

Committed No Matter the Cost

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Pastor Mike Scrivani teaches on Acts 21, verses 1-16.

We're continuing in our study of Acts, and we've made it to chapter 21. And tonight we're going to cover verses 1-16.

So if you remember, Paul is headed towards Jerusalem, and he has been warned, or I should say prepared by the Holy Spirit, that once he gets there, persecution awaits.

He's not quite sure what that's going to look like or what all that's going to entail, but he's heading towards Jerusalem, he's heading towards that, and that's where we find him in Acts 21, verses 1-16.

And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Kos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

[1:11] And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed to Syria, and later 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.

Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemaeus, 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.

[2:29] 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?

For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, Let the will of the Lord be done. 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 Nason of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we should lodge.

On April 14th, 1521, Martin Luther was on his way, and it looks like if you read the words, this council, this meeting, it looks like we want to say the diet of worms, and that's wrong.

It's the diet of worms. You've got to sound like a German person when you say that. A diet of worms is gross. A diet of worms is where Martin Luther made his stand for what he taught.

[3:35] So there at the diet of worms, the emperor had forbidden the sale of Martin Luther's books and ordered them all to be seized.

At this point in his life, Martin Luther was in danger. He had challenged the Catholic Church's erroneous teachings and their use of indulgences.

And so a close friend of his, a confidant, sent a message to him warning him not to come to this council. Don't come to worms lest he suffer the same fate as a man named John Huss.

John Huss was martyred in 1415 by the Catholic Church for his opposition to transubstantiation, the belief that the Catholic Church had and still has, that the bread and the wine and communion actually becomes the blood and the body of Christ.

And so he challenged that erroneous teaching, and he also exposed the sins of the priests. He exposed the hoaxes that they would play on their parishioners and how they would just cheat these people often out of their money.

[4:54] And so John Huss was invited to attend the Council of Constance, and he was promised that he would have safe passage. They wouldn't arrest him.

They wouldn't kill him, that he was safe to come there, and he would be safe to leave. That's what they told him. However, as soon as he got there, he was arrested, and he spent several months in prison, eventually being burned at the stake.

So Luther's friend feared that the same fate awaited him. Luther's reply to his friend's warning, though Huss was burned, the truth was not burned, and Christ still lives.

I shall go to Worms, though there were as many devils as tiles on the roofs. On April 16th, Luther entered Worms in a two-wheeled cart preceded by an imperial herald.

Although it was the dinner hour, a time when most people were in their homes, everybody came out to witness his arrival in the city. About 2,000 people were present when he came into town.

[6:01] And then on the following day, at 4 o'clock, Luther stood before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who ruled over a vast empire, was a very powerful ruler, man at this point, who was a strong defender of Catholicism, especially against the Protestant Reformation.

So he was not a friend of Martin Luther's. Most men in such a case would be intimidated to stand before such a powerful man who was opposed to everything that they taught, wrote, and was doing. After an exchange between the Archbishop of Tyre, Johann Eck, and Martin Luther, Luther, overwhelmed by the immensity of what he was doing and the stance that he was taking, requested, and received the night to spend in prayer.

And then he'd come back the next day. Luther, his prayer was recorded. How frail and sensitive is the flesh of men and the devil so powerful and active through his apostles and the wise of the world. O thou, my God, my God, help me against the reason and wisdom of all this world. Do this. Thou must do it. Thou alone. For this cause is not mine, but thine.

[7:26] For myself, I have no business here with these great lords of the world. Indeed, I too desire to enjoy days of peace and quiet and to be undisturbed. But thine, O Lord, is this cause, and it is righteous and of eternal importance.

Stand by me, thou faithful, eternal God. I rely on no man. O God, stand by me in the name of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, who shall be my protector and defender, yea, my mighty fortress through the might and strengthening of thy Holy Spirit.

on the next day, April 18th, in a large room before a large crowd, the meeting convened with Johan Eck saying, Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture?

Would you put your judgment above all, above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy, orthodox faith instituted by Christ, the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us an inheritance in which now we are forbidden by the Pope and Emperor to discuss lest there be no end of the debate.

I ask you, Martin, answer candidly, without horns. Do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain? Martin Luther replied, Since then, your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply.

[9:08] I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture in plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other.

My conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant of anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

Luther knew God's word and he trusted God's will. Whether he lived or died, he was determined that he would declare the truth.

And he had the example, obviously, of our Lord, Jesus Christ to set his face to Jerusalem, determined to do the will of the Father, which meant going to the cross to atone for our sins.

Luther also had the example of the Apostle Paul, who following, again, our Lord's example, also set his face towards Jerusalem, knowing that trouble awaited him there.

[10:18] So again, just to recap, last week, we finished Acts chapter 20. There, Paul spends his last moments in the area of Ephesus with the Ephesian elders, encouraging them and equipping them.

They had a tearful farewell, knowing this would be the last time that they would see each other face to face. And then, now in chapter 21, Paul's journey to Jerusalem continues.

Paul was completing his mission to deliver funds that he had collected from the Gentile churches in Asia Minor and in Greece, which he was going to distribute to the poor believers who comprised the church in Jerusalem.

And they were poor because, if you remember, they had faced a lot of persecution. And on the day of Pentecost, a lot of them were traveling from outside of town for Passover, and then Pentecost happens, the Holy Spirit comes, they're saved, and they don't want to leave because now they're a part of the church.

And so there was a lot of needs that that church had which this offering was going to be used to meet. Also, Paul's goal, I think, in this was to solidify, to unite the church in Jerusalem with the Gentile churches.

[11:37] As Paul makes his way towards Jerusalem in Acts 21, again, we hear about these repeated warnings that are increasingly made about the trials, about the suffering that awaits him in Jerusalem.

There were times when Paul heeded such warnings and he changed his plans. Sometimes it was the Holy Spirit who prevented him from going to a place.

However, in this moment, he understood that it was God's will for him to make this journey. Acts 20, verses 22-24, again, Paul told the Ephesian elders, and now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself if only I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul's devotion to Jesus, his desire to serve his master, compelled him to dismiss the concerns of others as he committed himself to obey God's will.

[12:59] So the main idea that we see from this text tonight is that our commitment to Christ must prevail over our fear of what obedience may cost us.

As believers, our commitment to Christ must prevail over our fear of what obedience to the Lord might cost us. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks his disciples who they believed that he was.

And if you remember, Peter, as he was prone to do, speaks up and he says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And remember, Jesus praises him for his correct answer, for this knowledge that he had received from the Holy Spirit and his bold assertion of the truth of Jesus' identity.

Verse 21 says, Matthew 16, 21 through 23 says, from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must, so this is right after this bold confession of Peter, from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to me for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[14:30] And then after saying that, Jesus told his disciples about the price that came with following him in Matthew 16, 24-25. Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

So as we have heard here, as we read in the rest of scripture, living for Christ means that we die to this world. It means obeying the Lord knowing that our obedience will put us in conflict with the world.

Maybe you're in a place right now where obeying the Lord may cost you a relationship by confronting someone's sin, maybe hurting the feelings of someone you love by speaking the truth to them.

Maybe obeying the Lord for you right now means dismissing the concerns of those who you love as was the case for Paul in our text. The truth we learn from the example of Jesus and Paul his servant is that our commitment to Christ must prevail over our fear of what obedience may cost us because there is better reward for doing God's will than trying to preserve our comfort and safety in a world that will one day perish.

And so we see three principles in this passage to help us stay committed to Christ when obedience is costly. The first principle comes from verses one through six.

[16:16] Pursue God's purpose by pressing on through difficulty. Pursue God's purpose by pressing on through difficulty. So here Acts 21 opens with a reminder of just how emotional Paul's farewell was with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

There again we read and when he had parted from them and set sail we came to the straight course to Kos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara.

The Greek word translated here as parted means to tear away to rip away. This reminds me of a mother dropping off her child for the first time maybe at school or maybe in the nursery at church. If you've been in one of those been the parent or been the one trying to get the child from the parent you know that there's a lot of tears being shed. The little one does not want to be taken from usually mom and so you know it's just this being pulled away while they're still reaching for mom and sometimes it's the other way around isn't it?

Sometimes mom is the one who needs to be tore away from the little one. Anyhow there's trauma in this party. Paul had to tear himself away from his friends who didn't want him to go but Paul knew that to stay meant that he would be disobeying God's will for his life.

[17:52] He continues his journey to Jerusalem sailing from port to port. He was in a bit of a hurry because he wanted to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost so he decided to at this point risk crossing the Mediterranean Sea rather than staying close to the coast so he found a ship that would get him to his destination in a more quicker time frame.

We read about that in verses 2-3 and having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia we went aboard and set sail when we had come in sight of Cyprus leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

So the unloading of the ship's cargo the preparation of the ship then after that for it to sail again took seven days and so Paul and his companions they have seven days and instead of you know sitting on the beach and just relaxing what did they do?

They found believers they sought out believers in Tyre verse 4 it says 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 so again Paul here seeks out other believers and no doubt during that time that he had with them he would have done what was typical of him which was to teach them and to disciple them and to encourage them in their faith when it came time for him to go these believers urged Paul to stay they're urging him to stay we read Luke tells us was through the spirit now this creates a dilemma for us doesn't it on the one hand Paul is compelled by the spirit to go to Jerusalem on the other hand we have these believers telling Paul through the spirit not to go so is Paul being commanded by the holy spirit through these believers not to go to Jerusalem and if so is his going going to mean that he's disobeying God well I don't think Paul was being disobedient here I believe what happens here is the Holy Spirit informs these believers of the trials that await Paul in Jerusalem but that didn't mean Paul's going was against God's will they're urging Paul not to go was motivated by their love for him they knew it was going to happen and they didn't want him to go and experience that John MacArthur gives a few reasons why Paul was not sinning on this occasion first he says Paul lived a life sensitive to the Spirit's leading when forbidden by the Spirit to preach in certain regions

[20:54] Paul did not disobey Acts 16 6 through 7 is an example of that that long-term pattern he says of obedience makes it unlikely that he was disobedient in this matter second Paul described his mission to Jerusalem as the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus in Acts 20 24 how could the Holy Spirit forbid Paul from doing what the Lord Jesus had commanded him to do further Acts 19 21 records that Paul proposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem while in Acts 20 22 the apostle describes himself as bound in the Spirit on my way to Jerusalem he was compelled his innermost being by the the scriptures nowhere suggest that Paul sinned by going to Jerusalem after he got there he declared in Acts 23 1 I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day it is difficult to see how he could have said that if he had just flagrantly sinned

against

God so what's happening here in Tyre is that the! again there had received understanding from the Holy Spirit that Paul would face persecution in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit was preparing Paul for what awaited him in Jerusalem but was not prohibiting Paul from going there however because these believers loved Paul they didn't want him to go because they knew that he would suffer there in verses 5 through 6 Luke records when our days there were ended we departed and went on our journey and they all with wives and children accompanied us until we reached until we were outside the city and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and said farewell to one another then we went on board the ship and they returned home and so here we have another emotional and difficult farewell Paul knew that these believers loved him staying would have been easier!

God's will prevailed over whatever concerns they had or he might have had or that anyone else had about the difficulties that awaited him in Jerusalem so now we come to the second principle prepare to face opposition from those who mean well prepare to face opposition from those who mean well verses 7 through 12 look at verses 7 and 8 again when we had finished the voyage from Tyre we arrived at Ptolemaeus 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 we stayed with him Philip was one of the seven faithful men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to serve as deacons in distributing the food to the widows in Acts 6 5 through 6 Philip was also called by the Lord to serve as an evangelist in Acts chapter 8 verse 5 he preached the gospel in Samaria and other nearby cities Acts 8 40 Philip was then the pioneering preacher to non-Jews first to the Samaritans and then to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 26 Philip is the only person in the book of Acts who has the title of evangelist verse 9 says he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied Luke doesn't indicate whether these women prophesied once or more than once a person who prophesied in the Bible received a specific message from God usually for a specific person or a specific situation in the

Old Testament we have female prophets prophetess however you say that Miriam the sister of Aaron and Moses was called a prophetess in Exodus 15 20 Deborah was another prophetess in Judges 4 4 Huldah was a prophetess during the time of King Josiah's reign in the New Testament Anna is called a prophetess in Luke 2 36 37 if you remember when Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus into the temple Anna immediately recognized who Jesus was that he was the Messiah and she gave thanks to God for him again Luke doesn't say what prophecy Philip's daughters gave or how often they would prophesy he doesn't mention any prophecy here in this text we must always be using scripture to interpret scripture women had and still have a very important role in the church during the time of the apostles as the

[26 : 25] New Testament was being written and collected as the gospel was spreading the Holy Spirit gave some men and women the gift of prophecy specific messages to specific people or situations at a specific time however it's clear in scripture that Paul commanded men to serve as the primary teachers in the church 1st Timothy 3 2 Titus 3 15 set out the qualifications for elders who are to be men in 1st 2 12 Paul prohibits women from assuming the role of preaching and teaching men in the church and the gift of prophecy as we see it in the New Testament has ceased it served its purpose and now with the collection of scripture that we have that gift has ceased!

It served a purpose for that time and in that place Paul does not refer to prophets at all in any of his last letters to Timothy he tells Timothy to evaluate men qualified to serve as elders men who are able to teach God's word again Luke mentions that Philip's daughters prophesied but not here in Acts 21 but he does record the prophecy of a man named Agabus in verses 10 through 11 there again it says while we 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 this is not the first time Agabus appears in Acts we met him for the first time in Acts chapter 11 verse 28 there he prophesied about a great famine which prompted the disciples to send relief to the believers living in Judea here he appears again with another prophecy and this prophecy is a visual demonstration of what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem and in the Bible this is not the first time a prophecy was given through the use of a visual aid Ezekiel for example made a clay model of Jerusalem and set up a military miniature camp around it foretelling the Babylonian siege he also was commanded to lie on his left side for 390 days to bear the sins of Israel and then 40 days on his other side for Judah during that time

also he as a visual aid to warn the people of what was to come he ate bread that was baked over dung and he drank small measures of water to demonstrate the famine and captivity of God's people Jeremiah bought a linen belt remember that story a pristine linen belt he wore it then he hid it in the crevice of a rock later he came back and dug it up and it was useless! illustrating how God would ruin the pride of Judah and Israel for their sin and those are just a few of many other examples recorded in scripture through a visual dramatization I promise you I'm not a big fan of visual dramatization so don't worry about me taking your belt off or anything like that I think that kind of crosses the comfort zone for both me and for you but anyhow this was a warning or just a reminding Paul preparing him for what awaited him in Jerusalem and the opposition that he would face there verse 12 says when we heard this we and the people then urged him not to go up to Jerusalem notice here that Luke says we including himself and his other traveling companions the men who were going with

[30 : 56] Paul who had been traveling with Paul and were going back with Paul to Jerusalem they joined the Christians in Caesarea urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem sometimes sometimes the opposition we face for doing God's will comes from God's own people Luke and the other Christians there certainly meant well I think Peter meant well when he forbid Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die because he didn't want Jesus to die I'm sure that you if you've walked with the Lord for a decent amount of time have faced similar opposition from believers who think that they have your best interest at heart by discouraging you from doing something you knew was

God's will for your life I have a couple of examples of that one was coming here I shared that story before it was very quick three months and I had a really good friend in ministry a pastor who was concerned about how quickly that was coming or DLM expressed the same concern you know are you sure about this it's very quick and they were worried for me going to India not that long ago for those of you who know my mother was concerned about me going to the other side of the world and being so far away and traveling and all that why would you want to go to India why wouldn't I want to go to India if that's where the Lord wants me to be so I'm sure you've probably faced the same kind of opposition from God's own people and they mean well but it's good to be prepared to know that that may happen however you must do what

God's commanded you to do even if you're in the case where Paul was it was just Paul and his close friends companions and other believers in the area there were trying to compel him not to go and ultimately the cross is the ultimate example of this truth that the disciples Peter they didn't want Jesus to go to the cross but we see the great good the ultimate good that was done by Jesus telling Peter in this moment get behind me Satan he came to do the will of his father and now third prioritize God's will over personal comfort prioritize God's will over personal comfort Paul's response to all this is recorded in verse 13 Paul answered what are you doing weeping and breaking my heart for I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in

Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus it would have been easier no doubt for Paul to have stayed or to take some kind of a detour but the Christian life doesn't come with an easy button you know that commercial I don't even know what they're advertising does staples okay did you I have one at home at two but I don't do you yeah I have one at home but I have to put batteries in Danny I think got it for like gold digger for free or something like that you know it be nice if you could just press the easy button but there is no easy button in life and there is no easy button when to pursue God's will and God's purpose for his life verses 14 through 16 says and since he would not be persuaded we ceased!

And we said let the will of the Lord be done! 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 Nason of Cyprus an early disciple with whom we should lodge!

[35 : 28] And so now I think the question for us to think about is how do we prioritize God's will for our lives over personal comfort? Looking at the example of Paul again he was sensitive God will never command you to do anything that contradicts his word the Holy Spirit will prompt you and use knowledge of God's word to instruct you to do what it says also Paul understood God's calling for his life he was an apostle to the Gentiles and he understood that this calling meant suffering remember what Jesus told Ananias whenever Paul met the Lord on the way to imprison believers in Damascus and he blinds him Jesus tells

Ananias go to Paul he's here I'm going to use him I'm going to save him he's going to be an apostle to the Gentiles remember Ananias is like what do you know who this guy is do you know what this

guy has done remember Ananias in Acts 9 16 of Paul go for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel in verse 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name Paul understood that God's calling on his life meant suffering for the gospel but it was a good kind of suffering right it's the best way to spend your life in service to the Lord complete devotion and obedience to the Lord's will and so also how can we do this by following the example of Paul is to trust that God is sovereign Paul believed God knew what he was doing at all times and all situations Romans 8 28 and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose and then I think maybe most importantly is that Paul knew that his life wasn't truly his life Philippians 121 for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain Paul's favorite title for himself was bond! slave a bond slave of Jesus Christ Jesus was his master and he was Jesus his slave to do whatever his master commanded him to do no matter what that cost might be because he was ready to die he was ready to lay down his life for the Lord if that was going to achieve God's purpose for his life to know God's will for you you need to read the Bible do what it says spend time regularly with God in prayer and you know what I've found to be the case often what you don't want to do is what Jesus wants you to do ever think about that I mean I don't want to do that and I wouldn't do it unless

I knew that it was what the Lord wants me to do so oftentimes the thing that we don't want to do we don't want to do it because we are afraid of the cost because we would rather be comfortable and oftentimes it's the thing that you don't want to do is what the Lord is calling you to do so resist your flesh be obedient and pray like Richard Baxter prayed he said Lord what thou wilt where thou wilt and when thou wilt you don't have to pray like that you could say Lord what you will where you will and when you will let's pray and let's pray that way bow your heads with me Lord thank you for this time that we've had to study your word to look at the life again of your servant the apostle Paul who followed your example going to

[40 : 04] Jerusalem knowing what awaited him there but Lord entrusting himself to you all the way knowing that whatever would happen would happen under your sovereign direction and that it would accomplish a greater good and Lord here we are seeing the great good that it accomplished and so Lord may we also be attentive to your spirits leading Lord may we know your word and be eager to apply it and Lord may it be our prayer as it was for Richard Baxter and so many others Lord whatever you will of us wherever you would will us to go and whenever you would have us to do that Lord I pray that our answer would be yes Lord and that we would do it willingly and that we do it for your glory because you are good and you are worthy in

Jesus name we pray Amen! I think I would use the example of my friends they were trying to give me godly counsel they weren't saying don't go I think they were trying to just have you thought about these other things and then in those moments I was able to say yes and here's all the things that have happened that have convinced me that this is what the Lord wants me to do ultimately if you've been in that spot where you know you know the Lord in the ways that he does has revealed to you this is what I want you to do this is where I want you to go when other people try to give you that counsel just say hey I appreciate it I really am thankful I know that you are sharing this with me because you love me and you want me to think about some things that maybe you're concerned that I haven't thought about however let me tell you these are the things that the Lord has done and is doing to reveal to me to convince me that this is where I should go to learn more visit us in person or see the website at