God. Now, sometimes that means going up to Jerusalem and suffering bonds and afflictions. Sometimes, it means going nowhere and suffering monotony and boredom.

We might wish for some bonds and afflictions in those situations. But that may be God's will for us. God's will for us – I can assure you of this, as I read the Bible. As I read Hebrews 11 and the trials and sufferings of the saints in that chapter, I can tell you this. That it is not God's will for us that we have ease and comfort in this world.

Excitement in this life may not be what God wants for us. And we have a lot of that 'cause God's a good and gracious God who does "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." But God's will for us is not ease, it's not comfort, it's not excitement. He wants us to obey Him. If He has led us into a situation that is difficult, we're to obey him, even if it is suffering loss.

God puts us in a place and circumstances so that we may glorify Him in that way, through faithfulness, through obedience. They may not be circumstances that we want or that we like. They may not make a lot of sense to us at the time. Going to Jerusalem didn't make sense to Paul's friends. Even now, it puzzles some commentators. One wrote that Paul's ministry was tragically abbreviated and his voice silenced in a very critical time because of the events in Jerusalem.

And yet, the reality is those events opened up a whole new chapter in his ministry. Because of his arrest, because of his imprisonment, he spoke to people that he might not have spoken to. Because of his imprisonment, he stood before governors and kings just as the Lord had told him he would. He even stood before Caesar himself. Because of his imprisonment, at the end of this book we'll see he had a long dialogue with the rabbis of Rome.

His presence in the city of Rome galvanized evangelistic activity there. Paul writes of that in Philippians 1. And it is from his Roman jail that he wrote the prison epistles. His voice wasn't silenced. His ministry wasn't abbreviated. At the end of it all, Paul could say triumphantly, "I have finished the course."

We don't have the capability to interpret or judge providence. We can't know what situations and circumstances are best for us. But we can know this. We can know the one who guides us, and we can know that He is all wise, and that His leading is always perfect and we can trust Him. We don't have to see what awaits us tomorrow or in the next hour because He sees it.

He's already chartered it. Just follow His way and be obedient. That's what Paul did. He did it with confidence because he knew that God is sovereign, God is wise and he is always faithful. And Paul did that gladly.

He obeyed gladly because he loved the Lord and had as his ambition to live and even to die for the name of Christ. And so he went forward courageously and finished the course. That is to be our aim. And we can be sure that God will bless us as we seek to glorify Christ, as we seek to honor His name by our decisions and actions. And we will finish the course, all by the grace of God.

Is that your aim? That your desire? Are you even on the course? Have you taken the way of eternal life? Remember that knight that I referred to in that old engraving. He was going toward a city on a hill. That is what the Christian is doing, surrounded by danger, surrounded by distractions.

But he remained undistracted. He continued on toward that city on the hill. That, as I say, is what we are doing, traveling through this world with all of its dangers, all of its distractions. We're traveling to a destination, and that destination is not in this world or the things of this world. That destination is the Heavenly City.

And we begin that journey through faith, faith in Christ as the one who came into this world, the Son of God who became a man in order to suffer in our place, to die in our place for our sins. And those who believe in Him will all arrive safely. So believe in Jesus Christ, trust in Him. May God open your eyes to your need of a Savior, open your eyes to the fact that you are sinful and under the judgment of God. But there is a way of escape.

All men are on a journey; all men have a destination. It's one of two: the city of God or the city of destruction. The way of escape from that city is through faith in Christ. So believe in Him. And you who have done that, follow His guidance, trust Him with the resolve that Paul did to glorify Him in all that you do. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and grace. We come to a text such as this and we see Paul facing bonds and afflictions, great difficulties, and yet going forward. Not out of selfishness. Just the opposite, selflessly. He might go to that city where he would be arrested and bound and imprisoned, going to that city with a gift for the saints and a witness for the Jewish people.

His ambition was to live and even die for Christ. May that be ours as well. Give us that singleness of purpose, that singleness of mind that we might serve Him faithfully today and tomorrow, when things are exciting and when things are boring. May we be men and women that serve Him faithfully at all times and in all ways. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.