

41a ACTS

This is the 6th of August, 2004. We continue our study tonight in the Book of Acts. We are more than two-thirds of the way through this great narrative, Volume 2 of Luke's two-volume work on the life of Christ and the aftermath in the early days of the Church.

As we begin our study, let's take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. It gives us a chance to focus our concentration and to make sure that we are susceptible to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the opportunity to spend time in fellowship and in the study of your Word.

We thank you for the spiritual gifts that you have distributed amongst us and the opportunity that we have to bless and be blessed when we assemble ourselves together. We know that where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, He is in our midst, and we ask your blessing on us as we study this evening that we may rightly divide the Word of Truth, that we will understand not only the principles that are in this passage related to the life of the Apostle Paul, but we'll also see their applicability as we move forward in what remains to us of our lives. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We started Acts Chapter 21 last time. We saw that the Apostle Paul with Luke and other companions have stopped at Miletus.

They have visited with the Ephesian elders. Paul told them he didn't have time to go to their town. They would have to come see him.

So, he waits for them at Miletus. They make the trip. He speaks to them.

Paul then spends seven leisurely days in Tyre and a couple of other days in Caesarea, Hither and Yon. And so, in Chapter 21, we pick up the trip. Luke says, When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Kos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

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. The only reason I review this particular section is that Luke often makes note of Cyprus as they go past.

Later on, when they're heading the other direction, he's going to make note of the fact that they have to pass under Cyprus, is what he says, but they're not able to stop. There are some weather conditions. But Cyprus is actually going to figure here in what we note this evening.

And then, after looking up the disciples in Tyre, we stayed there seven days, they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. Now, we know from the last two or three weeks that there is no question that the Holy Spirit in every city told Paul,

do not go to Jerusalem. Bonds and chains await you in Jerusalem.

And here, specifically, if there was any doubt, these believers in Tyre kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, capital S, not to set foot in Jerusalem. It is a clear guidance from God, and Paul says he's going anyway. 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. The question arises, why mention the wives and children? Well, it tells us, among other things, not only the closeness of the Christian community, even though Paul has to look up the disciples when he first gets to Tyre. He's not familiar with them.

By the time he has been there a week, he's sort of one of the family. The wives and children come down to see him off. That's the first principle, and it tells us what a great community and a great fellowship we have in Christ, and that you can develop family where you had no family, and you can develop a closeness and friendships that last indefinitely in the bonds of Christ, in the family of Christ.

Secondly, it tells us that women and children were intimately a part of the church. The men didn't go down to the meeting house and have church and then come back and tell their wives what happened at home and just slap the kids down. Everybody came to church.

Everyone was involved in the church. The women and children knew Paul and knew him well enough, had heard him and listened to him for a week, and wanted to see him off down at the beach. And so it tells us that, unlike many of the later developments in the church where you had segregation of people, I heard of a lady who is actually a Muslim, but she's sort of a liberated woman also, and so she wanted to be devout, but she wanted to be liberated.

And trying to work that out in the Muslim sphere is kind of difficult. So when she first was going down to the mosque, they said, well, the men are up here in the prayer room. And so here's all the men.

They get this nice big spacious prayer room with the prayer rugs and all that. But the women have to go down in the basement of the mosque, and it's cramped and the AC's not on and there's no rugs. And so she did that a couple of times and she thought, you know, this just isn't my idea of the liberated woman.

And so she started pushing past the bouncer at the door who had been shunting them downstairs. She brought her mother with her and eventually they kind of broke through. And now she worships on the ground floor, but all the men are out of fellowship if there is such a thing for a Muslim because all they can think about is here's this woman up

here in the men's prayer room and Allah is going to be unhappy about it or whatever.

But there has been an idea, not only in other religions, but also in Christianity of segregation. Even in a lot of good old Bible-thumping churches they would have all the women sit on one side and all the men sit on the other. Now we tend to take our children and put them off in a separate service.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, but this tells us that in the early days of the church it was a household setting and you pretty much had everyone mixed together. Everyone knew Paul. He didn't have one class for the adults and another for the married women and another for the children.

Everyone was together. So they meet down on the beach and pray and say farewell. Then we went on board the ship and they returned home again.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre we arrived at Ptolemaeus and after greeting the brethren we stayed with them for a day. On the next day we left and came to Caesarea. You remember this is the Roman capital of the province of Syria.

The province of Syria is the Roman area that encompasses Israel. The Israelites, the Jews, consider Jerusalem to be their capital but the Romans say no, Caesarea is the capital. So this is the capital city of the province.

Entering the house of Philip the Evangelist who was one of the seven, stayed with him. The man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. We talked about them last time and the sort of stunning lack of information from these women because they are prophetesses and we are told all about them and yet they say nothing.

Instead, a prophet named Agabus comes from Judea. Now you think about the coast where Caesarea is and you think about Judea and you remember earlier in Acts we saw the long journey that Philip made from Jerusalem down into the wilderness to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. Gives him the information he needs, baptizes him and then he is found some distance away and then he moves up north to Caesarea and does some preaching there and he has settled down in Caesarea and his family is there.

So they are staying there for some days. Agabus of earlier fame who predicted the famine that came to pass comes and took Paul's belt 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 hand of the Gentiles. Paul is an astute man.

He is a scholar. He is a Pharisee. He has a good mind.

He has memorized big chunks of scripture. How many times do you think God needs to tell Paul that bonds and chains await him in Jerusalem if he just needs the information to prepare himself for persecution? Once or twice would be sufficient but in every town,

every place the man goes somebody comes in the power of the Spirit and says Paul, don't go to Jerusalem. Bonds and chains await you in Jerusalem.

The Jews are going to bind you just like this. And since he doesn't listen to the spoken word, Agabus acts it out. It puts you in mind of Ezekiel in the Old Testament and some of the other Old Testament prophets who, if you look, and we're seeing this in Ezekiel right now, when is it that God has the prophet act something out? It is when the people are hardest of hearing.

They are so hard of hearing he can't just send a speaking prophet. He has to give them a pantomime. He has to give them a video, a visual, flannel board.

So, here's Ezekiel, 390 days laying on his left side, playing with his model of Jerusalem, besieging it, attacking it, storming it, chopping off his hair and beard, whacking that up with a sword, scattering it in the wind, putting a little in his belt. This pantomime comes at what point in Israel's history? When Jerusalem is almost destroyed. There have already been two carryings away into captivity.

The people are hard of hearing, calloused over. And when God resorts to pantomime, you know that this is kind of his last ditch effort to get one's attention. He says, well, I need a multimedia presentation to get through to you here.

Agabus is the multimedia presentation for the Apostle Paul. You look at chapter 21, verse 4. The Apostle Paul is not supposed to go to Jerusalem. Now, how do we know that? We could say, well, you know, he's the Apostle.

He got the word from the Spirit. He's probably in a better position to judge. Well, take a look at Romans chapter 1 and verse 5. You know that Paul has already written this book now in our sequence of events.

What does Paul say about his mission, his ministry? He's talking about the Lord, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we, talking about himself, have received grace and apostleship to do what? What is his marching order? To bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name's sake. That's Paul's commission. Romans chapter 11 and verse 13.

I am speaking to you who are Gentiles inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles. I magnify my ministry. Romans 15, 16.

He starts in verse 15 saying, I have written very boldly to you on some points to remind you again because of the grace that was given me from God to do what? To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. You can go on passage after passage, Galatians chapter 1, verse 16. He says substantially the same thing.

God has called me through his grace. He was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles. I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem.

To those who were apostles before me, I went to Arabia and returned once more to Damascus. Paul doesn't feel the need to go to Jerusalem right after his commission, right after his sight comes back. In Galatians chapter 2, 7 and following, he goes on to talk about that.

Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 1. For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles. Same page, go down to verse 8. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ. First Timothy chapter 2 and verse 7. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle.

I am telling the truth. I am not lying. As a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Second Timothy chapter 4 verse 17. The Lord stood with me and strengthened me so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished and that all the Gentiles might hear. I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

Now, understandably, it might be that your emphasis is the Gentiles. Or it's the Jews and the Gentiles. But how many passages is this? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 passages I've given you where Paul himself states that his mission is explicitly to the Gentiles.

Why are we belaboring this? We're not an apostle. We're not an apostle to the Gentiles. But there is a phrase, This I know.

Jesus loves me. This I know. There's a biographical film on Dr. Criswell called This I Know.

And when we approach our operations, our daily life and existence, there are a lot of things that we don't know for sure. We don't always know what the geographical will of God is. There are times when we're between jobs and we don't know what the next job is going to be.

When we're single and haven't found our right opposite number, we don't know who that's going to be. The world is full of unknowns. Well, how do you navigate through uncharted waters? I am fortunate in having been a midshipman and been trained in navigating in waters that you're unfamiliar with.

What do you do? You find known points. You identify what you do know and you work from what you know to what you don't know. You're up on the bridge of a vessel and you don't know exactly where you are in the water.

Am I getting too near the shoals on the port side or on the starboard side? How deep is this channel? Am I even in the channel? Where am I? What do you do? You get a guy

with a direction-finding telescope-looking deal and he looks over to the shore. And you say, take a bearing, shoot a bearing to that lighthouse. Shoot a bearing to that buoy.

Shoot a bearing to that church steeple. You get out your map that has those known points on it and they come back and they say, well, the bearing to the church steeple is 350. The bearing to the lighthouse is 065.

The bearing to the other one is whatever it is. And you draw those lines on the chart and you work from the known things and you figure out your unknown. It's the same thing in algebra or any other type of problem.

You have to start with what you know. What does Paul know? There could be a question because he thinks he should go to Jerusalem pretty much everybody else thinks he should not. So, which is it? Do you go to Jerusalem or do you not? By the way, why does he want to go to Jerusalem? What is his purpose in going? Originally, we're told that he had a vow and it seems that the vow is some way related to going to Jerusalem.

Later on, we find if we look in the latter portion of Romans, Romans chapter 15, we find out that the reason Paul wants to go to Jerusalem is to deliver an offering. He has heard that the believers in that region are impoverished. So, in verse 25 of Romans 15, Now I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

So, he tells us the purpose of the trip is to serve the saints in Jerusalem. Now, what are our known pieces of information? Paul is commissioned. He is commissioned as an apostle.

What is his calling? What is his commission? Ten different places he has told us it is apostle to the Gentiles. How many other apostles are there in the Jerusalem area? Ten. You're missing Judas.

You're missing James. Everybody else, ostensibly, is still upright. So, you've got ten to whom the Lord Jesus spoke and said, You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, and in Samaria.

Till the end of the age, you eleven, pretty soon James gets the chop and you're down to ten, that's your area. Ten apostles are ganged up on the problem of Jerusalem and Judea. How many go to the entire rest of the world to serve as stewards of the mysteries of Christ? One.

You've got one apostle for Asia Minor. You've got one apostle for Rome. You've got one apostle for this huge area.

He's got a team, he's got some helpers, he's training men, but one apostle. And what does he decide? I'd better reverse course and go to Jerusalem. This is mission failure.

This is disobedience. This is going the wrong direction. There's just no other way to put it.

Ten different places Paul says, I'm the apostle of the Gentiles. How many Gentiles does he minister to in Jerusalem? There may be some in there. We know about one, there's going to be a man from Cyprus that he's going to stay with.

But that's our next point. So look now at Acts 21, because after Agabus comes down and does the audiovisual media presentation, Paul says, What are you doing weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Later on, Paul is going to come to a more balanced view in terms of considering himself and considering the believers around him.

Right now, this is a mission for him. He says, I am willing to go, I am willing to suffer, I am willing even to die for the cause of Christ. And he has a very monolithic, egocentric view of this where he's essentially judging the situation and making the decision based on him.

And he's left out his calling. Later on, Paul is going to say that we have to take others into account. You remember in Galatians, where he talks about the fact that he is tired, he's been through a lot, he has gone to a lot of the travels and so on, the council in Jerusalem he rehearses in chapter 2, he's been opposed and so on.

He says, If I rebuild, this is 2.18 of Galatians, If I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. And what is it that Paul has destroyed? It is the law. How many times does Paul say this? Galatians 4.19 He is on a trip to rebuild what he has just been teaching people out of.

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you. Christ formed in you. Not the law inculcated in you.

Christ formed in you. Galatians 5.6 This whole next section after Galatians 4.19 You who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? And he goes through the two sons, the bond woman and the free woman in the rest of that chapter. Then you get to chapter 5 and verse 6 and he says, In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything but faith working through love.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? Well, on a different occasion, Paul could have asked himself this question. I was running well.

Look at these great missionary journeys that we have made. Look at the churches that have been started. The thousands upon thousands of Gentiles.

The thousands upon thousands of Gentiles that he comes back to Jerusalem and tells them about. So what's the point for us? When we look and are trying to decide what

should we do next? Should we implement plan A or plan B? Should we stay? Should we go? Should we pull the trigger? Should we unload? What constitutes the basis for our decision making? The best thing we can do is avoid this mistake. Start with what you know.

Good decisions are based on facts. Amass the facts. Gather the facts.

If you are an apostle and you're heading in one direction and everybody you come in contact with says, Holy Spirit wanted me to tell you you're going the wrong way. Well, gather the facts. Paul has this mission.

We know from Romans he wants to minister to the saints in Jerusalem. He wants to take them this offering. But you know how this is.

This is like the American government going to Iraq and saying we want to help you. We want to rebuild your infrastructure. We want to rebuild your water and your electric and your government.

We want to give you freedom. And there are people over there who hate us for it. Not all of them.

The ones that have any sense at least see the opportunity to get some free help. But you look at the number of maniacs and the number of zealots, if you will, who interpret this as an insult. What, you think we can't help ourselves? You think we need you? You bunch of perversity dealers.

You porn purveyors. You salacious depraved. You're going to bring your western culture over here and defile us with it? I'd rather be poor.

I'd rather not have water than have you come over and build it. There's this attitude. There's an attitude of resentment.

Even though we are spending money and blood trying to make things better in that country. Well, you have this element of zealousness in the soul that blinds people and makes them prejudiced and they will interpret everything that happens as they see fit, as fits their world view. And there is nothing you can do.

There is no act of generosity. You could throw yourself on a grenade and they would say, well, good. It's one less of those Christians.

They will not see it. And Paul is heading directly into a nest of people who have that attitude because they are zealous for the law. They are zealous but not according to godliness.

And zeal of this type blinds one. We have to be careful. There are people in the... pick your movement or pick your position.

Pick conservative Christian coalitions or whatever. There are people who get so zealous for that that they become blind and can't see where there might be a good idea. Everything is bad if it's not within my movement.

Everything is bad if it's not in my denomination. Everything is bad if it's not within the boundaries that I have defined. It must be bad because it's not in these boundaries.

And it's a dangerous way to view life. So we have to be careful of this scylla and charybdis, of these two extremes. Because on the one hand, we can be so gung-ho and there is a kind of narrow-minded dogmatism that is good.

I like to think that I myself am narrow-minded and dogmatic in a lot of things. But we have to be careful about pumping too much zeal into our correctness, into our rightness, that it blinds us and we can't see that there is merit, that there is value. This has happened in conservative Christianity where it's my way or the highway, you listen to my pastor or you're out in the weeds type of thing.

This is what Paul is going into. But secondly, when we try to be objective, we go before the Lord, we ask, we seek, we knock, we need to gather the facts. What has God said? For example, let's say this example that I gave you last time about the fellow who wanted to be a missionary and wanted to go overseas and moved heaven and earth and did it and it was an unmitigated disaster, not only financially and physically but spiritually, destroyed his faith.

But what was the problem? If you look and say, well, here is a potential course of action, I really have a burden for these people, I would like to go be a missionary to them, share Christ with them, it all sounds good. There is no sin in that. You can't reject that point of view and say, well, there is sin in it, so it must not be God's will.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with it. But gather the facts. What are the things I know I'm supposed to do? I don't know if I'm supposed to go to Thailand to be a missionary or not, but I do know that God has given me a direct command to be a good husband.

I do know that I have a direct command to be a good father. I do know that I have a direct command to be a good son to my parents, as long as they are alive. I do know that I have a responsibility to be working with my own hands, making my own way, not dependent on charity, not stirring up a ruckus.

And when I put those known points in place and say, now, can I fulfill those and stand before the Lord and say, I have done my best in all of those areas and do this other thing. Will this actually enhance those? Will it work together and there will be a mutual sort of synergy and blessing involved when I do this thing? It's going to enhance my marriage. It's going to enhance my parenting.

It's going to enhance my ability to do all of these other things so that I am, in essence, fulfilling my known commands, even as I go into this unknown area. That has the marks of a good decision. If, on the other hand, this is going to be taking time away, I won't be home as much.

I'm going to have to let my wife do more of the child training. I'm going to have to get a second income. Or my wife is going to have to work.

Or we're going to have to deputize and get people to send us money. And I'm going to be separated from the rest of my family. There are some issues there where it would be nice if I was around, but I've really got a burden for these people.

And so we ask ourselves the question. I mean, on the one hand, there is sacrifice involved in serving the Lord that is worthwhile. Paul says, do I not have the right to lead about a wife? I don't do it because it's more needful for me to be out here doing my apostolic ministry.

But, he did not have a wife that he left behind. He did not have children that he left behind. So, as we look at the Apostle Paul, and it's easy to throw rocks and say, well, Paul, you know, God threw everything but the kitchen sink at you, and you went to Jerusalem anyway.

But, we do the same thing. God gives us clear guidance in his word about certain known parts of our calling. We have clear, explicit commands for holiness, for purity, for an orderly life, our responsibilities to one another.

And those cannot be sacrificed on the altar of ministry. Those who do so, do so at their peril. God is going to bring them up short.

God is going to have to give them an object lesson, perhaps a demonstration out of the audio-visual world, because we have been given the facts. The Apostle Paul here has been given his commission. You are the apostle to the Gentiles.

You're going to stand before princes and kings. How many kings are there in Jerusalem? Zero. There are no kings in Jerusalem.

He's supposed to stand before kings. He's supposed to show forth glory to the Gentiles. It's the hardest thing in the world to be a Gentile in Jerusalem.

If there's one spot in the known world where Gentiles are scarce, it's down at the temple in Jerusalem, but that's where Paul's going. And you'll notice, he spent all this time going through Macedonia, getting all of these love gifts, these sacrificial gifts that the Gentiles made, and he takes them here in Acts 21 and gives them to James. And what kind of an impact did it make? What does James have to say about the offerings? What do the rest of the Jews have to say about the offerings? The offerings are not even mentioned here.

He brought this truckload of relief for the Jews. It's ignored. It's pushed aside.

Paul, I think, you can envision at least, him having the idea that this would be a means of justifying his life and his ministry and his calling before the home crowd. What are the words of Jesus? A prophet is not without honor except amongst his own kind. And Paul is from Tarsus, but his kind, the Pharisees and the religious Jews, all hang out around the temple.

And these are the ones he's trying to get some legitimacy. He wants, today they would say validation. He wants to be validated.

He wants the church in Jerusalem to recognize this is a great thing, and it is. But where do we get our justification? Where do we get our validation? Where do we get our identity and the genuine evaluation of where we stand? It has to come from God, not some other crowd. And this turns into a disaster.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see after Paul's companions say, well, the will of the Lord be done, and he goes to Jerusalem, and he hooks up with James and the four individuals with the vow. We'll see what happens next.

But let's pause here and take our break.