

Happy New Year

A MISSION ONLY THE CHURCH CAN STOP

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Acts.

And so we begin in Acts 21. The background, the context here is you have Paul, in the book of Acts at this point, on his Third Missionary Journey. He has been in Corinth. He wrote the book of Romans saying he wanted to get to Rome in order to get to Spain to show the gospel to unreached peoples there, but he said, "I have to go to Jerusalem first." And so, what he did is he left Corinth, and he is heading down to Jerusalem.

What he has done is he has taken up an offering among all these Gentile churches. There were some problems in Jerusalem. There is a lot of division between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church here. A lot of the Jews were making it very difficult for the Gentiles to come to faith in Christ and for the Gentiles to be a true part of the church. And so there was a lot of division there. What Paul has done is he has gone and taken an offering among all these Gentile churches that are indebted to what had started in Jerusalem, and he is taking this offering back, and he wants to take it to the church there personally. But along the way, he stops at a few different places.

In Acts 20, he is in Ephesus, and he has been warned on his journey to Jerusalem that if he goes all the way there, that there will be trouble when he gets there. You look in [Acts 20:22](#), just before this chapter that we are about to read, you hear him say these words as he gathered together with the elders at Ephesus, and he says this: Verse 22,

"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

So, here he is acknowledging, "I know that the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships might be facing me." And at the end of Romans 15, he had talked about how he had been warned about going to Jerusalem. But he says, "The Spirit is compelling me to go, and I know there is risk there, but I consider my life worth nothing to me." What happens is you get to Acts 21, and Paul stops at two more places that are highlighted, a place called Tyre and a place called Ptolemais. And I want you to see what happens as he interacts with the church, with Christians in those two places.

Lets look together starting in Acts 21:1.

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting

Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Thru the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

So, he gathers together with the believers at Tyre, and they urge him, **“Don’t go to Jerusalem.”** Verse 7, *“We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”*

I love this picture here. You have Phillip...and this is kind of an added note. Remember Philip back in Acts 6 when he was called out with Stephen to help serve in the church? That was right before Stephen was stoned and guess who was leading the stoning of Stephen? Saul was, this guy before he became Paul. And so now, years later, we see Paul and Phillip enjoying each others’ company. Those who were great enemies, now enjoying each others’ company. What a great picture of the gospel! Now, that is just kind of a side note, but it is for free. It is really a good picture.

Verse 10, “After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 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 Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”” That is not good news for Paul. Verse 12 says, *“When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, ‘The Lord’s will be done.’”* After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. **16** *And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.*

What great conviction in the life of Paul that no matter what people said to him, he was so convinced in his own heart of God’s will for his life that nothing could stand in his way. Even people who had the best of intentions and concern for him in their heart.

In both of these places, Tyre and then Ptolemais in Caesarea, the church is saying, **“Paul, don’t go”**, trying to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. Paul was saying, “The Holy Spirit is leading me there and I know that prison and hardships may await me, but this is where I MUST GO.”

I think if you had to sum up one of the themes in the book of Acts, it is God-active and God-resisted. It is a picture that I think we see throughout Scripture from cover to cover. God from the very beginning saying to His people, “I want to bless you greatly. And the

result is, I am going to pour out my blessing on you, and a you are going to show my blessing and my goodness and my grace and my glory to the ends of the earth, to all the peoples of the earth. This is why I am blessing you.” He says that over and over again to those people and over and over again, His people say, “Well, we like to do things our own way instead.” And they are turning from the covenant all throughout the Old Testament, and as a result, the nations are not seeing the greatness and the glory and the grace of God through His people.

It is why God comes to His people and says in [Ezekiel 36:22](#),

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my Holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.'"

This is God saying to His people, “When I pour out my blessings on you, it is not for your sake. It is for the sake of the nations to know that I am good, and that I am great, and I am holy; it is for them to know my glory.” All throughout the Old Testament, you have God passionate about showing **His glory** to **His people**, God active in blessing His people for that purpose, and the people of God resisting over and over and over again, doing things their own way.

Then, you get to the New Testament, and you have Jesus die on a cross and rise from the grave, and Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, says at the end of the Gospel of Luke, “Jesus died so that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in all nations.” He picks up right where he left off in Luke with Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* This is what God is doing.

But what happens is when you get into the book of Acts is, six chapters later, the gospel is still stuck in Jerusalem! They are still keeping the gospel there. They have been given this commission to go to Judea, and Samaria and to the end of the earth, but it is still stuck in Jerusalem. It is not until Stephen is stoned that in Acts 8 that the gospel finally starts to spread to the church, because they are scattered by the stoning of Stephen. And it starts to go to Judea and Samaria. People with the Gospel are scattered out and the Gospel begins to propagate out.

You get to Acts 10, and the gospel starts going to the Gentiles like Cornelius, and it causes a major mess in the church. People start saying, “What are we going to do with all these Gentiles coming to faith in Christ? Are they allowed to come to faith in Christ? What do they have to do to come to faith in Christ?” If you look at the beginning of Acts 11, it is a picture of the church literally against the nations. “We are not sure if we want the gospel to go to the nations.” Thank God things change. But all throughout the book

of Acts, what we see is God active in His mission, and God resisted many times by the church.

Now, here is the question that I want us to ask: Do you think that that resistance stopped in the book of Acts or do you think it continued? I believe it continued. I want to take you with me on a little bit of a journey through church history.

I want to give you a little bit of a glimpse of history church through some folks who have given themselves to the Gospel. And what is really interesting is, as I was praying through our time together and thinking about these men's lives, it hit me that one of the things that they all had in common is that in every single one of their lives, the church tried to stop them.

I will start with **Jim Elliott**. Many of you know the story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot. Jim Elliot went to Wheaton College and spent years there studying linguistics and decided that he wanted to give his life to serve the Auca Indians in Ecuador. This was a savage tribe of Indians. Whenever anyone tried to approach this tribe, they would most likely lose their lives. Very savage, evil, murderous tribe, but they had no knowledge of the gospel, and Jim Elliot and four other men decided that we are going to change that.

And so, they got their families together, and they decided that they were going to go and live in Ecuador. What was interesting is that when they were making that decision when he was in college, over and over again people kept coming to him from the church, saying, "You don't need to go to Ecuador. You have so many gifts in preaching and in teaching. Why would you waste those on a savage tribe where you may lose your life when the church here needs so much help? When people are lost here, why would you go there?" Over and over again, they said this to Jim Elliot. He wrote one time in response in his journal. He said this:

““Surely those who know the great passionate part of Jehovah must deny their own love to share in the statement of His. Consider the call from the throne above. “Go ye, and from round about, come over and help us.” And even the call from damned souls below, “Send Lazarus to my brothers that they come not to this place.” Impelled, then, by these voices, I dare not stay home while these Indians perish. So, what if the well-fed church in the homeland needs stirring? They have the Scriptures, Moses and the Prophets and a whole lot more. Their condemnation is written on their bank books and in the dust on their Bible covers. American believers have sold their lives to the service of mammon, and God has His rightful way of dealing with those who succumb to the spirit of Laodicea.””

A few years later, Jim Elliot and four other men, left their wives and children at camp and went to a beach to arrange a meeting with this tribe in Ecuador. The meeting happened, the only problem was those Indians showed up with spears, and they speared each of those men who died on that beach. However, as a result of Jim Elliot's life and death, that story has spurred men and women ever since then to go around the world sharing the gospel with unreached peoples. Not only that, but these men's wives went into that tribe in the days ahead and led the very men who speared their husbands

to faith in Christ, and the gospel now reigns among the Auca Indians in Ecuador. Praise be to God, the church could not stop Jim Elliot!

Another figure in Christian history is **David Livingstone**. He is a guy who, basically, on his own, went into the heart of inland Africa. But soon after he got there on his first trip, he was mauled by a lion. Not a great way to start out. Most would say God doesn't want you to go. So, anyway, when he was preparing to leave for his first time to go to Africa, he wrote a letter to the London Missionary Society that said this: "So powerfully convinced am I that it is the will of the Lord that I should go to Africa, I will go no matter who opposes me." He went into Africa.

After he had been there years, he came back to England to visit. He was welcomed home with much fanfare. All kinds of ministers and pastors, government officials, and press wanted to talk with him and hear about all his stories. Whenever he had a chance to speak to them, he would beg them to go to Africa. He said, "I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years, we will be cut off in that country which is now open. Do not let it be shut again. I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity. It is for you to carry out the work which I have begun. I leave it with you."

He returned to Africa, and on the second trip, somewhere along the way, he fell out of favor with the church back home. And so, when he came back a second time to England, there were no pastors and no ministers there to welcome him; no press, no government officials. He came back, stayed there for a while, and then went back to Africa a third time. Years went by, and nobody heard anything from him. People began to speculate whether or not David Livingstone had died, and so a journalist named Henry Morton Stanley was commissioned to go into inland Africa and try to find the whereabouts of David Livingstone. To try to find out, number one, if he was alive, and number two, to urge him to come back to England.

And so Henry Morton Stanley went to try to find him. It is the famous quote when they met each other, and he looked at him and said, "Mr. Livingstone, I presume." They met up with each other and began to share about all that had been going on in Africa, and Henry Morton Stanley said, "You need to come back to England and to share all of these things. There are riches waiting for you back there. There are people waiting to honor you. The people who love you the most - family, friends - who are closest to you, they want you to come back." David Livingstone looked back at Henry Morton Stanley and said, "God has called me to Africa, and I am staying here."

Not long after that, David Livingstone was in the middle of the African jungle one morning when those Africans who he traveled with, who had been introduced to the gospel through him, came into his room one morning to get him and found him knelt by his bed in a posture of prayer, his head in his hands. He had passed away in communion with God. It would have been very easy for these natives to take his body, bury it there, divide up all of his possessions and go on, but they had such great respect for his man who had given his life for their country, that they decided they were going to

take his body, trek through dangerous land, a thousand miles to get back to the coast, so they could send it back to England and give him a proper burial there. But before they took his body out of inland Africa, they removed his heart and planted it in Africa because that is where he had given his life for the cause of Jesus Christ. Praise be to God, the church could not stop David Livingstone!

C.T. Studd was a wealthy Englishman who came to faith in Christ, and soon thereafter, sensed God's call for him to go to China. Listen to what his biographer said.

Studd met the strongest opposition from his own family. That one from their family should become a missionary was the last straw. Every persuasion was used, even to the extent of bringing in Christian workers to dissuade him. One such respective Christian worker said to him, "C.T., I think you are making a great mistake." Studd responded, "Let's ask God then. I don't want to be pig headed and go out there of my own accord. I just want to do God's will."

"That night," Studd said, "I could not get to sleep. It seemed as though I had heard someone say these words over and over: 'Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' I knew it was God's voice speaking to me, and that I had received my marching orders to go to China." Many said he was making a huge mistake, but he went anyway. But that is not where the story stops. He went to China, and then he came back home, and then he decided India was next. And so he went to India.

Then, he came back home, and when he was fifty years old, when he should have been looking toward retirement, he decided, "I am going to go to Africa now. I am going to spend the rest of my life in Sudan." The problem was he had no money, his doctor had told him not to go, and the church committee had told him not to go. He wrote a letter to them saying, "Gentlemen, God has called me to go and I will go. I will blaze the trail though my grave may only become a stepping stone that younger men may follow."

In the next twenty years, he founded the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade through his work in Africa that has planted gospel seeds all over Africa, Asia, and South America. Before he died at the age of 70, Studd wrote these words to the church:

Too long we have been waiting for one another to begin. The time for waiting is past. Should such men, as we fear, before the whole world, I before the sleepy, lukewarm, faithless, namby-pamby Christian world, we will dare to trust our God, and we will do it with His joy unspeakable, singing aloud in our hearts. We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only in God than live trusting in man. And when we come to this position, the battle is already won and the end of the glorious campaign in sight, we will have the real holiness of God, not the sickly stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts. We will have a real holiness, one of daring faith and works for Jesus Christ.

Praise God, the church could not stop C. T. Studd!

One last example. **John Patton**. Missionary to the New Hebrides, a series of islands in the Pacific. Patton served for ten years as the pastor of a church in Glasgow, Scotland, but God began to burden his heart for the New Hebrides. Pacific Islands that were filled with cannibalistic peoples with no knowledge of the gospel.

Twenty years earlier, he knew that two missionaries had gone to the New Hebrides and had been killed and cannibalized there. So, Patton began to share his desire in the church to go to those people, and he wrote this in his journal: "I was besieged with the strongest opposition on all sides. One of my professors of divinity told me that I was leaving certainty for uncertainty. I was leaving work in which God had made me greatly useful for work which I might fail to be useful and only throw my life away among the cannibals." He continued, "Amongst many who sought to deter me was one dear old Christian gentleman whose crowning argument always was, 'The cannibals. You will be eaten by cannibals!'" John Patton replied to this man. "Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms. And in the great day, my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer." The old gentleman, raising his hands in a deprecating attitude, left the room saying, "After that, I have nothing more to say."

Patton's church: The church grieved with him and begged him to stay. They offered him a house if he would stay. They even told him that he could request any salary, and they would give it if he would stay. Don't miss it. You get the salary if you stay; you don't get the salary if you go. Patton wrote,

Indeed the opposition was so strong from nearly all, and many of them warm Christian friends that I was sorely tempted to question whether I was carrying out the divine will or only some headstrong wish of my own. This caused me much anxiety and drove me close to God in prayer. But, again, every doubt would vanish when I clearly saw that all at home had free access to the Bible and the means of grace with gospel light shining all around them, while the poor heathen were perishing without even the chance of knowing all God's love and mercy to me.

At the age of 33, Patton traveled to the New Hebrides with his wife. The result of his life and work, which was not easy, one entire island called Inawa...entire island...came to faith in Christ. The church across Australia, Scotland, and all parts of the world was challenged to rise up and make the gospel known among the toughest to reach peoples on the planet, and countless savages across the New Hebrides came to know for the first time the peace that is found only in Jesus Christ. Praise be to God the church could not stop John Patton!

Think about it with me. Ladies and gentlemen, what would have happened if these men had listened to the church? What if Jim Elliot and David Livingstone, William Carey and C. T. Studd and John Patton would have listened to the church? Here is what would

have happened: Countless people unexposed to the gospel would have continued on a track toward a Christ-less eternity without knowledge of that gospel.

Church, I remind you, that when you came to faith in Christ, at that very moment, one central command began to pervade your life. And it was a command, not a calling...a command to make disciples of all nations. We relegate that to an optional program over here in the US. We look at the Great Commission in Matthew 28, and we say, "Make disciples of all nations. Well that means other people." But then, we look at Jesus' words in Matthew 11, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest", and we say, "That means me." We look at Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, "You will have the power of my Spirit; you will go to the ends of the earth", and we say, "That means other people." We look in 1 Peter 5, and it says, "Cast all your cares on me, and I care for you", and we say, "That means me." We put off the command of God for our own convenience.

By what right do we draw a line of distinction between the privileges of Christianity and the obligations of Christianity? Relegating the obligations of Christianity to a few while we all sit back and enjoy the privileges of Christianity in a self-consumed, self-centered picture of religious activity. When we come to faith in Christ, there is a command across every single one of our lives, "Make disciples of all nations! Make disciples of all nations." Everyone who has Christ in our lives has this command.

Now, picture it this way: We are called to faith in Christ, and when we respond to this call, there is this command, "Make disciples of all nations." And then, here is the beauty of it. I am not saying that God has given the same calling across every single person in this room that God has given the same gift, the same skills, the same passions, the same desires, and personalities. Here is the deal: We have got this command to make disciples of all nations, and then God takes each of our lives with what He has entrusted to us, and He calls us to put that command into action in a variety of different ways. Some of us teachers, some of us accountants, some of us stay-at-home moms, some of us doing this or that, some of us students.

The danger is whenever we take this calling that is different for each of our lives, and we begin to substitute it for the command, and we put the command as an option over here, and what is important most to me is my calling, not realizing that all the callings that are in our lives are ways by which we carry out this one command. I am not so ignorant as to think that we don't have different callings. When you look in the New Testament, Peter and Paul had different callings. James and John had different callings, but they were all driven by a passion to make the glory of Jesus Christ known in all nations.

And Jesus had told them how to do it. You make disciples. Everything revolves around the command, and it plays out in different ways. And so, it is certainly not an optional program over here, and it is certainly not something we are called to. Paul said it in Galatians 1:15 and 16, "*God was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that...*" Purpose clause. Paul is saying "Why, Paul, was Christ revealed to you? Why did God reveal

Christ to you?" Paul says, "So that I might preach him among the nations." Paul says, "The very purpose of my salvation was for the sake of others."

God saves you and you and you and me...He saves each of us for the sake of other people to know that He is good and He is gracious and He is glorious. That is the command that drives us all. That is why Paul said in **Romans 1:14-15**, ***"I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish."***

It is a great word in the New Testament. Literally, he says, "I am in debt. I am in debt to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish." Don't miss the picture. Paul is saying, because he owns Christ, he owes Christ to the world. He is in debt to all peoples. You realize that because we own Christ in this room, we owe Christ to the world, to the least person and the greatest person, to the worst person and to the best person, to the richest person and the poorest person. We owe Christ to every lost person on the face of this planet.

How can any individual in this room who has the gospel of Jesus Christ inside of him, saved from your sins, saved from an eternity apart from God, saved from eternal damnation...how can anyone in that state sit back and make excuses for not sharing that gospel with the rest of the world? It is not possible biblically to say, "I am not called to that" You are right, you are not called; you are commanded to a mission, a global mission: Make disciples of all nations!

Gospel