

4/28/24 - Acts 21:1-16 - "Risks and Rewards for Obedience"

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[0 : 00] The word today is Acts 21, verses 1 through 16. And when he had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Kos, and next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went abroad and set sail. And we had come in the sight of Cyphers, leaving it. On the left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre.

For there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit, they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

When our days there were ended, we departed and went on, our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city.

And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. We went on aboard the ship, and they returned home. We had finished the voyage from Tyre.

[1 : 15] We arrived at Tunnis, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. On the next day, we departed and came to Caesarea.

And we entered the house of Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?

I am ready not only to be in prison, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, he ceased and said, Let the will of the Lord be done.

[2 : 27] After these days, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Nathan of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we should lodge.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. The proverb that says, Trust in the Lord with all of your hearts and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. The emphasis of that proverb is the undercurrent of the text today.

As Paul is returning on his way to return to Jerusalem. And Paul is confident that God is leading him to Jerusalem.

He's very confident in that. And while everyone, even the narrator Luke, is equally as confident that God has not called Paul to do so.

- [3 : 36] There's tension in the passage. There's conflict in this passage. But a couple questions are probably going through our heads this morning.
- What do we do when we hear conflicting voices concerning God's will? What do we do? What do you do when God's leading does not match up to the supports and the blessings of other people around?
- How do we receive warnings even from God? Speaking through his people and count the cost as we progress in obedience.
- How do we separate defiance from devotion? All of these should be stirring through our head as people are trying to say, Paul, stop!
- Don't go to Jerusalem. And I believe after today's sermon, the emphasis of the text will reveal that every step we make in obedience comes with a cost attached to it.
- [4 : 48] But we will also see that cost is a worldly term. It's a worldly concept. Because with cost comes risk.
- And those ideas are worldly. With the power to quench God's plan and dry up the faith of God's people.
- In other words, the Lord Jesus bids Christians to follow him regardless of the cost by the power of the Spirit. And the reward of following him far outweighs any perceivable or conceivable cost or risk attached to it.
- And so for that, I titled this sermon Risks and Rewards for Obedience. Risks and Rewards for Obedience. We're going to break this up into two sections.
- We're going to develop the stop signs and then look at the response of Paul. Stop signs and then response. And the point we will discover based upon Luke's writing and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, what we will discover is that warnings serve to deepen our faith.
- [6 : 09] Warnings serve to deepen our faith. And our faith makes us obediently follow God. Amen. We're going to see that today and discover that together.
- Let's pray before we consider a few different perspectives of this conflict and these questions. Please join me in prayer. Father, thank you for your word.
- Something so true, infallible, inerrant, sufficient, all authority. Father, help us to come under your word today.
- Under your word. And as we go under and dive and humble ourselves under your word, may you also raise us up in faith and help us to rise with confidence and bold assurance of our salvation today and your leading.
- And we praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And so the first of the two sections, let's look at some stop signs here. And so we see the first section, the danger of chasing safety.
- [7 : 18] And we see this from verse 1 all the way to verse 12. Let's see a little bit of urgency unravel in verse 1 through 3. Look at the urgency here.
- In your own Bibles, nothing's on the screen. Just look in your word. 1 through 3. Paul is on the move. All these locations from this place to this place.
- And might we say that there seems to be a little bit of urgency in this as he's on the move. From Kos to the, what, next day to Rhodes.
- And he even got sick of waiting for a ship and he switched ships in verse 2 to Phoenicia. I mean, he's, he's boom, boom, boom.
- He's on the way to Jerusalem. Until finally they landed in Tyre and remained there for a week. No ships to be found and so his ship unloaded their cargo.

[8 : 18] You see, Paul is moving very quickly as we learned the last couple weeks that he wants to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost.

And it seems like everything in and around his life is saying don't do it. Is this a good idea? Right? And in verse 4 we see, and having sought out the disciples, in Tyre, he stayed there for seven days.

And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Looking upon verse 4, the opportunity arose for the disciples through the Spirit.

It's not their opinion. Through the Spirit there's inspiration here. There's a divine encounter here. telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

And the warning even from the Lord through the Spirit did not restrain Paul from staying upon his course to Jerusalem. In verse 5-6, after a week of warning, you can imagine every day waking up, Paul, you're still not thinking about going to Jerusalem.

[9 : 39] You can see them at the breakfast table eating. You're not. That's in the past, right? You're staying with us. We'll build a church here. Come on, Paul. Well, stayed the course.

A week after warning, the disciples in Tyre prayed for Paul and said farewell. On that beach scene in verse 6 as Paul boarded the ship once again.

And on he went. On to more urgency. We see from Tyre to one day in Ptolemaeus packing up and arriving at Caesarea to fill up the evangelist's home.

And this is where the narrative unpacks even further with stop signs. There were all seven of them the text mentions. A completion of number.

And with four unmarried daughters who prophesied, who had a gift of prophecy, who were pure, reliable, trustworthy sources.

[10 : 43] You see, after many days in verse 10 of staying there, I would imagine the discussions got deep, authentic. He's there for a while, right?

Many days. Not a week. Probably a couple weeks. And I would imagine the discussions got very, very deep. They started, Paul started opening up about his fears of what might come in the future if he makes it to Jerusalem.

And Paul was probably scared, opened up, and sought the support of friends just like any of us would when we're going down life's journey. And look at me.

I'm going to break down and slow down a little bit on verse 10. Look with me. We were staying there for many days. A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. In verse 11, and coming to us, remember Luke is in this too.

He's sitting there writing stuff down. Coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, thus says the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 49] This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. In verse 12, when we, even Luke, heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

If the urging from the disciples in Tyre didn't bring fear to Paul to make him stop, certainly the words of Agabus, I mean, this is the real deal. He came down and he even used a sermon illustration, took his own belt and wrapped him up like a pretzel and said, this is going to happen to you if you go.

And the response of all of those in the evangelist's home would certainly do it. That should have been convincing. But I've got to stop for a minute and ask a question.

What are we to do with verses like verse 4 and verse 11, the stop signs from everyone around, but in your heart you know that you're on the right path.

John Stott helps us and he says we should draw a distinction between a prediction and a prohibition. Agabus simply predicted what would happen.

[13 : 18] The conclusion Paul's friends made based on the information weren't infallible. They were human deductions, he says. In other words, the warning was divine while the urgings were human.

The warning caused fear, anxiety, turmoil within God's people. Oh no, this is going to happen. But Paul continued on as we read this morning.

There is a difference between defiance and devotion. Paul was devoted to the Lord. He paid attention to divine urgings of God and the stop signs God has provided.

Did he not in Acts chapter 16, 6 all the way through 10? He was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia and they attempted to go to Bithynia, sorry, tongue-tie, but the Spirit of Jesus, what, did not allow them to go there and speak to the Lord and then came the vision of Macedonia, the guy in his dream saying, come help.

And so you see, it's certainly theological, theologically true that our human deduction and spiritual deduction may compel us to speak boldly into a situation like this is not a good idea, right?

[14 : 47] But none of our deductions can ever be viewed as divine, as an end-all, be-all. From a human perspective, it's pretty easy to conclude that Paul might be making a mistake.

I mean, he can't even wait for a ship to unload and he's jumping to another ship. He's there, he's here, he's there, he's everywhere. It's like, where in the world is Paul?

Right? He's on this track and nobody can stop and he's in a hurry. Seems like he might be being irresponsible. And the majority agree that the future looks dangerous and it even looks risky.

But when has God's plans ever unfold? folded without risk. Since when have we chased safety?

You see, obedience often occurs when faith rises over fear. And we ought to feel the weight of fear. Fear is real.

[15 : 59] Consequence is real. Risks are real. But only to deepen our faith. Right? Faith in God to guide us through and down the valley of the shadow of death as Psalm 23 encourages us.

Don't chase safety, friends. Don't chase safety. Never forget the cost of salvation has called each and every one of us to die to ourself.

To die to this world. Maybe for some today that's the very reason for our reluctance to surrender. We'll give God maybe 95% if we want to be a little generous of our lives, right?

But that 5%, eh. Right? Maybe that's why today some of us are reluctant to surrender. that there's too much risk in following God.

Too much cost to surrender in salvation. Well, the text today challenges us and asks us, will we follow God regardless of the cost?

[17 : 21] And you don't need to be headed to Jerusalem facing being bound up like a pretzel with Paul to experience something like this. This applies in many different aspects of our lives that require a leap of faith over fear.

It could be your work of changing employers or jobs. It could be of choosing a career field. It could be a move that your family is in of uprooting yourself.

You have all these memories of rocking your child as a baby in this home, but you know that God is calling you to something else. Or maybe even reconciling with friends, wondering how it might be received, or maybe even beginning new ministry endeavors.

Has God called you to pastoral ministry and you are reluctant because you have fear of speaking in front of people? Or doubt yourself?

Will you follow God regardless of the cost? The second section kind of gives you a response of all these stop signs.

[18 : 30] And the section is titled Answering Fear by Responding in Faith. And we see that from verse 12 through 16. No, 13 through 16. And it says, then Paul answered after being bound up.

I don't know if he was still bound at this time. I mean, that would be a sight on the floor bound up. And Paul answered them. But whatever it looks like, he said, what are you doing?

Weeping and breaking my heart? Sounds like a country love song in this translation. Something's missing in translation with our English.

But you should be able to see what he's saying. What are you doing? Weeping and crushing my heart. Destroying it.

Pulverizing it. He says, for I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 44] Jesus. Can you imagine what Luke is describing here? Weeping, like grieving the loss of Paul before he's even bound up or dead.

Don't do this, Paul. Agabus just came down from Judea to warn you. Look at you, you're tied up like a pretzel.

This is dangerous. remain with us and stay safe. But the most unsafe place for God's people is in disobedience.

We learn that in our series of 1 Samuel, similar to the words of Samuel to disobedience, Saul says in chapter 15, verse 22, has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams. See, Paul doesn't care about the danger.

[21 : 04] He cares about obeying God's will regardless of the cost. After all, following Jesus comes at quite a cost. And sometimes God likes to remind us of that.

Amen? But to choose another path as a response of fear is more dangerous than any threat that brings the fear.

fear. And so the narrator resolves in verse 14. And since he would not be persuaded, Agabus is scratching his head, well, there's nothing more I can do for you, Paul.

Good luck. It says in verse 14, we ceased and said, let the will of the Lord be done. See, sometimes it takes risk for us to be broken down on our knees.

Sometimes it takes fear to be broken down upon our knees to pray just as Jesus Christ prayed in the garden on the night he was betrayed.

[22 : 14] Not my will but yours be done. Luke mentions multiple times in his gospel of the dire situation that faced Jesus Christ's future in Jerusalem.

It's in chapter 9, chapter 13, chapter 18, chapter 19, all pointing to Jesus Christ predicting his suffering, saying something along these lines.

So we are going up, Luke writes in Luke's gospel in Luke 18, we are going up to Jerusalem. Everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.

For he will be handed over to the Gentiles and he will be mocked, insulted, spit on, and after they flog him, they will kill him and he will rise on the third day.

The fear of the future caused Peter to put the stop sign up to Jesus, which ended in a rebuke of Peter. And like many of the Christians here in Acts 21, trying to persuade Jesus to avoid such pain, but Jesus Christ marched on in obedience to God's will and praise God that he did.

[23 : 36] Because Jesus Christ did die, but victory over death counted to three, and he rose.

praise God also that Paul remained faithful to God's will too.

And we'll see more develop as he works his way to Rome. Ultimately, his sights are on Rome. But what a process for God's people to humble themselves of fear as the narrator resolves the tension in verse 15 and 16.

And it asks us in the passage today, are you one step behind Jesus? Are you one step behind Jesus?

Are you willing to go wherever he leads, leaning only upon the strength that he provides, keeping your eyes fixed solely upon him?

[24 : 42] God's we're reminded of Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

may the Lord help us all to understand that obedience requires a firm conviction of truth that's rooted in our faith.

May we remember that. And maybe you're here and you're just on the borderline of faith in Jesus, you've attended church, maybe this is the first time and you just know that God is speaking to possibly your own disobedience in your life today.

Maybe your faith is the missing variable to fully surrender to God this morning. You can't fathom the things that you will need to surrender in your life to Jesus Christ.

And the change in your life that is required of you to follow him faithfully, you're counting the cost and you're freaked out. And so you lose your faith with hold faith.

[26 : 10] Well, may your faith be firmly rooted in the reward, forgiveness of sin, triumphs over any struggle or fear that we may face in what God requires of us.

May your faith be firmly rooted in the reward, not the risk. And as we collectively die to ourselves, as the whole church body can say, we know that our death precedes us rising in victory with Jesus Christ.

We know death is not the end. It looks like the end from this world. It looks like the final cost that we pay in this life, but it's a cost that we have been grafted into by our faith, forgiveness of sin, and at our death we are assured that just as Jesus Christ rose, we will rise in victory with them.

Nothing in this life can steal that glory. May we answer fear by responding in faith. You see, warnings serve to deepen our faith, does it not?

And our faith makes us obediently follow God. This reminds us all that we are called to love Jesus Christ the most, even over our own lives.

[27 : 30] less people pleasing, and more Jesus pleasing. We are Christians, and we must be prepared to say with Paul, I am ready to die for the name of Jesus Christ.

Are you not a Christian? You see, our lives, security in the stuff are indeed gifts from God.

But how many times we make gods out of our gifts? Do you treasure the Lord supremely as the gift giver, as the Lord of the gifts?

Lord over your workplace, your family, your home, your well-being? need to be. We could reflect on numerous circumstances together where life would have been drastically different if had not faith triumphed over fear.

And for one, personally with me, I would not be your pastor today had I listened to the urgings and the warnings back in 2012 when I felt God calling me to ministry. Had I not listened to the Lord over the voices at my previous ministry job, paid staff, everything, fluffy job, working for the Lord to quit and to volunteer in youth group here back in 2016.

[29 : 10] We could go on and on of numerous circumstances together and sit around and share about how drastically our lives would look so different if fear triumphed over our faith. So this is also a reminder that valuable input. While I didn't disregard the urgings of my family saying, you know, ministry is not, you're not going to make a lot of money in ministry. I mean, some do, but you know, you're probably not. Or the friends in 2016, right?

We need to honor and we are reminded of the value of input into our lives to help us discern God's will, but we must never mistakenly receive urgings and replace it with God's will.

And I was not saying to ignore all, to defiantly just steamroll over anybody like King Saul may have did in his life. Paul certainly listened to the counsel of others. I'm sure he had open ears to all the warnings. He probably was like, this is getting real agabus. I'm tied up like a pretzel.

This ain't good. I could remain safe here. I doubt he steamrolled over all his friends like a Jesus tank shooting all of them down. And there's many Proverbs we have to remember that encourage the value of heeding godly counsel. And every Christian ought to seek godly counsel. We should.

Why? Because that helps us count the cost. And what do we do when we count the cost? It deepens our faith in God's will when we do. Remember Proverbs 3, 5 through 6.

[31 : 03] Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

Are you one step behind Jesus? Let's pray.