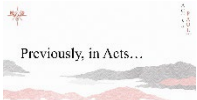




I Hear You

Date: July 2, 2023
Series: Acts of Paul (Pt 1)
Passage: Acts 21
Speaker: Steve Howell (Associate Minister)



Previously, in Acts...

Can you believe we're here already? Basically, at the **end of Paul's 3rd missionary journey!!!**

This year in our **sermons**, we've been slowly but surely working our way through the entire book of Acts. Yes, it's a **lot of time** to invest in one sermon series, but Acts is an **important** book! This book has been showing us our **church's origin story**. Where did the church begin? What were the important priorities? What can we take from their experiences to apply in our church today?¹

To **answer those questions** and more, we are reading and studying and preaching through the book of Acts from the **first** chapter to the **last**. After going through **almost 75%** of the book so far, there have been **three major historical figures** that have gotten our attention:

1. **The Apostle Peter.** As a key follower of Jesus, he is **instrumental** in the early days of the church as it forms and expands. He's there on the Day of **Pentecost**. He's there as the **church grows** in Jerusalem. He's there as the gospel message is first shared with the **Gentiles**. But the story eventually shifts to another person...
2. **The Apostle Paul.** Although not an original follower of Jesus, Paul has a **miraculous conversion** story and then is used by God as the driving force in **planting** new congregations across the Roman empire. He goes on **missionary journeys** in Asia Minor and Greece, sharing the good news of Jesus with **Jews and Gentiles** alike.

Both Peter and Paul play a major role in the story of the early church, but they are **secondary** to someone else...someone whose presence you can't miss as you read...

¹ Side Note: Tonganoxie Christian Church has its modern roots in the American Restoration Movement. Basically, a group of people in the mid-1800s grew tired of the denominations and the convoluted histories and traditions and bickering. Instead of continuing down that line, they wanted to hit the "reset" button, and go back to the beginning...to the church of the New Testament...to see what really mattered. Our church has roots in the American Restoration Movement, but its seed is all the way back here in Acts!

3. **The Holy Spirit!** It is the Spirit who **guides**, who **empowers**, who shakes everything up. The Spirit is **gifted to believers** by God on the Day of Pentecost, and His **indwelling presence** transforms Jesus' followers into more than they could've ever dreamed!!! **Without the Spirit**, Peter and Paul are **nothing**. **With the Spirit**, they are **spiritual forces** to be reckoned with!

So, who is the **focus** of today's passage? It's a toss-up between numbers 2 and 3 – between **Paul and the Holy Spirit**.



Currently, in Acts...

Today we'll be looking at **Acts 21**, so if you have a Bible with you, please turn there with me.

3rd Missionary Journey Comes to an End

Most recently, the **Spirit has been leading Paul** as he travels on his third and final missionary journey. Paul's **goal** is simple:

*"After spending some time [in Antioch], [Paul] departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, **strengthening all the disciples.**"*
(Acts 18:23, ESV)

Paul has been **encouraging** churches and Christians, talking about Who he loves: **Jesus!**

The journey takes him back through many of the **same locations** we've seen in previous chapters. He crosses the interior of Asia Minor, no doubt stopping at churches he planted in **Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch**. He arrives at **Ephesus** and spends a significant amount of time there. He then returns to **Greece** – aka **Macedonia & Achaia** – and visits more of his churches like the ones in **Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth**.

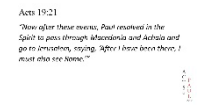
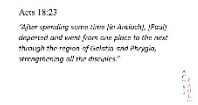


Now, as we come to the **end of this circuit** (which Mitch covered in his last two sermons), Paul has a couple of **additional stops** on his mind:

*"Now after these events, Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to **Jerusalem**, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see **Rome.**""* (Acts 19:21, ESV)

He wants to make it back to the city of Jerusalem for a visit, and then he wants to head to the capital city of the empire – the city of Rome!

On the surface, it's a **straightforward itinerary**...but there's **more to this statement** than first meets the eye. As we get to chapter 21, we find that Paul encounters **a lot of opinions** about this trip, including **from the Spirit Himself!**





Chapter 21 turns into an interesting **case study** in “**listening to the Holy Spirit!**”

If you’ve ever struggled with listening to the Spirit, I hope you’ll **pay attention** here. While a little mysterious, the Spirit’s presence and activity is **crucial** to living the Christian life and being the Christian church.

We **flounder** as a church if we **fail to listen** to the Spirit! We might be an **efficient** organization, a **welcoming** social gathering, or a **transformative** agent of change...but without the guidance of the Holy Spirit we’re **not much different** than any other organization in the world. In other words, **without** the guidance of the Spirit we are spiritually **powerless**; but **with Him** we are a **powerful spiritual force!**

A **church** that is **spiritually vibrant** and alive will always be **listening**. A **person** that is **spiritually vibrant** will be **listening**. A person and a church who **wants to become spiritually vibrant** will **listen** and grow as they pay attention to the Spirit of God!

This morning, I **pray** that we all become **more spiritually vibrant** as we consider how to **listen** to the Spirit!!!! So, let’s explore this passage together and **hear** what we can learn from Paul’s case study.



Paul’s Experiences (Acts 21:1-14)

Here are **Paul’s experiences** that we find in **Acts 21:1–14**.

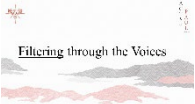
Acts 21:1-14
And when we had parted from them and set sail,
we came by a straight course to Cos, and from there to Patara.
And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.
And when we had parted from them and set sail,
we came by a straight course to Cyprus, and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.
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 Ptolemais, 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.

¹ And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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 ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ 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. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ 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.’” ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³

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."¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."



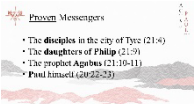
Filtering through the Voices

There's a lot going on here in Acts 21!

Paul's travels are presented in **rapid-fire succession** (and they are much easier to follow with a **map!**), but there is a **consistent theme** as he travels from Asia Minor: **The Spirit has an unpleasant future for Paul!** According to the Spirit, Paul faces **arrest** (or worse!) if he continues his journey to **Jerusalem**.

However, this message **isn't** presented in **one miraculous, Damascus Road-type** incident. Instead, it comes through a **variety of voices**. Paul has to **filter through those voices** in order to **discern** the Spirit's will.

How does he listen?



Proven Messengers

Paul starts by hearing from **proven messengers** about his future in Jerusalem. The **Spirit speaks** through **several people** on this matter. He uses:

- The **disciples** in the city of Tyre (21:4)
- The **daughters of Philip** (21:9)
 - *Note: this is the same Philip who evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8, one of the early church's original deacons!*
- The prophet **Agabus** (21:10-11)
 - *Note: the same prophet we met in chapter 11*
- **Paul** himself, in the previous chapter (20:22-23)

Each of these people brings some **spiritual gravitas** to the situation. They have a **history** with the Spirit! They have a **proven track record** with God! They are **faithful** followers! When any of them **claim to have a message** from the Spirit, the **ears** of those around them should be **open**.

It **makes sense** to **listen closely** to the voice of people who are already **proven messengers**. This isn't to say that God can't use a **surprise** mouthpiece to speak His words (e.g. Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22). However, **proven messengers** have a **heart** for sharing God's messages **above their own**. Proven messengers know how to **listen** and **test** their words. Proven messengers are **aligned with the Bible**, God's Word. Proven messengers have **fewer agendas** to advance, other than the ones God is providing. They **know the Spirit**, and they are the kinds of folks we read about in **1 Corinthians 2:12-13**:

1 Corinthians 2:12-13
"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual."

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." (1 Corinthians 2:12–13, ESV)

Proven messengers are **not infallible**, but we should **prioritize** their voices over others' voices as they communicate the Spirit's wisdom. We should listen to *them* as a **real-world application** of **Proverbs 12:15**:

Proverbs 12:15
"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." (Proverbs 12:15, ESV)



Overlapping Messages

A **single** message is great, but when proven messengers **overlap** their message, the wise spiritual response is to **listen even more closely!**

Overlapping messages make me think of the Biblical character **Gideon**. In **Judges 6-7**, Gideon is singled out with a **message** from God: He is to help **rescue** the nation of Israel from the oppressive forces of the nation of Midian. What a **calling!** God promises **victory**, but Gideon is **hesitant**. He **seeks clarification** that this message is truly a divine promise.

So, after God sends the **angel of the Lord** to deliver the initial message...then he sends a **miraculous sign**...then **another** miraculous sign...then provides **prophetic dreams** to back it up! (*I would like to think that I would have stopped when I heard the first message from an angel! But Gideon sought more...*)

Once the **repeated** and **overlapping** messages **confirmed** a **spiritual truth**, he finally **acted** and was able to lead Israel to victory in a spectacular and miraculous way!

When **proven messengers overlap** their message, it is **wise to listen!**

In this case, in **Acts 21**, the **overlapped message** is clear: **Trouble awaits Paul in Jerusalem!** The **Spirit** has reiterated it to him multiple times. Paul had no doubt this was the Spirit's message!

But **what** is the **spiritually wise response** to that truth? Paul needs to **filter more** of the information.



One Message, Many Applications

Meaning vs Significance

A **spiritually clear message** may have **different implications** for different people. In other words, the **same facts** may generate **different responses** and **emotions**.

In classes on biblical interpretation, I point out this fact to future teachers. A passage can **mean** only **one thing**, but that one thing can have **many moments of significance**.



Here's an example: **"It's a hit!"**

What does it **mean**? A collision, a home run, a chart-topping pop song, a mafia assassination, or "You sunk my battleship!" The phrase only *means* one thing.

But if it **means** the last one – an **exclamation** while playing a board game – that phrase has many **moments of significance**. For the person who guesses G-4, it is a moment of **triumph**. For the person who places the red peg in their ship, it is a moment of **sadness** and anger. For the sibling who is waiting to play the winner, it is a moment of **relief** that the game is finally over. And for the mom sitting on the couch next to them, it is a signal that she is about to deal with some **conflict**!

It **means** one thing. It **matters** in different ways.

Meaning and Significance in Acts 21

So, let's **apply this** to Paul's situation. The spiritual message for Paul is clear.

*"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.**" (Acts 20:22–23, ESV)*

It is **reiterated** by others.

*"And coming to us, [the prophet Agabus] 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.' "" (Acts 21:11, ESV)*

It **means** one thing!

But it **matters differently**.

For **some of the disciples**, it matters because they **don't want anything bad** to happen to Paul. The disciples in **Tyre** (21:4) and the disciples at **Caesarea** (21:12) all hear the ONE message and respond by trying to **prevent Paul** from going at all! They simply want **safety** for Paul. They want him to be spared any injury, and they don't want to lose him! They take the truth of this message and **apply it as a warning to stay away** from **Jerusalem**.

But **Paul**, with his **experience** and **insight**, **applies the message differently**. It matters differently to him.

"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.'" (Acts 21:13, ESV)

For Paul, the message **isn't an instruction** to stay away but instead **it is preparation** for what is to come. Paul can **get himself** emotionally **ready**. He can get his affairs in order, and he can be **equipped** for the inevitable. When -- not if! -- he goes to Jerusalem, he will be ready.

Acts 20:22-23
"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 afflictions await me."

Acts 21:11
"And coming to us, [the prophet Agabus] 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.' ""

Acts 21:13
"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.'" "

If you **read further** in chapter 21, you discover what happens. Here's the **Cliff's Notes** version of what Paul prepares for:



- In **Acts 21:15-19**, Paul arrives in **Jerusalem**, sharing with the Jerusalem church a financial **gift** he has collected from Gentile churches. He describes what God has been doing among his **Gentile churches**, and they all **rejoice**. *Yahoo!*
- In **Acts 21:20-26**, the **leaders** in the Jerusalem church inform Paul that his successful work among the Gentiles has **angered** a lot of **Jews**. His **reputation** has unfairly become that of a lawbreaker! They ask Paul to publicly participate in a Jewish **ceremony** at the temple to counter this incorrect perception. Paul **agrees**, using his freedom in Christ to participate in these culturally important Jewish ceremonies (without trusting them for salvation! That's an idea we covered back in Acts 16).²
- In **Acts 21:27-40**, the **Jews** who oppose Paul mistakenly **accuse** him of committing a capital offense (*i.e., bringing his Gentile friend into the Temple area, an area that was off limits to him*). A **mob attacks** Paul, and he is only **saved** because the **Roman troops** stationed next door to the Temple intervene! Not understanding the commotion, they **arrest** the man in the middle of it all – Paul – and assume he must be a troublemaker. The chapter ends with **Paul** in **custody** and in **grave danger**...just like the **Spirit predicted!**

None of this was a surprise. It wasn't a step into the risky unknown. Paul had been **prepared** for this danger! He knew he was going to be taken into custody! He had **listened** to the Spirit speaking **clearly** through **multiple, proven** messengers.

So, **why** would Paul go through with it? Why would he **risk** it? Because of one key **truth**. Paul knows that ***obedience isn't safe.***



Risking Obedience

When we **listen** to the Spirit, we **aren't given** any messages that **guarantee safety**.

Safety in General

In general, "**safe**" means that we **don't get hurt**. And **not** getting hurt is usually **good!** It leads us to take **precautions** that **prevent problems**.



- **Aircraft** are inspected, and pilots do safety checks before flights to ensure that everything is working, and the plane arrives **safely** at its destination.
- **Fireworks** come with warnings, and parents (most parents!) try to teach their kids how to **safely** light things up during 4th of July celebrations so that no one loses a finger or gets embers in their eyes.

² I wish we had longer to get into the details here, but just remember: A) Christians are not saved by rules, we are saved by grace! B) Paul's faith is in Jesus, not the OT/Jewish rules C) Certain OT/Jewish practices are culturally important, not salvific.

- **Football** players wear helmets so they aren't just cracking skulls against one another, but instead can *safely* prevent most concussions.

But “safe” is **not** the same as “**100% without incident.**”

- **Despite inspections**, the occasional plane has a **mishap**, like the Delta flight this week that had to land at Charlotte without its front landing gear.
- **Despite warnings**, far too many people will be visiting my wife at the **ophthalmologist** on July 5 with injuries.
- **Despite** even the **fluffiest of helmets** used in the NFL preseason (have you seen those things from last year?!?!), someone will experience head trauma.

“Safety” in Christianity

Likewise, in our **Christian experience**, we **cannot expect** a “safe” life once we start following Jesus and **listening** to the Holy Spirit...at least not if we want life to be “100% without incident.”

Yes, we can be **safe from hell** and from the **penalty for sin**. That is a kind of **eternal** “safety” that is absolutely **assured** in Scripture.

*“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **he saved us**, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4–7, ESV)*

Yes, Christians are safe spiritually, but **NO**, safety **doesn't extend** to every part of our life. In fact, the **New Testament** makes it clear that **Christians will face trouble**. Its list of verses talking about Christian suffering is lengthy and varied! **Suffering**, **trials**, and **tribulations** are covered in:

- Matthew 24
- Romans 8
- 2 Corinthians 4
- James 1
- 1 Peter 3
- Revelation 2
- ...and more!

These verses **aren't talking about punishment** for wrongdoers. They are **conversations** about the Christian experience, written to men and women who **obediently follow** God. Despite trying to live according to His will, they discover that **obedience isn't safe**.

Sometimes, when the Spirit gives you a message, **obedience will not protect** you from **evil people**, from **evil plots**, from **injustice**, or from **discomfort**. Paul's experience proves it! But this **dangerous obedience** isn't *bad*; it is **purposeful**.

Titus 3:4-7
 "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."



In his second letter to the Corinthian church, **Paul** helps us have some **perspective**. Describing **his own experiences**, he says:

2 Corinthians 4:8-12
"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies..."

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you." (2 Corinthians 4:8–12, ESV)

Obedience is not safe, but it brings the life of Jesus to others! It is **purposeful** despite being sometimes **painful**. And the pain itself is **temporary**. Continuing a few verses later, Paul says:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18
"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this **light momentary affliction** is preparing for us an **eternal weight of glory** beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

*"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this **light momentary affliction** is preparing for us an **eternal weight of glory** beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."* (2 Corinthians 4:16–18, ESV)



Worth the Risk

In his **writings** and this **case study** of Acts 21, Paul shows us that **obedience is not safe**, but it is **worth the risk**. **Listening to the Spirit** (listening **by doing!**) is always the **best** course of action.

If we **listen to the Spirit** with the **intention of obeying**...and then we happen to **mis-hear** or **misunderstand** His message... what's the worst that happens? God can and does **correct our course**.

But if we **listen to the Spirit** and **choose to ignore** Him...even when He has clarified the message...we **don't want to go down that path!!!**

Listening is **worth the risk**, even if it is **challenging!**

2 Timothy 2:10-13
"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."

*"Therefore I **endure everything** for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have **died** with him, we will also **live** with him; if we **endure**, we will also **reign** with him; if we **deny** him, he also will **deny** us; if we are **faithless**, he remains **faithful**— for he cannot deny himself."* (2 Timothy 2:10–13, ESV)



Closing

I **don't know** what messages the **Holy Spirit** has been **presenting to you** about your own path and your own choices. But we all need to be listening.

This **isn't theoretical**. It needs to be a **practical** part of our everyday life.

It applies to **big decisions** by our **leaders** for the **direction of this church**. I know for a fact that they are **praying** and **studying** and **listening intently!**

- **Like Paul**, they have to **filter through various voices** to **discern** what the Spirit's guidance is and how to apply it.
- **Like Paul**, they have to **put themselves out** there, knowing that obedience to the Spirit might not be **comfortable** or **safe**.
- ...and because of that they **need our prayers** as they weigh the information they have.

But it's **not just church decisions** that require **good listening** and **risky obedience**. It is ALL decisions; it is **YOUR decisions**. The **Spirit's presence** is **crucial** for each of us to live out the Christian life and together become a **spiritually vibrant** church.

- Listening is important in *your own* **career** decisions.
- Listening is important in *your own* **parenting** decisions.
- Listening is important as you plan for **retirement**.
- Listening is important as you plan for **babies**.
- Listening is important as you make plans for **Friday**.
- Listening is important as you type out a **text**.
- Listening is important as you push "**add to cart**" on Amazon

A **church** that is **spiritually vibrant** and alive will **always be listening**. A **person** that is **spiritually vibrant** will be **listening**. So...

Are you listening?

Prayer

Invitation

If there is a decision you are facing, trying to listen to the Spirit's guidance, I want to invite you to come forward and share it with us so we can pray for you today.

You have the tools after looking at Acts 21...so let us be part of the process as you try to listen. Feel free to come up and share with me as we sing our invitation song, and then we'll pray as a church family.

Pastoral Notes:

Sermon Notes

Previously, in Acts...

Currently, in Acts...

3rd Missionary Journey Comes to an End

(Acts 18:23; 19:21)

Paul's Experiences (Acts 21:1-14)

Filtering through the Voices

Proven Messengers *(1 Corinthians 2:12–13; Proverbs 12:15)*

Overlapping Messages

One Message, Many Applications

Meaning vs Significance

Meaning and Significance in Acts 21

(Acts 20:22–23; 21:11; 21:13)

Risking Obedience

Safety in General

"Safety" in Christianity

Obedience isn't safe.

(Titus 3:4–7; 2 Corinthians 4:8–12, 16–18)

Worth the Risk

(2 Timothy 2:10–13)

Questions

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- When facing a decision, would you say that the Holy Spirit is typically A) crucial, B) irrelevant, C) helpful, or D) ignored, as you make your decision? Share the reason for your answer.
- What do you wish your answer could be to the above question? Why?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Why is Paul heading to Jerusalem? See Romans 15:25–27. How would this purpose have the potential to help heal divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the church?
- Have you ever stepped out in faith before, tried to do something you thought was good? Describe the emotions that come from such plans. Read Proverbs 12:11. How can you tell if you are “working the land,” or are you following “worthless pursuits?”
- Do you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you? (See Acts 2:38-39) What confidence do you gain from that fact?
- Do you think the disciples’ desire for Paul to avoid trouble in Jerusalem was encouraging or challenging (see Acts 21:4-13)? Defend your opinion.
- Why was Paul willing to suffer even to the point of death? (21:13)
- How would you have prepared for the trip to Jerusalem if you were Paul, knowing what Paul knew?
- Would you rather be safe or obedient? What choices have you made that demonstrate your preference?
- What decisions require you to listen for the Holy Spirit right now?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for your fellow believers to actively, persistently, and humbly listen for the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Ask God to help us be obedient to whatever the Spirit requires of us, regardless of the cost.