

Acts 21 – Unstoppable

Hey good morning church. So very good to be with you this morning. Today as we continue worshiping the Lord, now through the Word of God, I invite you to go ahead and turn to Acts 21. If you have a Bible, or device, or one of our Scripture journals – go ahead and look to Acts 21.

KIDS – Let me ask you – can you name someone that’s courageous? Anyone? Ok great. Now, can you name someone that’s foolish? Kids, what do you think is the difference between being courageous and being foolish? Let me give you an example – for Christmas for 3 of our kids – we built a skate ramp in the backyard. 3.5 – 4’ half pipe (and when I say we, I mean my good friend Patrick really did all the hard work). Now, would it be courageous or foolish of me to try and drop in on this skate ramp? Right, it’d be foolish. I haven’t ridden a skateboard in like 30 years, and I never ever dropped in.

But, for my kids that know how to skateboard (Dillon, Shawnkos and Alexa) – it’s not foolish because they have good balance and wear pads and most importantly know how to skateboard – for them it is courageous because it’s scary right?

What does this have to do with Acts 21 → well, where we pickup the story of Paul highlights the courage that he had in following what God had called him to do. For some, they’d have thought he was being foolish. But for Paul, he had the courage to follow what God had called him to, to complete the task that he had aligned his life with. It wasn’t foolish at all – his call was rooted in a **deep conviction** of what God had called him to – and **he wasn’t going to let anything come in his way. He really believed that the mission of God is UNSTOPPABLE!**

Picking up Paul’s story, right where we left it last week – remember Paul has given these final instructions to the elders from the Ephesian church – calling them to follow both his lifestyle and his teaching – knowing they wouldn’t see Paul again – they share this Gospel Goodbye

Read 20:36-38

³⁶ After he said this, he knelt down and prayed with all of them.³⁷ There were many tears shed by everyone. They embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ grieving most of all over his statement that they would never see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

They’re sharing a Gospel Goodbye – while they would have loved for Paul to stay with them – they and he knew the mission to which God had called them all to was more important than keeping Paul with them. In a similar way – when some of us left a longstanding church home to come and be a part of planting RCM – yes **very hard to say those Gospel Goodbyes** – but worth it. I’ll never forget sharing with our daughters about planting RCM – leaving the only church they had ever been a part of – they were in tears. Now, 3 years later, they’re thrilled at where God has our family – but nevertheless those Gospel Goodbyes are hard. And at times they may seem foolish to some.

But the **only way they make sense is if we believe the Gospel is real, and the mission is unstoppable.**

Continuing into Acts 21, it says:

READ 21:1-3

After we tore ourselves away from them, we set sail straight for Cos, the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² Finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we boarded and set

sail. ³After we sighted Cyprus, passing to the south of it,^[a] we sailed on to Syria and arrived at Tyre, since the ship was to unload its cargo there.

V1 – They tore themselves away – But they (Paul and Luke and the team) were absolutely convinced in what God had called them to. What may have seemed foolish to some, was necessary to Paul and his travel mates.

And see, when we are convinced of what God has called us to – affirmed in the word, and born out of our walk with Christ – we have to obey. Even though it may seem foolish to others – we have to obey – they had to obey.

They landed at Tyre – and set out looking for the church.

READ 21:4-6

⁴We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. ⁵When our time had come to an end, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives and children, accompanied us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to pray, ⁶we said farewell to one another and boarded the ship, and they returned home.

V4 –

- Stayed there 7 days – there was a practice of **hospitality**. Just as we've seen in other parts of the book of Acts – hospitality was a central outworking of the church. Not as you and I see hospitality (emphasis on the host), or even still as we view our homes as fortresses with front garages and back patios, with privacy fences as the best neighbors. No way – hospitality – as the Bible uses the word is love of strangers – where the needs of others are the most pressing issue.
- Through the Spirit – I think the best way to understand this is they knew there would be challenging days ahead for Paul (the Holy Spirit must have revealed that to them) – so they urged him not to go. We know the Holy Spirit doesn't contradict himself. And since the Holy Spirit called Paul to Jerusalem, he had to go.
- Even against his friends warning. What may have seemed foolish to outsiders, was rooted in a deep sense of what Paul had been called to do.

READ 21:7-9

⁷When we completed our voyage^[b] from Tyre, we reached Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸The next day we left and came to Caesarea, where we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. ⁹This man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

V8 – House of Philip – from **Enemies to Friends & Partners**

- Going back to Acts 6 – when there was a dispute over the daily distribution of food – the apostles enlisted the services of 7 men – Philip was one of them – remember these men were full of the Spirit and faith – enlisted to serve the church freeing the apostles to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer
- Philip was also a preacher and evangelist – one of the disciples that was scattered as a result of the persecution of the church by Paul.
- Now, Paul is staying with him.

- See the beauty of the Gospel here – that there was a time when Paul would have wanted to kill Philip and a time when Philip literally was running for his life because of Paul – now we see Paul relying on Philip the evangelist’s hospitality as Paul would continue his travel up to Jerusalem.

The next few verses Paul gets **another solemn warning**:

READ 21:10-14

¹⁰ After we had been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ He came to us, took Paul’s belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³ Then Paul replied, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

¹⁴ Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, “The Lord’s will be done.”

Paul knew that the road ahead of him (or better said the ocean ahead of him) wouldn’t be easy. The Holy Spirit had told him that trouble awaited on his journey. Jesus himself, when Paul was converted testified to Paul about the suffering he would endure. Now, the prophet Agabus acts out this prophecy about what was waiting for Paul.

Acting out of prophecy wasn’t uncommon in the Old Testament prophets:

- Ezekiel was instructed by God to lay on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days
- Isaiah walked around barefoot and naked for 3 years to indicate troubles that were coming to the people of Judah
- Maybe most notably of all, Hosea was instructed to take a wife with a questionable reputation.

Here Agabus acts out what is waiting for Paul. When you see belt, not leather with a nice buckle and holes – but instead a piece of fabric that was usually tied around the waist.

V12 – the all tried to get Paul to stay and not go. And hear me, you have to agree that their concern was from a posture of love for Paul. They didn’t want anything bad to happen to him. Even Luke and his travel companions tried to get Paul to not go to Jerusalem.

But **Paul knew what God had called him to**. And, yes it was a courageous move for him to go knowing what was waiting for him. But, the most foolish thing he could have done was to listen to his well intentioned friends trying to keep him safe.

In a similar way – each of us needs to know what God has called us to. And run to it as long and as hard as we can.

Illustration – What if they say no? Well, we’d plant the church anyway.

How do we decide between courageously following God’s will or foolishly following our own desires? Know what God has called you to → when we know what God has called us to, the foolish move is to avoid it! But how do we know?

- Start with the basics
 - What had God called every follower of Christ to? The Great Commission.
- Move from there
 - What does that look like for me and my family?
- Lean on the Scriptures
- Seek the counsel of others to pray with you, but check their motives and make sure they're trusting the Spirit.
- Count the cost – Luke 14:25-35

²⁵ Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?²⁹ Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce^[c] all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

 - **For Paul, there was nothing more important to him than following Jesus, and being faithful to what he had been called. Family, Training, Religion, Fame, Money – all of it was garbage compared to knowing and following Jesus.**
 - **Paul had discovered that Jesus is always worth it.**
- Trust that Jesus is always worth it
 - Mark 8:34-36
 - ³⁴ Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. ³⁶ For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?

For Paul – Jesus was all that he needed. We see this in V13 in his response. He’s ready to be chained and die for the purpose that God had called him to. Paul’s overwhelming desire of life was Jesus. Just give me Jesus. Because he knew that Jesus is always worth it. In Philippians, several years later after this event at Philip’s house, Paul would write it this way:

READ Philippians 3:7-8

⁷ But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ

THIS ONLY MAKES SENSE IF THE GOSPEL IS REAL, AND IT HAS CHANGED YOU COMPLETELY!

Jim Elliot – missionary to Ecuador – killed at 28 by the people he was seeking to share Jesus with wrote years earlier in his journal “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

