

97-07-13a

We prepare to worship God this Sunday morning. Let's begin by going to our Heavenly Father in prayer. Father, we thank you for the wonderful privilege we have of being called by your name, of having been entered into a relationship with you through the sacrificial work and the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We thank you for His example of faith, His example of love toward us, even while we were enemies, even before we were born. We thank you that as a result, we have unique opportunities in this age to learn about you, to learn about your plan and our place in it, and to prepare ourselves for life in this age and in the next. We pray that as we study these concluding sections of the letter to the Romans, that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding.

We pray that not only will we be able to perceive the truth in these passages, but that it will incorporate into our thinking and equip us and prepare us to think and to decide and to act in a way that pleases you and glorifies our Savior. We ask it in His name. Amen.

For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Numbers chapter 22. Numbers chapter 22. This is the story of Balaam.

You may recall that Balaam, the son of Beor, was a prophet. His origins are somewhat obscure. But as the children of Israel moved and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho, this is their approach to the land the first time, Balaam, the son of Zippor, saw that Israel had wreaked havoc on the Amorites.

And Moab, in verse 3, was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many. And Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, Now this company will lick up everything around us as an ox licks up the grass of the field.

And Balaam, the son of Zippor, was king of the Moabites at that time. So he sent messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor, at Pathor, which is near the river in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and they are settling next to me.

Therefore, please come at once. Curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you as the Lord speaks to me. So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

Then God came to Balaam and said, Who are these men with you? Balaam said to God, Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, Look, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me.

Perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out. God said to Balaam, You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.

Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you. The princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, Balaam refuses to come with us. Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than the first.

They came to Balaam and said to him, Thus says Balak, the son of Zippor, Please, let nothing hinder you from coming to me, for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore, please come. Curse this people for me.

Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me. God came to Balaam at night and said to him, If the men come to call you, rise and go with them, but only the word which I speak to you, that you shall do.

So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. Then God's anger was aroused because he went. And the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as an adversary against him.

And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. Now the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again.

Then the angel of the Lord went further and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, she lay down onto Balaam. So Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times? Balaam said to the donkey, Because you have abused me, I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you. So the donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden ever since I became yours to this day?

Was I ever disposed to do this to you? And he said, No. Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand.

And he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the Lord said to him, Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times.

If she had not turned aside from me, surely I would also have killed you by now and let her live. Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, I have sinned, for I did not know you stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases you, I will turn back.

Then the angel of the Lord said to Balaam, Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. The story goes on forward from there, and as you know, Balaam pronounces blessings on Israel instead of curses.

This passage is helpful in our study of the concluding sections of Romans, specifically Romans chapter 15, the latter portion of the chapter. As we saw last week, we find Paul expressing his desire to go to Jerusalem and take a gift to the saints who are gathered there. This is a gift from the Gentile churches.

That is designated for the poor in Jerusalem, and it is Paul's desire that his gift, and by extension, his presence, his ministry, and his work among the Gentiles be acceptable in the eyes of the Jerusalem church. That's specifically his prayer request at the end of chapter 15. He says in verse 30, I beg of you brethren, these are the Romans to whom he's speaking, I beg you brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.

Paul has a desire to go to Jerusalem and then go on to Rome. And that is also God's desire for Paul. Paul has mixed motives in going to Jerusalem.

And it's evident from his prayer request that he is very desirous that his service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. We don't have the opportunity to look up all of the passages where Paul mentions the collection of gifts. He mentions it in Corinthians and many of the other letters that he writes.

He stressed it when he was present at the churches. And this is a good thing. The Gentile churches, one of their exhortations from the Jerusalem Council was to remember the poor.

To abstain from idolatry and eating things strangled and from blood and from fornication. And they were to remember the poor. And this is a worthy thing.

These are commands that transcend even the law of Moses. And it is a good thing. But as you think about Numbers chapter 22 and this episode involving Balaam, you may start to see something of a parallel.

God had a time for Balaam to come and stand on the heights and view Israel gathered in the plains and pronounce a blessing instead of a curse on them. God told Balaam the first time, don't go. It wasn't time for him to be there yet.

The second time, the messengers come more honorable and more numerous and with greater gifts in hand. Balaam honors the Word of the Lord and says, I can't go, but I'll check with the Lord tonight, so stay overnight with me. And then God tells him he has permission to go.

Then we have this very curious section beginning in verse 21 because in verse 20, God has said, if the men come to call you, rise and go with them. But notice the last part of verse 20, only the word which I speak to you that you shall do. So there is a restriction on Balaam when he goes.

He is only to speak the word that the Lord has committed him to speak. So Balaam rises, saddles his donkey, and is doing exactly what God told him to do in the vision. He's going to Moab.

But God's anger is aroused because he went and the angel of the Lord takes his stand. And we have this threefold attempt by Balaam to get past the angel of the Lord. Why is that? Is God capricious? Is He inconsistent? Is He contradicting Himself? He tells Balaam to go and now He's stopping him with the angel of the Lord.

What is the problem here? Why is the anger of the Lord aroused at Balaam for going? Well, God told him to go, so the fact that he's going is not the reason. What is it that we have seen throughout our studies, and especially here recently in the book of Romans? It's not what you do. It's why you do it that counts.

What is the Word of God? It is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And Balaam, apparently, we don't have an explicit statement. It's interesting, the Old Testament very seldom gives us the insight into the thinking and the heart that we get sometimes in the New Testament.

We have to infer more by the actions that take place. We saw that in the life of David. And here, apparently, it is Balaam's motivation in going.

Apparently, Balaam is thinking, well, this is going to be a profitable trip here. Look at these honorable princes and this guy must really want me bad to have made these two trips. And I think in Balaam's mind, this is going to be a rewarding trip in the material sense.

And God's anger is aroused because it's not Balaam's primary interest to deliver the Word that God is going to commit to him. I cannot think of another reason why God would tell him to go and then be angry at him for going except that it is his reason. And what does the episode with the

angel of the Lord in the path do? It forces Balaam to stop and think about who he had better be pleasing on this trip.

Is he going to go to please the king of Moab or is he going to please God? When Balaam realizes that he has narrowly escaped with his life in confronting the angel of the Lord, the angel says, if your donkey hadn't laid down, I would have killed you rather than have you go for the wrong reason. This sobers Balaam and gets him back on an objective basis so that when he goes, it doesn't matter what else is going on. He is going to deliver the oracles that God wants to have pronounced over Israel.

And these are prophetic oracles that are recorded as inspired Scripture in the Old Testament. Oracles that will, among other things, be the basis for the trip that the wise men take when Jesus is born. How do they know that we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him? That information is in the oracles of Balaam which Daniel taught to the wise men during his captivity.

So there is a reason and there is a purpose that God has in Balaam going to Moab. And he ensures that Balaam understands that and purges him of that false motivation before he goes. Now, going back to Romans 15, it is God's will that the Apostle Paul bear witness not only to the Gentiles but also to the house of Israel.

Turn with me back to Acts to the calling of Saul on the Damascus road in chapter 9 of Acts. In verse 11, the Lord is speaking to Ananias and he says, Arise and go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. For behold, he is praying.

And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him so that he may receive his sight. Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to do what? To bear my name before Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel. Now, this trip that Paul is talking about in Romans chapter 15 where he goes to Jerusalem, this is going to result in his imprisonment. In some ways, this is sort of that protective custody idea because the Romans are going to guard him to keep the Jews from killing him.

But it is at the Jews' instigation that he finds his liberty curtailed and he finds himself in custody, if you will. And it is as a result of these incidents that are going to happen when he goes to Jerusalem that he is going to bear witness. He's going to bear witness five or six times.

He's going to bear witness before the Roman authorities in Jerusalem. He's going to bear witness before Felix. He's going to bear witness before Festus.

He's going to bear witness before Agrippa. And he's finally going to go to Rome and bear witness before Caesar himself. God knows that ahead of time.

God says, This is the reason I'm calling him. But there is a time and there is a way for Paul to do this, just like with Balaam. And if Paul anticipates God, if Paul gets mixed motives in going and doing these things, God is going to draw him up short.

And God is going to warn him in the same way that God warns Balaam. Turn with me over to Acts 13, verse 2. God the Holy Spirit provides guidance all through Paul's ministry. And it's very interesting to see the times that Scripture says God the Holy Spirit witnessed directly to Paul.

There are times when there are important decisions made and we don't have any statement to the effect that God gave direct communication. And then there are other occasions when you wouldn't necessarily think the decision was as important and there's a vision or there's a revelation or there's a direct ministry of the Spirit. So when you look at chapter 13, in the church that was at Antioch, there were certain prophets and teachers.

Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. So God the Holy Spirit speaks. This was probably through a believer in the congregation who had the gift of prophecy.

We are not always given the mechanism by which the Holy Spirit speaks, but it was clear to everyone there that this was the word of God via the Holy Spirit that Saul and Barnabas be called out and perform this work. And it was clear to them, as you see in verse 4, that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit and they knew exactly where to go. They said, Well, if we're leaving Antioch, where should we start? At this time the whole Gentile world is open for evangelism and for ministry and for the establishment of churches.

Where should they go? Well, by the Holy Spirit they go down to Seleucia. And from there they sail to Cyprus and arrive at Solomus. And they preach the word of God in the synagogues.

And notice, this is one of the last references we have to John, the disciple slash apostle in verse 5. They also had John as their assistant. Of course, there's some question whether that's John or John Mark. But at any rate, this is a clear piece of guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Paul was called out. He was designated an apostle and commissioned through the direct word of the Lord as we saw back in chapter 9 here. He begins the active phase of his ministry after some internship in Antioch.

You turn a few pages over to Acts chapter 16 and verse 6. And as we go along, this is the thing to watch for. How does God do what He does in terms of divine guidance? We've studied divine guidance in the past and we see that there's a variety of means by which God guides and instructs how He wants things to proceed. That's a question that we all have, don't we? We go through life, we come to decision points, and sometimes we wish we were back in these days where the Holy Spirit would speak, where we would have a dream or a vision.

In fact, that wish is so real in the minds of some of us that we actually have it come true. I'm working through a book by, I think I've mentioned it a time or two, this book called *Surprised by the Voice of God* by Jack Deere, who is a former Dallas Seminary professor and assistant, actually an associate professor of Old Testament, who wanted more direct contact with God, felt that his life, as far as just studying the Word of God and so forth, was wooden and dry and didn't have life and vitality. He didn't feel like he had any strength or any meaning, and he felt like there ought to be more, and suddenly he found more, and he now sees visions and hears voices and so forth.

And it's an easy thing to wish for, especially if the Word of God is not alive and powerful in our souls, if the Word of God that's contained in the Scriptures isn't a compelling force in our thinking, if it doesn't bring alive to us the ministry of God's Spirit, if we don't arrive at the place where we have the indwelling of Christ and the indwelling of the Father that Jesus promised in John 16 and 17, we're going to start searching for some way to fill that void. And this is one of the ways people answer that question. Here's a case where that was the mechanism.

This was the means in the early church. Why? Because we didn't have written Scriptures that God the Holy Spirit could use for that purpose. Where are you going to get your New Testament truth? How is that foundation going to be laid? How are the first elders and pastors going to be trained? Well, that's the commission of the apostles.

That's why they were given that great commission. And they were also given the supernatural means of fulfilling it, just like the tabernacle craftsmen were given the ministry of the Spirit to ensure that the worship life of Israel was launched properly and was set up properly, and that God the Holy Spirit did the same thing for the apostles. But there are many people now today, our contemporaries in the body of Christ, who want to see that this is still legitimate.

And it is not a proper thing to simply write off all of the believers who are going for charisma and say, well, they're wrong, and not know why, and not know what the alternative is. As I was mentioning before class, I think one of the sad things in Christian education and in seminary training and so forth today is that the schools and seminaries are good at shooting down the traditional rote sort of theology that people often get in a standard denominational church. People come in and say, oh, here's all the reasons why what you were taught in church isn't correct.

But they're not replacing it with the right thing. It's okay to point out the flaws in something if

you're going to then teach what the right thing is and show from Scripture what that is. Here is the more perfect way.

I will show you a more excellent way, Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians 12. But you don't just shoot things down and then not have an answer to give. Not only do we need to know the problems with people who think the signed gifts are active today, but we need to know what the answer is.

How does God guide? We need to know the difference between the apostolic ministry of God the Holy Spirit and the ministry of God's Spirit today. And we need to be able to substantiate that from Scripture. And as the author of Hebrews says, this we will do if God wills.

So here we have in Acts 16 as Paul continues to minister in verse 6 of Acts 16 when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. Now is Paul eventually going to minister in Asia? Yes he is, but not on this trip. It's not time.

That will happen later. Paul has three missionary journeys, and this is the first, and he's not supposed to go to Asia on this one. God the Holy Spirit forbids them to preach the Word in Asia.

After that, in verse 7, they had come to Mycia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. The Spirit said no, it's not time to go to Bithynia. So passing by Mycia, they came down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. Now Paul is apparently at this point having trouble discerning where he's supposed to go next. He tries to go to Asia.

The Spirit says no. He tries to go to Bithynia. The Spirit says no.

Paul goes down to Troas, and apparently doesn't have a good idea of where he's supposed to go next. So what happens? A vision appears to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood up and pleaded with him saying, come over to Macedonia and help us.

After he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them. This was a conclusion they had to draw from the vision. This wasn't just the voice of the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't the voice of Jesus like on the Damascus Road saying, Paul, go to Macedonia. He was given enough information that he was expected to make application to figure out from the evidence that he had that that's what he needed to do. It wasn't a direct call.

And they said, we concluded from this vision that this was where we go next. And as a result of this, when they go to Macedonia, the capital of Macedonia is Philippi. Well, everybody remembers Acts 16.31, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

The occasion for that speech is the episode with the Philippian jailer. They're going to be imprisoned when they go to Philippi. And as you read through the remainder of Acts 16 here, you find that out.

Paul casts out a demon. Paul and Silas are beaten. They're imprisoned.

In verse 22, the multitude rose up together against them. The magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. When they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.

Having received such a charge, he put them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. Then you have that miraculous episode. At midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

In verse 25, and the prisoners were listening to them, suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. Was it God's will that Paul and Silas be imprisoned indefinitely in Philippi? No, it was not.

Was it God's will that they be there? Yes, it was. So when you have these two irreconcilable things happening, God says, well, the imprisonment is not to be, and God ends it. The keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, do yourself no harm. We are all here. He called for a light, ran in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas, brought them out.

Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Then we have that wonderful verse. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household. This means the household believes, the household is saved, not the whole household is saved because of the one man's faith.

They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. After they accepted Christ, Paul started laying that foundation that we've been studying. Gave them the truth about change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God and so on.

Took them the same hour of the night, washed their stripes. Immediately he and all his family were baptized. Paul had a great opportunity to teach some truth about baptism and about the way to maintain fellowship with God and the ministry of God the Holy Spirit and how to handle sin in the life and so forth.

When he brought them into his house, he set food before them and so forth. And as a result of all of these things, the next day Paul and Silas are released. They go to the house of Lydia in verse 40.

They saw the brethren. They encouraged them and departed. So what do we see here? Here's God the Holy Spirit guiding Paul, saying don't go here.

Don't go there. Here's where you go. They go there.

Wonderful things happen. God's purpose is fulfilled. Turn another page over or two to Acts 18 when Paul goes to Corinth, meets up with Aquila, someone we're going to see mentioned in Romans chapter 16, the husband of Priscilla and a fellow tent maker by occupation.

And Silas and Timothy in verse 5 came from Macedonia. Remember, that's where they had been earlier. Paul was compelled by the Spirit.

Notice in verse 5, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to whom? To the Jews. He's the apostle to the Gentile, but here he is in Corinth. There are Jewish believers there.

And Paul, compelled by the Spirit, testifies to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. That's a part of his calling. It's a part of his commission.

And the Spirit guides him in that direction. They opposed him and blasphemed. He shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads.

I am clean. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. He departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justice, one who worshiped God whose house was next door to the synagogue.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized. There's a productive result from Paul bearing this witness.

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision in verse 9. Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent. I am with you. No one will attack you to hurt you.

I have many people in this city. Now this is a wonderful thing. And thus far, when God speaks, Paul responds.

And great things happen that are a part of Paul's calling. Now one of the dangers is that we look at the career of the apostles. In particular, we look at the career of Paul and we say, Here's a man that responded to God's leading and God's guidance, who fulfilled his calling, and here's the fruit.

People hear the gospel and they are saved. The misapplication that is often made from that is we think, If I respond to the word of God, if I'm obedient, if I fulfill my calling, the result is going to be the same. People are going to hear the gospel and be saved.

Well, this is the result of Paul's calling to preach the gospel. He is called out to be this kind of

witness. He is an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord.

And that's the fruit and the result of his calling. There are many parts of the body and all of us, in our fulfillment of calling, don't arrive at the very same fruit. But to listen to the... In fact, I was reading this past week, the definition of an evangelical.

Did you ever wonder? This term is bandied about. Well, we're conservative evangelicals. What does it mean to be an evangelical? Well, it's kind of a broad, loose, general, unclear designation.

You can be a lot of things and qualify as an evangelical. But the core of the definition is an evangelical believes that the primary function of believers in this age is to evangelize. That's why it's called evangelical.

That the defining purpose and role of the church is evangelism. And so we can muse on that and wonder how long we're going to continue to qualify for that designation. It is an important thing.

It is a wonderful thing. There are many of us who are called and gifted in that area, who have the gift of evangelism. Pastors are to do the work of an evangelist as a part of their function.

But it is not a universal calling. All the parts of the body are not a mouth. We have hands, and we have feet, and we have elbows, and we have many different callings.

And the fulfillment of that calling is not always going to result in evangelism and church establishment like it did for Paul. And it is an erroneous leap of logic or leap of application to conclude that. By the same token, it is erroneous and wrong for believers to decide that that is the purpose and the measure by which we decide we have fulfilled our calling, and then to run around and browbeat one another and make one another feel inadequate and guilty and unfruitful because there is no evangelism and sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ on a regular, consistent basis with others.

Why is it that when we apply to a school or get interviewed for one thing or another in the Christian realm, there is a question, when is the last time you shared the gospel with someone? It is because the assumption is that this is the measure, and you are unfruitful. There is something wrong with you spiritually if you are not regularly reaping the harvest and bringing new souls into the kingdom because this is our purpose. That is wrong.

And what that does, to the extent that we as believers and we as the church of Jesus Christ in this age believe that, the 98% of us for whom that is not the primary calling are going to be looking over the fence trying to fulfill a calling that doesn't belong to us and failing to fulfill the calling we do have, which is to grow in grace and knowledge, to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our souls in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. So we have to be careful when we look at the apostles and remember that the principle is true. God leads, God guides, God speaks, and He will enable us to see our way and to know what decisions need to be made.

He is going to do it through His Word and through His Spirit just as He does for Paul. But we need to be sensitive to the purpose of God in this age. God has no problem with circumstances.

God has no problem getting someone evangelized. God has no problem resolving difficulties. God has no problem meeting the needs of believers.

He's omnipotent. He can do that in a thousand different ways without even straining Himself. We think if we're not there evangelizing, if we're not there ministering, well, God just can't get it done without me.

If I make a wrong turn, if I'm not there, if I'm not dedicated, if I don't sacrifice myself enough, if I don't embarrass myself, if I don't work through the awkwardness and the resistance and the quizzical looks and the puzzled expressions and the analysis that we're strange and weird, which in often cases we are strange and weird attempting to fulfill a calling that does not belong to us. We think, well, if I don't do this, it just won't get done. There are many, many believers who think the blood of unbelievers will be on their hand and there will be people bobbing around in the lake of fire for eternity because they were too embarrassed to share the Gospel.

So we have to watch out when we're looking at the career of Paul and the other apostles to extract the principle of operation without taking to ourselves the calling and the function of an apostle. So in 18.9, the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent. So do you see a pattern in the working of God in the life of Paul to reveal to him what his purpose is, to reveal to him how to fulfill that purpose? And that's what Paul does.

There are other occasions as you read through Acts. It's fascinating. Start at Acts chapter 9 and just read.

You can skip a couple of chapters there, but you read the account of Paul in his missionary journey and see that they make decisions to go from one city to another. They stay for a year and a half in some place and then they decide to leave. And there's no mention that God the Holy Spirit said, Okay, Paul, it's now time to leave.

He didn't get a consistent interview with God every time he needed to make a decision, but there were certain key points where God appears. You can see this in 18.18 of Acts. Paul still remained a good while here in Corinth.

Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria. Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchreae for he had taken a vow.

We don't know what that vow is or why it involved cutting his hair. But he came to Ephesus and left them there. But he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Now, this is a long period of time in Corinth. And then he leaves. This is a big change for him.

And he goes to Ephesus. Verse 20, they asked him to stay a longer time with them. He did not consent, but he took leave of them, saying, I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem, but I will return again to you, God willing.

And he sailed from Ephesus. It doesn't tell us that God the Holy Spirit told him he needed to be in Jerusalem for the feast. But that may have happened.

We just don't know. But he feels the need to be in Jerusalem for the feast. So he goes through Caesarea and greets the church and goes down to Antioch.

And then he goes to Galatia and Phrygia in verse 23. Then in chapter 19, it happened while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus, finding some disciples. He said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit or not? And they said, no, we did not receive the Holy Spirit.

And they've only had John's baptism and so forth. In verse 8 of chapter 19, he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. Where is it that he's preaching? It's the synagogue.

Who is it that's allowed into the synagogue? The Greeks? The Gentiles? No, it's the Jews. Paul has a legitimate calling and a legitimate function, as was mentioned at the inception of his commission as an apostle, to bear witness to the Jews in the house of Israel, as well as the Gentiles. And there are occasions where he does this, and this is great.

It says in verse 10 here, this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. Think of that. Everyone in Asia, where the Holy Spirit forbade him to go just a few years earlier, now he's having a fruitful ministry in Asia, because now the time is right.

Now he's in the right place at the right time, fulfilling the very same thing that he wanted to do earlier when it wasn't time. And God worked unusual miracles by the hand of Paul. This is a confirming ministry.

He's in the right place doing the right thing. But we know, and you'll recall from our study last week, that Paul decides to collect a gift and go to Jerusalem, and suddenly we have a change in the pattern. Up to this point, every time we see God, the Holy Spirit, He confirms, He guides, and Paul responds.

And Paul and the Holy Spirit are in harmony. Every time there's a word, every time there's a vision, every time there's a prophet that stands up and speaks, Paul is in harmony with that. But then suddenly we have in Acts chapter 20, Paul telling us in verse 22, I go bound in spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulation await me.

So now Paul is going somewhere where the Holy Spirit is saying, chains and tribulation await

you. This is not a direct forbidding word at this point, is it? But every city, this is something that happened repeatedly. Every time Paul would go into a city and meet up with the people with a prophetic gift in that church, they would say, Paul, if you go to Jerusalem, they're going to hand you over.

You're going to be chained. You're going to be bound. And we have him continuing.

Look at verse 4 of chapter 21. When they go to... In fact, start at verse 3. When he had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left. We sailed to Syria.

We landed at Tyre. There the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days.

Then they told Paul, through the Spirit, not to go up to Jerusalem. Now that's about as plain as it gets. When he gets to the church... Now notice, Paul doesn't get a vision.

Paul doesn't get a dream. Paul doesn't hear the word of the Lord or the voice of the Spirit speaking. This comes to him how? Through fellowship with believers.

Here are believers who have the prophetic gift, like Agabus does. And they say, Paul, the Holy Spirit has given us a message for you. Don't go to Jerusalem.

And that's as plain as it gets in verse 4. They told Paul, through the Spirit, not to go up to Jerusalem. 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 until we were out of the city.

We knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken leave of one another, we re-boarded the ship and returned home. This does not deflect Paul.

And you start to see the Balaam pattern here, don't you? Every city... Jesus doesn't come and strike him down on the road like He did in Damascus, because Paul ought to know at this point. It's kind of like with the man beckoning to Macedonia. He didn't get a direct word to go to Macedonia.

He got a vision of a man in Macedonia saying, Come help us. And he concluded from that vision that that's what he needed to do. Here, he's getting consistent message every city that he goes.

Don't go to Jerusalem. Go to Jerusalem, you're going to be taken captive. Don't go.

Don't go. Don't go. He continues on his way.

And you get the implication. It doesn't explicitly say this in verse 9 of Acts 21, but they're staying in the house of Philip the Evangelist who was one of the seven. That's the seven who were appointed back in the early chapters of Acts to be ministers to the church.

And he stayed with him. Now, this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Now, what do you think these virgin daughters prophesied when Paul got there? Well, it's the same prophecy Paul has been getting in every city that he goes to, isn't it? Well, he's not responsive to the four virgin daughters in the same way that he hasn't responded to any of these other messages.

As we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. We saw this last week. He came, he took Paul's belt, bound his hands and feet.

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. When we heard these things, it doesn't take anybody else long to figure out what the Holy Spirit's trying to say, does it? Everybody up in Tyre knew what it meant. Everybody here in Caesarea knows what it means.

The entire church, all of the people accompanying Paul, plead with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 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. Now, does Paul have faith in God? Is he operating in faith as he goes to Jerusalem? Yes, he is.

Is he sacrificial in his dedication? Yes, he is. Is it a good thing to be willing to testify to the things of God no matter what the cost? Yes, it is. In Numbers chapter 22, was it God's will that Balaam go and speak in front of the Moabites? Yes, it was.

Did God tell him to go? Yes, he did. Did God stop him on the way after telling him to go? Yes, he did. Why? What was Balaam's problem? Faulty motivation.

Why do you think the Holy Spirit is warning Paul about going to Jerusalem? It isn't that God doesn't want him to go. God told him at the beginning, He is going to bear witness of me before kings and before the house of Israel. And that's what Paul is going to do in Jerusalem.

God is going to appear and comfort Paul while he's in Jerusalem and tell him as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, you will also testify for me in Rome. Paul knows ahead of time that he's going to be going to Rome eventually. The problem is not that he is going, just like with Balaam, it's why he's going.

And I think we have the key in Romans chapter 15. He says, Paul desires vindication. Paul wants approval.

He wants unity, which is a good thing. You don't want to be divided. You don't want to have parts of the church casting aspersions on the people that you're ministering to and looking at the Gentile churches as second class and Johnny-come-latelys and not as holy and not as righteous as the Jewish church.

These are good things, and Paul cares about his converts, his Gentile churches, and he wants

them to be unified, and that's a good thing, that this service for the Jerusalem church will be acceptable to the saints. This is how he's going to get that done. And God the Holy Spirit says, No, don't go to Jerusalem on this basis.

And Paul goes in spite of all of these repeated warnings. Never before in Paul's ministry has the Holy Spirit said, Oh, by the way, if you go to Philippi, you're going to be beaten with rods and you're going to be imprisoned. It doesn't say if you go here or there or any of the other places where Paul was beaten and persecuted.

It doesn't say don't go here or you're going to run into trouble. But now he starts doing that, and Paul is supposed to draw a conclusion. What does this mean for us? Well, we're going to take our break and come back and make that application.

Let's pause here.