

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 21 as we continue our study through the book of Acts. It is our plan on Wednesday, when we are finished with Acts, to go back to the book of Ruth and then Samuel and Kings and Chronicles as we have been going through that Old Testament as well; kind of gone back and forth. And Sunday mornings it is our plan to go to 2 Corinthians starting the first of the year.

We continue tonight in our studies through the Bible by picking up here with Paul in Acts 21. Paul had been out on the road for years, probably a good fifteen to sixteen years. He is on his final missionary journey - the third one. He had gone out for three years early on, then six more years after that, and now he is out for his third trip and come time in between. Paul is retracing his steps. He wants to go home - not to Antioch in Syria where he had come from but back to Jerusalem where his heart was with the early church. If you've been with us going through the book of Acts, Paul had spent three years in Ephesus on this third missionary journey; planted the church, loved the people, taught endlessly. He wanted to go - before he went home - up north and then around to Macedonia and down to Greece to visit the churches, especially Corinth where he had spent a year and a half as well. When he got there, there was a normal boat that would leave there (from the Corinth area) to sail to Jerusalem for the feast days; all of the Jews would get on a boat and go for Pentecost and for Passover and whatever. But there was a plot to take his life, to throw him overboard, and so Paul thought maybe the Lord wanted him to walk back the way he came. And he did. He finally ended up going back up and around. We have these maps. I hope that you have them by now. If not, they are in the back at the counter.

But Paul eventually ends up there in Miletus (there on the map, if you have one) that is outside of the city of Ephesus, where he met with the church leaders and gave them a sermon. In fact, we mentioned to you it was the only sermon in the book of Acts that Paul gave (of any length) to believers. This was Paul sharing his heart with the elders, the pastors, the deacons, the overseers and all, and it's an important part of the lesson. We looked at it - from verse 18 through verse 38 - in the last three weeks; in fact, we spent three weeks going through what Paul had to say. He spent years with these guys. He handed the responsibility of this very large and growing church over to them, and Paul left, weeping. In fact, we read

(towards the end of chapter 20) that they were sorrowful. The church didn't want to see him go. They didn't think they'd ever see him again. But Paul was moved in his heart to go forward and to get to Jerusalem.

Tonight, we're just going to look at the first seventeen verses of chapter 21. We're going to get Paul to Jerusalem, where they'll receive him gladly (in verse 17). That's going to change in verse 18 and beyond. But we thought it would be a good way to kind of get us started as Paul ..... we've entitled the message "Jerusalem or Bust" because that's really where Paul had wanted to get to, and finally he's going to get to go there after having been on the road for, like I said, the better part of two decades.

If you read through Scriptures, and I know that you do, from Paul's earliest days of conversion, he had an unmistakable love for the Jews. You would understand that, him being a Jew, but he wanted very much to minister to his own people. If he had had his druthers, that's where he'd have ended up. When he writes to the Romans in chapter 9:3, he says one of the most remarkable things you'll read in the Bible. He said, "I would be willing to be accursed from Christ for the sake of my countrymen according to the flesh." Or, if you will, "I would go to hell if they could go to heaven." Now, who are you going to say that for? Yeah, me either.

(Laughing) But that was Paul's heart. He said, in chapter 10:1 to the Romans, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." That was really where he was coming from. When he got saved, God gave him very specific instructions that, though he would minister to the Jews, his primary ministry was going to be to the Gentiles. Not a people he would pick. Not ones that, maybe, he felt as ready to go and stand before. And that's really where the Lord sent him. If you look at Paul's life - at least the way it's laid out in the Scriptures - when he was saved in the Damascus area, he tried to preach; didn't do very well. No one listened to him. They were leery of him. The Christians were afraid; the Jews saw him as a traitor. And so he didn't get very far. He did go out to Arabia, to the desert; it isn't that far away. In fact, you can find Tarsus on your map there; it is in Cilicia. But, needless to say, for the next three years, Paul, after his salvation, pretty much disappears from the scene. He describes that time in the desert as a time of intimacy with God, where he began to be taught firsthand from the Lord the Scriptures; and he learned. When he returned, after three years, to Damascus, he tried again to go to the synagogue. But that didn't go very well either because that's not really the place God wanted him to be. So he quickly uncovers a plot to kill him. Imagine that as a response to your three years

of preparation! They let him down a fence in a bucket, basically. He barely escapes for his life. He heads for Jerusalem where he figures his great ministry will be. A couple of the apostles met with him only because Barnabas kind of interceded. He was there for fourteen days, not very long - two weeks - and he had caused so much trouble that the church said to Paul, "Please go away. You're causing all kinds of grief for us." And they actually were willing to walk him down to the docks and put him on a boat and send him home, which is exactly what they did.

And for the next dozen years, ten to twelve years anyway, Paul goes to Tarsus and just goes off the map (historically). There're some inklings as to where he might have been, but we're guessing more than knowing, and so there's no sense in doing that. We have enough information to go with. But, needless to say, for ten to twelve years, Paul's out of sight. When the revival starts in Antioch in Syria (300 miles to the north of Jerusalem), Barnabas is sent because he's such an encouraging guy, and everywhere he goes, people are encouraged. The church grows. God blesses. People get saved. But Barnabas does not feel himself to be a pastor over the flock, in that regard. But he knows Paul's in the area, so he travels up to Tarsus, looking for Paul in the hopes that he might talk him into coming back and pastoring the people and teaching them the Bible in a way that he knew Paul could. And Paul came with him. They spent a year in this mostly-Gentile, Hellenistic Jewish church, and Paul saw the fruit of his ministry. And life was great, if you will, in terms of church; there was a great ministry that went on. And Paul spent some time there. And then, for the next fifteen years, he goes out from there on these long trips, supported by the church, accountable to them, bringing reports back, gathering people from the church, actually, and helping from time to time.

And now he is about finished. This is his third time out. He really wants to get to Jerusalem by the time Pentecost comes along. He thinks that'd be a great time to be there. He really anticipates ..... "I've put in my time with the Gentiles. I'm sure if you just give me a chance, man, this is gonna be great. It's gonna be revival time like nobody's business in Jerusalem." And so his heart is on fire. He wants to make peace. He realizes there's a great distinction between the Jewish saints - believers - in Jerusalem and the Gentile believers everywhere else. The Jews are very antagonistic against the Gentiles. This span of grace is something that they would have to cross over time, and it took a while. But Paul thought he could bridge the gap. So he brings a lot of money from a lot of different churches, and a lot of

guys from a lot of different churches, with him to deliver this huge bailout, if you will, to the poor church in Jerusalem, which is struggling, in the hopes that he would say, "You see what the brethren, the Gentile brethren, think of you and pray for you? And they put their money where their mouth is." And so he comes loaded with gifts, if you will, with great anticipation. When he writes to the Romans, he said to them (in chapter 15 towards the end of the book), "I pray that I might come and see you and that the Lord might deliver me from those that are in Judea who don't believe and that my service to those in Jerusalem will be acceptable to the saints" (verses 30-32). "Pray that this works." That's really what he said. "And when this gets done, then I can come and visit with you." And so that's Paul's mind, if you will, as he is being driven, here in chapters 20 and 21 now, towards Jerusalem.

Every place he stops, however, on this hundreds-and-hundreds-of-miles tour, people are telling him not to go. When he spoke to the Ephesian elders (back in chapter 20:22-24), he said that every time he stops, "the Holy Spirit in every city is testifying to him about the chains and the tribulations that are waiting" for him in Jerusalem, and "none of these things," he says, "move me. I don't count my life dear to myself. I want to finish the race with joy, the ministry which Jesus has given to me, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." To Paul, there was still that portion of his work to the Jews that he felt he needed to accomplish. So that's where we stopped last week.

We will start in verse 1 tonight with Paul on that route, ready to go home, and with great expectation, ready to leave (now) Miletus (if you have a map) and head along the coast of Asia before he catches a boat home. Verse 1, "Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them" ('them' being those in Ephesus that were meeting with him on the coast) "and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo." So, we read "when we departed from them." Sweet sorrow. They had to pry themselves away. And Dr. Luke, who writes this and is with Paul at this time (you read the words "we"), gives to us a very quick kind of description of one-day trips. They went from Miletus to Cos - it's a 40-mile sail. They went from Cos to Rhodes - about 85 miles or so. They went from Rhodes to Patara - 70 more miles - where Paul found a worthy ship that was able to take his whole crew on board for what would be a little over 400 miles of sailing to go to

Syria and to go to Tyre. And again, you can look at the maps. We're told here in the account they got on a cargo ship which wanted to stop and unload in places and reload in others. They were able to get passage. Their trip would have taken about a week or so once they got into the water. They sailed, as Dr. tells us, with Cyprus on their left before they finally got to Tyre. When they sailed past Cyprus, I think Paul would have had some interesting memories. If you have been with us all along, on Paul's very first missionary journey, the first place he went was Cyprus. He landed on the side where there is Salamis. He traveled the entire length of the island, went all the way to Paphos. It was he and Barnabas and John Mark who had gone along with them. They found their first convert at their last stop in Paphos. It was the governor of the country; his name was Sergius Paulus. He was being served by a demon-possessed man whose name was Elymas. He wanted to keep the gospel from his boss. The Lord moved on Paul to pray that the Lord would strike this bad man blind, and He did. That was enough to convince the governor that Paul wasn't beatin' around the bush. He heard the gospel - he got saved. And that was fifteen years earlier. And boy, where Paul had been since then. So we have no comment at all about the four or five days of traveling - the hopping; another week of sailing. We just assume there wasn't any problem. They just kind of made the trip uneventfully and finally landed there in Tyre in Syria on the coast before they would eventually head down to Caesarea and then inland to Jerusalem.

We read, in verse 4, "And finding disciples, we stayed there" (in Tyre, for a week) "seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem." Now, when these boys land, notice they went looking for fellowship. "*Aneurisko*" is a word that means to locate with effort or you had to hunt them down. Whatever this church was in this town, it wasn't so easy to find or so well known; maybe it was small. We don't know. But they went looking for fellowship because that's what they longed for - is to hang out with God's people; and so should we. I've noticed over the years, with all the places I've been allowed to teach, that it doesn't matter if you speak the language with the people that you're visiting; you just know if they're brethren. You know? There is an awareness, I think, in the spiritual sense of being a family. We were in Japan a few years ago at a pastors' conference, and at least our translators - for Gerard and I - were very exacting. They didn't want to just translate the words; they wanted to translate the emotion behind the words or the feeling. And so I'd literally say ten words, and he'd go on for two minutes. I'd go, "Dude, seriously" (Laughing) "we are gonna be here all....." It's the worst way in the world to teach, by the way. It takes away your personality, your tempo, your eye contact. You're not really that funny on

translation. You know? (Laughing) It's just horrible. But it does convince you that God's Word works everywhere. So it doesn't matter what the language barrier is. It has to do with fellowship. And certainly I love that Paul and these guys are leaders in churches, they're experienced - they've been at it for years. And yet here they are just looking for a place where they can hang out with the saints, and they ended up staying there for a week because that's how long the ship was going to be in port. And again the most odd thing happens. Well, not odd, but it would certainly be disconcerting, I think. Paul begins to hear from people that don't know him personally that going to Jerusalem was a bad idea. Now he'd heard it from some friends. He will hear it from some that are closer to him as he gets closer. But these are folks that maybe he's never met. I mean, they had to find the church. This wasn't a well-known place, and yet when people began to minister to him, they started to say, "Hey, have you really prayed about goin' to Jerusalem? I don't think that'd be a good idea." And so they offer him advice, but this time - not like advice like we've read up to this point - this is written in the present active imperative tense. And that means nothing, except it means that they gave this as a command rather than a suggestion. "Don't go." Not, "You shouldn't go." "You shouldn't go. No. Don't go." That was their approach. They offered it as a command. "Don't set a foot in Jerusalem. Don't go up to Jerusalem."

Now Paul - put yourself in his shoes - interpreted all of these warnings in all of these places as informational rather than prohibitive. "Thank You, Lord, for letting me know where I'm going and what I'm heading into. However, it's all right. I need to go. I really believe that, in my heart, You have called me to go." And so duty called louder to him than warning, and nothing dissuaded Paul from just pressing on. Right? There are times when the Lord leads you that you just know this is God's leading. It doesn't make sense on paper. No one agrees with you. You don't have a lot of support. But you just know that God has spoken to your heart. That's where Paul's at, and he's kind of the leader of the band here. Right? The guys that are with him are there because of his ministry. They are headed for a goal that he has certainly set and cast before them. But nothing has dissuaded him up to this point except that the closer that he gets to the city, the stronger the warnings become. Even in this out-of-the-way fellowship, hidden in the midst of what was at least in that time a fairly large city (no so large today), there was a group that he had hunted down to have fellowship with, and they sort of turned on him and went, "Yeah, by the way, there's a word from the Lord we'd like you to have," and they stood in between him and his desire to go on. It didn't turn Paul away. He had a great love for the Lord. And understand, for the last two decades, he'd been

aching to just have a chance at Jerusalem. "Let me preach there. Let me talk to the people. I made a lot of women widows there. I took a lot of children and took their fathers away. I've ruined homes. I've got to make this right." The guilt that he must have carried over those years of persecution - God had forgiven him, certainly. But still, how easy is it to forgive yourself at that point?

So we read, in verse 5, "When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home." So they didn't think Paul should go. They loved Paul. They had a respect for his decision. They certainly would have known about Paul over the years. But by the end of the week, it was the Lord's love that bound them together. And I love the picture. I don't know if that warms your heart, but isn't it great to see moms, dads and kids goin', "We're gonna walk Paul down to the bus station," you know? Or to the docks or to the train station or to the airport. "And before he leaves, we're gonna pray that the Lord would bless him because we think he's headed for some trouble, but we're gonna just pray that the Lord would go with him." And there's no love like this that he's gonna run into in legalistic Jerusalem in a little while. He's not gonna have these people on their knees praying for him and loving him and standing by him and holding up his arms. This was about as good as it got. But I love the family approach to church, don't you? Because everyone's coming together. Common faith. Everyone sharing it. Here in Tyre. They'll do it again in Ptolemais, in a minute, that the church there has sprung up. And I'll tell you what. There's something about family nights that begin with, "Let's go to church together" where your kids come with you, and they see your example, and you just make that your practice. And I think that the kids will thank you down the road, and you'll certainly wish you had if you haven't. So, you dads, take your family to church. It's a smart thing to do. The kids will be blessed. But I love the picture of this young little church and all of the guys with Paul, all of them on their knees in the sand, praying. They're gettin' on the boat. Paul's a warrior, man. He's scarred up and beat down, and he's seen a lot. You know? But what a witness this must have been to the sailors who were getting on board. So, being out in public, being a witness - I always like to see Christians at dinner, saying grace, leaving a good tip for the waitress. Be a good witness; leave a good tip. Don't leave a lousy tip and then a witness tract. Please don't do that. (Laughing) Put the witness tract on another table, then. So, "Goodbye." That's what they said. "Goodbye" to the church in Tyre. They spent one more night in Ptolemais. Ptolemais is about 25

miles or so (it doesn't maybe look like that on the map) along the coast. Today, if you go to Israel and then go up to Lebanon, Ptolemais is modern-day Acco. So, Acco or Akko, depending on where you're coming from. But there is a modern-day Acco there as well.

We read, in verse 7, "And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day." So again, there was this gathering together. One day and yet they wanted to have fellowship one with another.

Verse 8, "On the next day" (so notice again, there's just a daily progression - Luke was keepin' notes, I think) "we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And we stayed many days." Twenty years earlier, Philip had been chosen by a relatively young church in Jerusalem to be one of seven deacons which would become the first organizational structure that the church would take, the first step. The church grew fast. There were needs that sprang up. The greatest need, early on, was feeding widows but not just Jewish widows - Hellenist Jewish widows; those who came from other countries with different languages. They were Jews, but they also were Gentile in their practices, if you will. And they came to the apostles, and they said, "There're a lot of Jewish Hellenistic widows complaining about not getting their daily care," and the apostles' answer to the church's growth was this: "We have to give ourselves to studying God's Word, to teaching it, and to praying. So let's appoint some people to take care of that." And the first organizational step in the church was the development of deacons, "*diakonos*," servants, if you will. And they picked seven men to oversee it. They were smart. They picked seven Hellenistic men, those who understood the challenges of being in Jerusalem from a different language, from a different culture, whose heart would have been involved. And of the seven, Philip was one of those. In fact, you can read (in chapter 6, way back in the book of Acts) some of the requirements for godliness and holiness. "Pick them out amongst yourselves those known amongst the tribes, filled with the Spirit" and all. And they began to minister in that regard, and it would be Philip that would eventually be faithful in the little and would be moved ahead. After the death of Stephen - where the church kind of ran in every direction, and the Lord used it to scatter the saints out beyond Jerusalem, where they had kind of parked, after what is called the Diaspora, the scattering - Philip was led by the Lord to go to Samaria; it was kind of the next

little town, the next little county over. And he began to preach and to share, and, man, the Lord did this great work; there was revival in Samaria. You can read about it in Acts 8. As the revival continued, Jerusalem took note that the apostles were still in Jerusalem. They sent a couple of guys - Peter and John - down to pray for the young church to be baptized in the Holy Spirit because Philip was preaching, people were getting saved, but he wasn't really ministering the baptism of the Holy Spirit to believers. And so John and Peter showed up; they laid hands on people, they prayed, and this revival continued as they, then, left and went back to Jerusalem.

In the midst of that revival (chapter 8:26), Philip is called by the Lord to leave the revival to go to the middle of nowhere, in the desert. And without questioning, he goes. We've talked about how hard is it to hear God's voice, especially when you're successful in everything that you're doing? But he knew the difference. And so, rather than being in it for himself and success wasn't a way to feel right, he wanted to obey. And he went to the middle of nowhere; the Lord didn't explain a thing to him. When he got to the middle of nowhere, there in the Gaza area, the Lord pointed out an Ethiopian man who had come from hundreds of miles away, in a chariot, kind of a big shot in the government, who had come to learn; and he was a proselyte or a convert to Judaism, if you will. He had come for the feast day, but he didn't seem to have gotten what he wanted from Jerusalem and from the feast. So he's still reading his Bible. He's still trying to find out, "Where is that relationship with God that I want?" He was reading Isaiah 53. The Lord said to Philip, "Join the chariot." And he heard him reading. He asked him if he understood what he was reading, and the fellow said, "Unless somebody helps me, I don't know how you figure this out." And he got in, and he began to talk to him about Jesus. Eventually he gave his life to Christ; he told him about baptism - they stopped along the way and baptized this guy in the river, in a puddle, I don't know where, in the middle of nowhere. But then he took off. Well that's the last time we see Philip. Philip disappears for twenty years. He goes up the coast. He ends up in Caesarea. He doesn't return to the revival in Samaria. We really don't know what he did. We have a couple of verses of him stopping along the way (at the end of chapter 8), but he just kind of settles in this Roman capital, out of sight.

So here's something that you want to kind of keep an eye out here in the first seventeen verses, and that is there're a lot of guys we run into here - three or four of them - that have been with the Lord for twenty years or more and are still doing really well; and Philip is one of them. Early on, man, champion in the early

church, disappears and now resurfaces again with a family and a ministry - in the midst of Caesarea, the Roman political capital, if you will, where it would have been - I'll just say - a debauchery kind of a place. It wouldn't be a holy place at all. And he has to raise four daughters. Can you imagine? So, for twenty years, Philip is still walking by faith. There's a knock on the door, and there's Paul, and he's there with a bunch of guys with him. Paul had been there at Stephen's death - on the wrong side of the fence. Right? He was still the persecutor. Paul had been the main cause for the Diaspora. He began to go after people wholesale, and they began to run. And now that guy is standing on Philip's door, and it's been twenty years. Imagine that meeting! "Oh, hi, dude. No, we don't need the paper. Anything else?" I think it must have been an interesting picture. Philip was a Hellenist, a Jew from a Greek culture. He was, I'm sure, far more tolerant than you might have gotten in Jerusalem from the legalists, and I think that, because of all that he had heard from Paul's ministry over twenty years, he was probably thrilled that he was there. But their background was, at best, strained, if you will. So he'd gone to the Gentiles. He'd spent time with the Samaritans. He's been living here in a big capital. And I think that it must have gone well.

We read, here in verse 10, they stayed there for quite a while, "many days." The implication is that he was in no hurry to leave here. I love the picture, though, of this man twenty years later. He's called Philip the evangelist, notice. Philip the evangelist, verse 8. What a great title. What is your description of you? Besides your name, what's your description? He's an evangelist. Twenty years later, in a very stacked city against him - Roman and powerful - he's known as Philip the evangelist. "Here's that guy that comes preachin' every time we see him." That's his rap. That's how people ..... it's a godly kind of a portrait of a man who was proven over the course of time. Faithful in the early church. God used him mightily. A devoted family man, godly man, not a flash-in-the-pan, not a guy who comes and kind of goes. He sticks with the program. He is willing to open his house up to .... I don't know how many guys were with Paul. Let's say there were twenty guys with Paul, twenty guys show up at your house, "Oh, I'd like to hang out for a week." "No. You won't. There's no way in the world you're staying here for a week." But yet here's a man of great hospitality. Romans 12:13 says "distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." So here's a man that was willing to "entertain angels unawares" as Hebrews 13:2 says. And he's an old guy; he's been around a long time. This is nothing new to Philip, but he's just plugging away in the trenches and serving the Lord. I always think of Abraham meeting the three men coming, as they were passing his tent and headed for Sodom, and he gives them

food and drink. And we discover, as we read, one of them was Jesus in His pre-incarnate condition. So Jesus said to the disciples, "In as much as you do this for the least of My brethren, you do it for Me" (Matthew 25:40). I think there's a pretty good argument to be made from the Scriptures that when you're willing to be hospitable and open your heart and your life to others, God can speak to you in a way that He couldn't otherwise. So I don't know how many people Philip took in, but he took in a lot of them. And Paul was not exactly a guy that wasn't on everyone's troubled list; not that he'd be trouble but I think wherever he came (kind of) trouble followed. So he showed him great hospitality. And you don't have to have a house to be hospitable. You just have to be hospitable. Peter wrote, in 1 Peter 4:9, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Be kind, be accommodating, if you will. So, here's how you can be hospitable at church. Before you run out to your car tonight and get in and leave, look around to see if someone's just sittin' by themselves or somebody that looks like they're having a hard time, and spend a few minutes talking to them. Be hospitable. Right? Be available. I know it's easy to, "Let's go!" A lot of times while I go, "Let's pray," I look and I watch a dozen people (Pastor Jack makes motions like he's running).....while we're prayin'. Really?! I want to do this, "Hey! Not done yet over here." (Laughing) But I don't. But I think it. So it may be sin either way. I'm not sure. So, look for someone, pray with someone, reach out to someone. Be available. Be hospitable. Philip, twenty years later, certainly was. He was willing.

From a spiritual standpoint, Caesarea was the Roman provincial capital. It would have been a particularly lewd and wicked place, a horrible climate to have daughters, let alone four of them, let alone four virgin daughters who are gifted in the spiritual gifts of the Spirit. This was a good guy. He was an influential leader who God was able to use. To raise kids today, in that kind of similar pressure, is difficult. To teach kids. If you can teach them about sex before marriage, you won't have to worry about abortion or contraception or safe sex because you won't have any of those. But it's a tough sell in this kind of culture, and yet Philip was able to get through to his daughters. It's always an issue of the choices that you made. I remember hearing ..... one of the funnier stories - I thought about it today - that I heard was the story that the University of Maryland's women's basketball team (I think four years ago, maybe five years ago) played the University of Michigan. They lost to them 175 to 42. It was as lopsided as it could be. When the game was over, they called the coach out for an interview, and the coach, with a serious face, said, "Well, it all came down to one call." And people laughed, and they said, "What call was that?" and he said, "The one I made last

year to them to schedule this game." (Laughing) And I thought - perfect. But that's oftentimes what it comes down to. One call. Right? Make the right call. Just say "no." Right? Do the right thing. Well, somehow he was able to get through to his kids. This is a guy that's ..... he's got a lot of mileage on him, in a godly sense. If you get to Revelation 14, you'll read about the 144,000 men who God calls virgins before the Lord - representatives in a wicked society - that God could use. So these girls were walking with the Lord, given the gift of the Spirit to prophesy, which, according to 1 Corinthians 14:3, means to build up or to encourage, if you will. And Philip is known as the evangelist; his daughters are known as encouragers and stirrers of the faith. Great parents, certainly.

They stayed a long time. Then we read, in the middle of verse 10, "And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." ' " Now, again, we're talking about longevity. Years earlier, when Antioch began to turn to Jesus and Barnabas had come to Jerusalem with Paul, there was a fellow there who had come to Antioch, and his name was Agabus; same guy, twenty years earlier. And he had brought some heavy-duty words from the Lord. (In chapter 11, you can read about them.) But the basis of the prophecy was, "There's a famine coming, and soon Jerusalem is going to be suffering as a result, and the saints are not going to have something to eat" (verse 28). And Paul took it seriously. So did Barnabas. They got together with the Antioch church, gathered resources, and brought them to Jerusalem to head off the suffering that would come as a result of this famine, which did come. So here's Agabus. He's twenty years in the Lord. He's also a faithful prophet whose word has been proven, a guy you can depend on. And he now shows up here, just from Jerusalem up to Caesarea, and he comes to speak to Paul. And he's more demonstrative, and he's got some weight with him in terms of credibility. He acts out the problem, he ties up his hand, he's very dramatic, if you will, in his presentation. But here's another guy that, just like Philip twenty years later, God is still using him in a powerful way. And he said this to Paul, "The Jews are going to bind you, they're going to deliver you to the Romans," and Paul went, "Yeah, I gotta go."

In fact, we read in verse 12, "Now when we heard these things," ('we' being Luke, the one who's writing, the crew that was with him - I guess Philip and all) "both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem." They

began - you see, everyone respected Agabus as a genuine prophet - to implore Paul to reconsider. Why did they do that? Because they loved Paul. They loved his heart. This wasn't easy for anybody. This was as hard as it could be for everyone involved.

And, in verse 13, Paul says, " 'What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' " Now, Paul's heart was made up. I asked, a few weeks ago, do you think he made the right choice? And there're certainly a couple ways to get to the answer. I'm not sure where your position is. But all of the warnings had come from godly men and godly women, even from a godly prophet who had a history for being right. My personal persuasion is Paul's right; he did the right thing. And the reason is I think that we have to be responsible to the Lord for what we believe God is leading us to do and not blame anyone else or factor anyone else in. We can look for verification, but direction has to come from God directly, I think, to our lives. Paul saw all of these things, like I said, as a warning to him that there were hard times ahead. I think Jesus' words to Paul, in chapter 23 (and we'll get there after a while), where He said to Paul (verse 11), "You've been a good witness for Me in Jerusalem, I'm going to use you to be a good witness in Rome," would suggest that he did the right thing. The Lord didn't say, "You shouldn't have come here, you knucklehead! How many people do I have to send to you before you listen?" No. He said, "You've been a good witness for Me here." And God seems to have used Paul. And notice what Paul said. The only time that I find, in the Bible, Paul fearful and ready to cash it all in was in chapter 18 in Corinth, when he'd been alone for a long time; the city was just sucking him dry and overwhelming him, and I think he was ready to cash it in. And the Lord showed up then, too, and He met Paul in his fear. But Paul is fearless. I mean, think about being in his shoes. You know? Billy Graham calls your house and says, "Don't go!" "Yeah, it's just Billy Graham." "It's just Agabus." He's known for generations now. He's a guy that's been around forever. He's got that long beard. He's a prophet. And yet you feel that the cost, even if it costs your life, is worth the risk because you love the people in Jerusalem, you want to share your heart with the Jews, and you feel like you owe that to them.

Now here's the rub. Gifted people have differences of opinion as to what the Lord is saying to the heart. It's just the way it goes. "I believe God says this to me," and you go, "I don't think that's the Lord," and I say, "Well, I think it is!" Now

what do we do? Where do we go from there? We both agree that we love the Lord. And here's my position - if I believe something is wrong for you, and you believe it's right, and it's not about sin - it's about discerning what God wants, I'm comfortable saying, "Well, as the Lord leads. Here's how I feel. You got the information, now go do what God tells you to do," and just leave it with you because that's where it should be left - with you. So, I can live with that. What we need is more godly people committed to the work at any cost. That's what we lack. Not the arguments. We lack people with this kind of "**chutzpah**." There's a Jewish word for you. It's Yiddish, but it's close enough. So, I think when you walk in love like Paul did, the differences are slight even though they are determined.

Well notice, in verse 14, that when they couldn't persuade Paul - and God knows they tried - they just said, "Well, the Lord's will then be done." Verse 15, "And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem." If you were with Paul at this time, would you be willing to say, "I'm not going"? "I was going until now. Here, you take the money from our church. We'll be praying for you. I'm gettin' on a boat and leavin' because there's trouble ahead, man. I don't want to go there. I don't want to be in trouble. I don't want to stir it up." No. They picked up their bags. They headed for Jerusalem. They don't bring it up again. They don't even bring it up later when they could have said to Paul, "I told you so." They didn't do it. Were they blindly following Paul? I don't think so. These are godly people who have left work and family and lives behind to risk their necks to travel across the world - dangerous situation - just because they wanted to serve the Lord. These guys were not rookies; they weren't off-track, if you will. God had been dealing with them, and they were going to trust that the Lord would work it out. Look, Paul was in charge here. They were there because of Paul. If Paul didn't see it, then they would trust the Lord to work it out. And so what did they say? "The will of the Lord be done." "If it's your will, Paul, we're gonna find out. If it's His will, then we're gonna discover it. But we're gonna trust God from this point forward." Look, this wasn't a dispute. And maybe I can say this again - it's not a dispute about rebellion. Paul is not starting a crack house. That would be easy. Paul is just determined that God is leading him to go, and there're other godly people with him, that God has used mightily, saying that he shouldn't go. That's all it is. Right? It's about leadership of God's Spirit.

And the dilemma was not violation of the Scriptures; it was about how do I hear from God, and what is my decision when I'm following someone who's going somewhere I don't believe we should go? Do I quit, or do I trust the Lord? I bring

that up because whether you are married and maybe a wife whose husband says, "Let's go this way," and you're goin', "That's wrong," but you're asked to submit to your husband; he's not leading you in sin, he just has a different understanding of what's goin' on, you're almost obligated to trust the Lord. Well, the Lord's will be done. Maybe you're in a ministry, and someone's in charge of that ministry, and their decisions aren't something that you like or you're always happy with or maybe you're in conflict with, it's easy to just quit. "I quit. Give me my ball. I'm goin' home." Or you can just say, "The Lord's will be done." You can make yourself known, you can share your heart. The people tried to persuade Paul, but once everything's been said and done, then you just move along, and you just let the Lord handle it. It's a real mature, I think, step to take.

They packed their bags, and they said, "Here we go." And so they got off - 65 more miles along the road - to Jerusalem. Verse 16, "Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we were to lodge. And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." Our next guy - and notice the last leg, 65 miles - they bring with them an old timer named Mnason. I did a study on a Sunday morning about Mnason. This is the entire verse about his life. I can't go over all that today, but let's just go over this. He had a house in Jerusalem everyone could stay at. He was favorable to what was being shared. He was willing to join Paul, though a lot of people were tenuous about where they were headed. He put himself all-in, and he was an early disciple. He was an O.D. No. An E.D. Anyway, he's an old..... (Laughing) Oh, my gosh. I should have quit at 8:10. I was planning on it, and I didn't make it. Anyway, he's the third guy who's got longevity, and he's still at it. Right? Philip's at it, Agabus is at it, Mnason's at it, Paul's at it, Luke's at it, Timothy's at it. I mean, these are old timers that are as excited to serve the Lord as ever. Some of you have been saved twenty years, and what you've done for the last five years is what you're doing right now - you're sitting there listening to me. Haven't been involved with anything, you're not doin' anything. That's not these guys. These guys were up to their ears in doing. Driven by love and excitement. Led of the Spirit. Accomplishing much. So should we. And it shouldn't be the longer you've been saved, the less you should do; the longer you're saved, the more you should do. You know more. And so did these guys. And I love how the Lord points out, just in these seventeen verses, three folks that have been at least twenty years around, faithfully serving day in and day out. So, potential problems. Mnason said, "Let's stay at my house."

Now, verse 17, don't be deceived by the apparent fortune of them loving his arrival. That will change next week. You will never read of the church in Jerusalem expressing thanks for the gifts, gratitude for the love of them at all. They will quickly demand more from Paul. In his desire to help, Paul will compromise, if you will. But we'll leave that for next week. For now, they received him gladly.

So, let me make this last point, and then we'll have communion. These men that we saw pressing on and remaining diligent - and not just diligent but on fire - John will write, at 90 years old, 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us;" well, these guys have proven themselves to be one of them. I read a recent article I thought was interesting. It was called "Burnout in Ministry." And it said that pastors in America average less than three years before quitting their jobs due to stress. The point was usually people and their judgments of their actions. Three years. Next line in the article said, "Involvement by those in the body for any length of time lasted about three years." Many people sit in churches while the work is done by 10% of the congregation. It's just the way it is. I would like to say this to you - the church is not a service organization. It is a living organism. It is life. Right? It is every part supplying that which the church needs. Why burn out? It seems to me the long-termers in the Bible never quit on their minds and hearts for the Lord. They don't burn out because they're driven by love for Jesus. The outer things can stumble - people, situations, difficulty. Beatings would get me to quit. Throw me in the drink three times - that would get me to quit. Stripes without doin' anything wrong - those'd be things that, "Maybe I'll quit now." Scars on your head, stoned and left to die. Not really good stuff. You know? But none of them could quit because their eyes were upon Jesus. So they don't quit. The only thing you should do is burn out for Him. You know, those two guys - Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's boys, there in Leviticus 9&10 - showed up when God was doing a great thing and drew attention to themselves, and they soon burned out. In fact, they burned up. But if you have any other motive than love for Jesus, you're gonna burn out. "Oh, no one ever thanks me for workin'. Oh, I showed up early and stayed late. No one acknowledges my work. Oh, they said something mean. I don't like those people. I'm not comin' back. Wah, wah, wah." It's all about you. Or it's not. It's all about Jesus, and you're lucky to be here. Right? And praise the Lord that He's using us. So, if you're driven by the love of Jesus, you won't need to burn out. Unfortunately, the Ephesian church, by the time you get to Revelation 2, burned out. Oh, they were busy still but no love for Jesus anymore. And the Lord called

them on it. He said, "I see you're busy. Not doin' it for Me anymore. So get back to what you started with." And that's where we should be. I turned 65 this year. This year? Oh, my Lord. I'm more excited about the Lord than I've ever been. Seriously. And I hope you are as well. Don't just sit here and watch the world go by. Get involved. Go serve. Be available. Try! God'll do great things with you. Paul was not willing to sit. Neither were these guys with him and those that we'll read about.

All right. Let's have communion together, shall we?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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