

When You Know, You Go (Acts 21:1-6)

Introduction

As we look into this next passage, Paul is set to return to Jerusalem, the completion of his 3rd Missionary Journey.

He has heard from God to return. He is certain of His voice and as we read in Acts 20:22, he is bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and verse 23 states that nothing but chains and tribulations await him.

We will see in this passage the faith of Paul to depart, his trust in God to provide, the test by God of Paul's faith, the renewal and refreshment of God and Paul's faith to persevere onward to Jerusalem. This passage will reveal a test that we all will go through as we are being sanctified.

"Will I follow God no matter what?" and "Am I certain I know His voice?"

Recap / Context

Before we go into the text, let us see where we were last week. Paul had sent for the elders of Ephesus to meet him in Miletus. He had a desire to encourage them before he sailed off to Jerusalem. Paul knew for certain this would be the last time he would be with them. His foresight to bring them together reveals Paul's constant awareness and devotion to God and the mission of the Church. Paul inspires them by showing them his call and passion.

(See Acts 21:20 and 20:24). In these passages Paul reminds the elders of the call on the believers, sharing his thoughts as an example; the imperative, that we must be selfless and totally surrendered to Jesus, and as guardians of the Truth, we must always share the entire Truth, just not the parts that may be becoming to the hearer.

We also can see in Acts 21: 28-31, that Paul is concerned to protect the Church. He reminds the elders of his constant warnings to them of the wolves who will seek to destroy in any way possible the fabric of God's Bride. Paul also reminds them of the words from Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", truly, a transformed attitude of the Christian.

Before Paul departs, we see an intense display of love and affection for Paul as the elders knelt down, wept and kissed Paul's neck after he prayed.

Now let's look at the sermon text. We will see first, the faith of Paul to depart and go toward Jerusalem. He knows he has heard from God.

Sermon Text: Acts 21:1-6

1. Acts 21: 1

Paul Sails from Miletus

21 When we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;

In this first verse, what I see is the absolute resolve in Paul to leave for Jerusalem. He has heard from the Spirit to go no matter that chains and tribulations wait him. (Acts 20:20-22). He is absolutely certain he has heard correctly from God. He could be tempted to stay where he has been effective to preach and teach the Gospel, loved by the brethren, and at that moment, safe from harm. But, he departs and boards a ship.

To me, this is a sweet display of faith, believing God and taking action (to depart).

Paul is certain of hearing from God. He has listened and obeyed God consistently. Paul is Spirit indwelt and surrendered. If we examine Paul's writings in Romans 12:1-2, we can see the prescription to hearing and knowing God's will.

12 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, [a]acceptable to God, *which is your* [b]spiritual service of worship. **2** And do not be conformed to this [c]world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may [d]prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

In this passage, one can see that a surrendered life to God and a devotion to renewing your mind through the Word will result in knowing God's will. Paul certainly knew that he had heard from God to go to Jerusalem no matter what. ("When you know, you go!")

Let's now look to the next few verses. Acts 21:2-4.5.

2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. **3** When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. **4** After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days;

So now here we will see not only does Paul trust God and departs as the Spirit has led, but he also trusts that if God called him that He too also will provide the means and supply his needs. In the verses above one can see the trusting of Paul to go, and his responsibility to seek. He seeks a ship to travel and also seeks disciples Tyre for lodging and fellowship. God faithfully provides Paul the means and provisions of traveling. It is a beautiful display again of Paul's certainty that he heard from God to go, his trusting in God to provide, and most of all, God's faithfulness to perform His will.

Ephesians 1:11 says that God works all things according to the counsel of His will. To me, there is no doubt that the ship's travelers and the disciples Paul stayed with were a select people God wanted Paul to touch with the Gospel and for them to impart something to Paul....." When you know, you go! "

So far we see that God calls, His people respond in faith and go, and if God has called, we can see He certainly will provide the means to accomplish His will. Now, we come to a part of the sermon text which I believe is the most important aspect God is revealing; that God will test us. We will see Paul will be tested to obey God despite the well-intended believers that try to dissuade him from his journey back to Jerusalem. It is an incredible test to see if Paul truly knows that he heard from the Spirit to go, because the

disciples in Tyre are telling Paul that they too have heard from the Spirit to warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. This is a true pickle, especially if you are not certain of God's voice.....This a real test of knowing God and obeying Him, a true challenge.Who truly heard correctly? ...Did they both hear correctly? ... Did both hear correctly but one misapply what they heard?... Did one party hear fully and the other partially?.....Did one not hear and claim they did ? All these are possible scenarios. Let's look and see what we know from the Scriptures and see how Paul responds.

Now first, let's look at the sermon text, Acts 4:21 and go from there.

4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul [a]through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

So here is the conflict, the disciples in Tyre are telling Paul continually that they heard from the Spirit and for Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul knows he has heard from the Spirit to go to Jerusalem...So what is it?

What do we know for sure: GOD CAN NOT CONTRADICT HIMSELF.

These passages can present challenges to all, even theologians. Let us look at the scriptures in totality and full context to glean what this supposed contradiction of scripture yields.

1. Paul has always shown an obedience to the Spirit. Never in the book of Acts do we see him depart from the direction of the Spirit. He waits, listens and obeys.

a. Acts 9:6. Saul (Paul) is met by Jesus on the road to Damascus and his response to Jesus is to ask Him "what do you want?"..... Saul responds with immediate obedience and goes to Damascus and await God's next direction. There is no resistance to God. He has met the Messiah and his life will now be the Lord's.

b. Acts 13:2. Here we see that the Spirit separates Paul and Barnabas for the work which He has called them. This is important because Paul has now been a Christian for at least ten-twelve years and has remained in Antioch. He has not ventured in his strength or by his good intentions to go elsewhere to share the Gospel. He waits for God's call and direction. Paul knows God's voice.

c. Acts 13:4. Here again we see Paul stay and wait until God speaks. "So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went.....". Paul does not go before the Spirit but only by His speaking and leading.

d. Acts 16:6. Here we see Paul obey the Spirit despite Paul's desire to preach the word in Asia. Paul has a desire to take the message to Asia, but the Spirit says "no". Does Paul do what he wants or does he obey God? Paul obeys the Spirit. This is Paul's calling and ultimate desire. I appreciate this place where Paul has a desire to do good in taking the Gospel to Asia, but God's ways always trumps man's good intentions. Paul obeys the Spirit.

e. Acts 16:7. Here in the very next verse we see the same thing. Paul wants to go to Bithynia to preach but the Spirit does not permit him. Paul obeys. This is a beautiful example of hearing God's voice, sensitive and alert to always be listening, and then submitting to God. This is truly the only place as Christians to be (in love with God, surrendered and faithful to His commands). What peace Paul had and we all can experience this place if we too love and obey God.

f. Acts 18:9-10. Here, Jesus speaks to Paul in a vision and tells him that he will be safe from danger to preach the word in Corinth. I bring this up to show how God warns us of danger as He did in Acts 20:23 and comforts us with the news of no danger. Paul hears. He knows God does what He says, for Paul was miraculously spared from danger in Corinth.

g. Acts 19:21. In this verse we see where Paul was first told to go to Jerusalem. "When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem....."

h. Acts 20:22. Here we now see the 2nd reference for Paul to go to Jerusalem. "Now, I am compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen there." (NIV).

i. Acts 20:23. Paul in the next verse now hears that nothing but chains and tribulations awaits him in Jerusalem.

So what we now see looking at all these verses is four things. 1. God speaks. 2. Paul hears. 3. God prepares us with warnings of danger and news of safety. 4. and no matter what ,even despite Paul's desires as seen in Acts 16:5-6 (previously mentioned above), is that Paul always has obeyed. He is certain of God's voice and that he is to go now to Jerusalem no matter the circumstance of danger.

He has heard, and consistently obeys God.

To give even further weight and fuller context to Paul hearing clearly from God, let's look at two more passages that gives bookends to what we have seen from the above texts. Also, let me remind, the test here is, did Paul hear from God correctly, for the conflict is that the disciples in Tyre say they heard from the Spirit also saying for Paul not to go to Jerusalem?

Let's look at these two passages.

a. Acts 21:10-11.

Acts 21:10-11 New International Version (NIV)

10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **11** Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

This passage comes in the next chapter (a bookend by the future) ; but what it shows is that the prophet specifically declares by the Spirit that Paul will be bound in Jerusalem.. A certainty. This is consistent to what we have just examined.

b. Acts 9:13-14.

Acts 9:15-16 New International Version (NIV)

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

This passage is relevant. It specifically details that Paul will proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles and to their kings. Up to this point, Paul has not testified of Jesus before any Gentile kings. After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem that we will soon see, he will testify before Roman governors and kings. His obedience to go to Jerusalem will facilitate the happening of that prophecy.

I want to stress a very important point however. If Paul would disobey God, God's purpose and will would not be thwarted. For nothing can thwart God's will. He will always accomplish His will. PRAISE GOD!!

Let's now review the test of Paul's faith. There are two aspects of this test; did Paul hear God correctly and will Paul go to Jerusalem despite the disciples of Tyre saying they heard a contrary message from the Spirit telling him not to go to Jerusalem.

Let's look at Acts 21:4 again that sets up this test/conflict.

Acts 21:4 New King James Version (NKJV)

4 And finding disciples, [a] we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

In review, we know these facts:

1. God does not contradict Himself
2. Paul has consistently obeyed God no matter the circumstances or his personal desire up to this point as recorded in the book of Acts.
3. The prophet Agabus was specific that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem.

4. The verses in Acts 19 and 20 are clear that the Spirit has directed Paul to go to Jerusalem.

With this detail analysis in full context , I believe that not only did Paul hear correctly but also submit that the disciples in Tyre heard the same thing that Paul heard in Acts 20:23 and what Agabus stated in Acts 21:11-12. They all heard the same thing; WARNING from the Spirit that chains and tribulations await Paul in Jerusalem.

I believe that the disciples in Tyre heard, as well, from the Spirit the same message of danger for Paul in Jerusalem. They heard a warning BUT not a PROHIBITION to go to Jerusalem as they stated. I believe they sincerely but wrongly misapplied the Spirit's message. They mistook the Warnings that lies ahead for Paul in Jerusalem as a command by the Spirit NOT TO GO. They, I believe, had good-hearted, loving intentions for Paul. But as we all can misapply or misinterpret Scriptures, I believe that this is what happened here. They were concerned of Paul's safety. They went a step further and took the warning of danger in Jerusalem as a directive from the Spirit to forbid Paul to go. I believe they concluded on their own that the intention. This is understandable. What is so important is that God does not always call us to safety and self-preservation but to danger. God has reasons for Paul to go to Jerusalem. God was warning Paul so he can prepare himself for this upcoming journey and know God is with him. What a test for Paul. This is the remarkable place that Paul is in; loving Brothers telling him they heard from the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem and Paul confident he heard from God to go. A true test: stay or go?

"When you know you go!"

I believe there are some meaningful applications from this passage in Scripture:

1. Well intended Christians may give opinions or advice that is from their soul perspective and not from the Spirit. We need to be very careful who we ask and test what they say with the Word and the Spirit's revelation.
2. Be aware God can and will often call us in places that we naturally may not want to go. These are places of persecution. These are places of testing and even more to display the Glory of God. When His children walk into adversity, others see the witness of God in us and that He is worthy of our love and faithful obedience.
3. Let each of us be careful not to give hasty, un-prayed through responses to those who seek our spiritual guidance.

4. And most importantly, for us to know God's voice. We will be tested.

There are some examples in the Bible where good intended men spoke what seemed to be Godly goodhearted advice but was totally ungodly, from the flesh, the concerns of man, and not at all from God.

1. In Job, we see three friends that came to mourn and comfort Job in his misery. They then proceeded to give advice that seemed godly but was not at all from God. In fact God's anger was stirred against them.

2. In 1 Chronicles 17:1-4, we see the prophet Nathan told King David to "do all that is in your heart, for God is with you." This was in regards of David wanting to build the Temple for God. Nathan encouraged David to build the Temple and even stated God is with you on this. This is the same Nathan that went to David about his sin with Bathsheba. God immediately spoke to Nathan afterwards telling Nathan to tell David not to build the temple. We see here a good intended man trying to give positive news that was not from God, but from the flesh and will of man.

3. This last example again shows how a Godly man who gets it all wrong despite, I believe in this case, are good intentions. Matthew 16:21-23.

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

This example really parallels closely to Paul being Christ-like. Jesus says He must go to Jerusalem and His disciple telling Him not to go. Peter was likely caring for His safety or perhaps wanting Jesus to stay with him. For whatever reason, Jesus sharply rebukes Peter for having no concern for God's will but for man's concerns. In this case with Paul, we see similarly the disciples telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem because there is danger. What does Paul do? He goes to Jerusalem. He knows God's voice and His will.

"When you know, you go!"

As we continue with the text, we have seen three things: 1. Paul demonstrates faith by departing to Jerusalem. (He hears God and obeys), 2. God provides as Paul goes forward with God's mission (the faithfulness of God to His will) and 3. God will test his children to see if they have heard correctly and will follow no matter what.

Paul has passed the test. Now, we will see in the next verse the renewing and refreshing of God for Paul and the disciples of Tyre.

Acts 21:5 New King James Version (NKJV)

5 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, till *we were* out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Paul now has come to the end of his seven day stay with the disciples in Tyre. For Paul, this must have been a refreshing time of fellowship with believers he likely had never met before. It is an amazing thing to witness the unity and instant acceptance we as Christians have throughout the world because of our Baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Jesus Christ. Paul experienced this supernatural acceptance and unity in Tyre. For the saints in Tyre, this must have been special for them as well. No doubt, Paul was well known throughout the region as an Apostle and former persecutor of the Church. They would have learned of Paul's many experiences of persecution for preaching the Gospel. They likely would have seen his scars from beatings as well as heard of the many miracles of God. Paul certainly strengthened their faith and showed them how as believers we will suffer for the name of Jesus.

As we see in this verse, the disciples and their entire families including wives and children escorted Paul out of town and to the shore before departure on the ship that would take him closer to his journey's end to Jerusalem. This is significant to me, for it shows two things; the love that was there for one another and that they had come to trust that Paul was truly lead by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem despite the danger that was awaiting him. For if they believed that Paul was a hyper-religious zealot totally disobedient to the Spirit, I do not believe they would have escorted a rebellious saint to

the edge of town with their entire families. In fact, what we see next is a beautiful display of unity as they all kneel and pray on the beach as Paul readies to depart. What a special time of refreshment and renewal for Paul before he is about to continue to Jerusalem. What a beautiful display of Christ-likeness in Paul, as he follows the example of Jesus who went to Jerusalem before His crucifixion, despite being aware of the danger.

As we conclude by looking at the last verse (Acts 21:6), we see that Paul boards the ship and goes toward Jerusalem and the believers of Tyre return home. Paul continues. I can imagine perhaps the temptation for Paul to not board the ship. After all he could have listened to the disciples and felt justified not to move forward into danger, after all they said they had heard from the Spirit for Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul could have stayed or gone to another town to preach and encourage other churches in the region, wouldn't that have been a GOOD thing? But no, Paul has heard the voice of God and his desire is to obey God no matter what just as Jesus obeyed the Father and went to the cross. Paul perseveres by the power of God and for his glory and in doing so has inspired not only the saints of Tyre but all of us who read this and who love Jesus.

These six verses in Acts 21 seem to be just a narrative of Paul's travel, but what we see is so much more. In review, we see 1. God speaks to Paul by His Spirit, 2. Paul demonstrates faith by departing for Jerusalem no matter the warning of danger, 3. God provides all of Paul's needs (if God calls, He will provide), 4. Paul is tested by believers who try to dissuade him from the mission but nevertheless stays on mission 5. Paul is refreshed and renewed by the fellowship of believers along the way, and lastly, Paul perseveres by the power of God and continues on toward Jerusalem no matter the danger.

Paul, like Jesus, goes on to Jerusalem. We too, like Paul, like Jesus, are to go on toward our Jerusalem, no matter where that is. "When you know, you go! "