

Acts 21:1-16

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word, which I pray you have with you this morning. And it's well read and treasured in your heart. And turn to Acts chapter 21.

We are fast approaching the day when we will complete our study of Acts together. It's been good and rich and I hope that you've felt the same.

I think there's always something bittersweet about ending a study. And we're going to find our study accelerate here, looking to probably the first week or so of September when we'll conclude it, because Paul is headed to Jerusalem.

And this sets off a chain of events in which Paul is arrested and tried and ends up imprisoned to the end of the book.

So we're going to start picking up some pace as we go through that narrative together. And it all gets kind of launched off here. Paul has been set on traveling to Jerusalem for some time.

[1 : 11] We can see back in Acts chapter 19, verse 21. Now, after these events, Luke records for us, and he's referencing the sons of Sceva getting literally beat out of their clothes by a demon-possessed man in Ephesus, and then a revival that follows it.

So 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.

Paul expresses concern throughout his writing that the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers would be unified. This is one of the great realities of the gospel, that it breaks down dividing walls and that people become one in Christ.

And Paul was concerned about this. A way that he worked to unite them was through the collection of funds from largely Gentile churches to support the highly persecuted, very transient, primarily Jewish church in Jerusalem.

We can read that Paul gave instruction to the Corinthian church for a collection for the Jerusalem church, which was written four years before his arrival in today's text.

[2 : 30] We can read that in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 1-3. Paul writes, To further concrete the point that Paul was transporting funding, to Jerusalem, we see in Paul's defense before Felix in Acts chapter 24 and in verse 17, Now after several years, I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.

So the past two weeks, we studied Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders from Miletus. Verse 16 of chapter 20 says, For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. So when we read in chapter 21, verse 1, which we'll do in just a moment, the phrase, When he had parted from them, This is who the Ephesian elders, And from where, Miletus, on the coast of Asia, Paul is departing on the last part of his journey to Jerusalem.

So Acts chapter 21, verses 1 through 16. Before I read, let me remind you, beloved, That this is God's word to us.

It was written for his glory and for our good. And as such, we would all do well to listen to it In order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

[4 : 30] I begin reading in verse 1. And when he 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.

And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, We went aboard and set sail. When we had come inside of Cyprus, Leaving it on the left, We sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, For there the ship was to unload its cargo.

And having sought out the disciples, We stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit, They were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When our days there were ended, We departed and

went on our journey.

And they all, with wives and children, Accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, We prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, And they returned home.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, We arrived at Ptolemy. And we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea.

[5 : 36] 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, Bound his own feet and hands, And said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem Will bind the man who owns this belt And deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

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

For I am ready not only to be in prison, But even to die in Jerusalem For the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, 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 Mason of Cyprus, An early disciple, With whom we should lodge.

[6 : 42] Well, much of our text this morning Is Luke's record Of the route that was taken From Miletus to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. They skirted a coast, They jumped across A gap in the Mediterranean Sea, Moving at the pace In which they could move.

Moving along as quickly as they could To arrive at Jerusalem. And the account is punctuated By the churches in two places Trying to convince Paul Not to complete said journey.

Now there are a lot of little things We could chase out in the text today. And I don't intend, I don't mean to just neglect them, But they're not the main point. Like, who are these four unmarried daughters Who prophesied?

We're not going to talk about it this morning. Or what exactly is the nature of prophecy And Agabus' prophecy? I believe that what's being highlighted In this text, What Luke is intending to record for us, Is the persistence of a journey And the resistance to that journey.

There are many commentators Who suggest that Paul Disobeyed the Spirit. I do not believe so. And I do not believe so for four reasons. So let me give those to you quickly.

[7 : 57] Number one, The phrase, Through the Spirit in verse 4, Is not conclusive. Some would want to make it conclusive, But it is not conclusive.

Remember that this is a historical narrative. And so all that we can safely assume Is that Luke believed that it was Through the Spirit.

And probably because they claimed this. They claimed to be prophesying by the Spirit. And so Luke recorded it As a prophecy through the Spirit.

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14, verse 29, That prophecy must be carefully considered. Secondly, Paul has patterned obedience to the Spirit.

We have seen this in the book of Acts. In Acts 16, verses 6-10, We witnessed Paul's obeying the Spirit's Forbance to preach in some places, And his immediate obedience And entering Macedonia When told to do so in a dream.

[9 : 05] So Paul has already received Stop commands from the Spirit. And he obeyed those commands. Third, The Holy Spirit had warned Paul What would happen to him In going to Jerusalem.

This is recorded in Acts 20, Verses 22 and 23. Part of the Ephesian farewell. Where we read, And now behold, This is Paul speaking.

I am going to Jerusalem, Constrained by the Spirit, Not knowing what will happen to me there, Except that the Holy Spirit testifies me In every city that imprisonment And afflictions await me. But the Spirit, So that's the text, But the Spirit had not forbid him From going there. So the Spirit has spoken to him About what would happen there. But is not said, But do not go.

Fourth, The Bible nowhere suggests That Paul sinned In going to Jerusalem. Paul says while in Jerusalem In Acts 23, verse 1, Brothers, I have lived my life Before God in all good conscience Up to this day.

[10:20] It is hard, At least for me, To imagine That he would have been able To say such a thing Just a few days After finding himself Arrested Because he had been disobedient To the Spirit of God.

So I believe That Paul was Rightly resisting The opposition of the church. Right? People are pleading with him Not to go. They're claiming by the Spirit That he ought not go. I think it's right That Paul went All the same. So, How then do we come to understand Paul's resoluteness In traveling to Jerusalem?

Is this a unique thing to Paul? Right? The confidence of conviction. Is it unique to him? Is this a thing That we can also have When it comes to The particulars of God's purpose For our lives? Here you have disciples Claiming to speak Through the Spirit Telling him that he Shouldn't go to Jerusalem. Then a prophecy Which was no surprise to him.

[11:23] Right? The Spirit had already told him He would suffer And be imprisoned. Right? Telling him about his arrest. But the church pleads In response to that For him not to go To Jerusalem.

How is it that Paul Was so convinced He should go? And how can We know With confidence What God would have us Do?

So with this narrative As a backdrop I would like to present to you Seven biblical truths To help us To guide us In this way And I'm going to I hope well It's my intention To do it well I'll show you In the life of Paul The practice of these Seven Biblical truths As I mentioned to you In the welcome These are from a work Called experiencing God How to know and do The will of God Intentionally so Because I want you to Want to pick it up And read it So that's why I'm using their things Not because I'm being lazy But these are good Good instruction Seven points Worded well And I want you to Want to pick up This work And spend more time With it And so They frame them This way Seven realities That identify Ways God works To involve People In his activity Seven realities That identify Ways God works To involve people In his activity Number one God is always At work Around you God is always At work Around you Beloved God did not Create the world Set it in motion And then sit back To watch it function God has been At work In the world From its very Beginning Ruling over All that happens We call this Providence And his providence Has never Been idle He has never Once in the history Of the world Set it aside He has always Reigned over All things That have happened Neither Did Jesus Come to the earth In order to Call together A band of disciples Give them a little

Bit of training And then leave them To see how they Would work out His commands Some experiment Of let me see If three years Is enough To get them going In the ways I would have Them go Matthew chapter 16 Verses 13 Through 18 I would appreciate You turning there With me This I hope Is a text That's familiar To you Matthew 16 Beginning in verse 13 Now when Jesus Came into the District of Caesarea Philippi He asked His disciples Who do people Say that the Son of man Is And they said Some say John the Baptist Others say Elijah And others Jeremiah Or one of The prophets He said to Them But who do

[14:52] You say That I am Simon Peter Replied You are the Christ The son Of the living God And Jesus Answered him Blessed are You Simon Barjona For flesh And blood Has not revealed This to you But my Father Who is in Heaven And I tell You You are Peter And on This rock Pause for a Second He's not Referring to Peter He's referring To the Truth that Peter has Proclaimed That Jesus Is the Christ Okay It's important That you Understand that Clearly On this Rock The truth That I Am the Christ The son Of the Living God I will Build My Church And the Gates Of hell Shall Not Prevail Against It Jesus' Promise Is that He'll Build His Church Today As we're Gathering Together Jesus Is at Work Building His Church God's Church Is built By God's Hand

The Kingdom Of God Is here And it Is arriving Whether you Recognize It's coming Or not God's Plans Will not Be Thwarted In Acts 26 Paul Recounts His Conversion To King Agrippa Where Luke Records Jesus' Words To Paul So this is Acts 26 Verses 15 Through 18 You may Appreciate Joining Me There Paul Says And I Said Who Are You Lord And The Lord Said I Am Jesus Who You Are Persecuting Now In Verse 16 Of Acts 26 Jesus Says But Rise And Stand Upon Your Feet For I Have Appeared To You For This Purpose To Appoint You As A Servant And Witness To The Things In Which You Have Seen Me And To Those In Which I Will Appear To You Delivering You From Your People

And From The Gentiles To Whom I Am Sending You To Open Their Eyes That They May Turn From Darkness To Light And From The Power Of Satan To God That They May Receive Forgiveness Of Sins And A Place Among Those Who Are Sanctified By Faith In Me Why Did Jesus

Appear To Paul Look At What He Says!

Things In Which I Am Working And Doing That You Would Be A Servant And A Witness To Those Things And That You Would Be A Servant Witness To Those Things In Which Jesus Says I Will Appear To You That You Will Be A Servant And A Witness To The Things I Am Doing In The World Have Done And Am Doing In The World So Whether or not You God Is Always At Work Around You That's Number One Number Two Second Reality God Pursues A Continuing Love Relationship With You That Is Real And Personal Beloved This Is A Gracious Glorious Truth Little Undeserving Me And

Little Undeserving You Are So Loved By God That He Pursues Us And That Pursuit Is Real And It Is Personal Romans Chapter 8 Beginning In Verse 11 Love This Personal Language Here Paul Writes If The Spirit Of Him Who Raised Jesus From The Dead Dwells In You He Who Raised Christ Jesus From The Dead Will Also Give Life To Your Mortal!

[18 : 54] Bodies! So then brothers We are debtors Not to the flesh To live According to the flesh For if you live According to the flesh You will die But if by the Spirit You put to death The deeds of the body You will Live For All Who Are Led By The Spirit Of God Are Sons Of God For You did Not Receive The Spirit Of Slavery To Fall Back Into Fear But You Have Received The Spirit Of Adoption As Sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

And that language means Daddy. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

So God is always at work around you. And God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and it's personal and it's the motivation for finding out what is God's will?

What would God have me do? How can I walk in obedience to Him? This great love that He has shown us in Christ. This pursuing love. Ongoingly pursuing love.

[20 : 18] God is always at work around you. And God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal. Third, God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.

Because God's at work and because God loves you, doesn't need you. I'm always quick to clarify that. Does not need you. God's purposes will not be thwarted by laziness or apathy.

But because God has a purpose and He's working it out and because He loves you, He invites you. He invites you to become involved with Him in His work.

In Acts 1, Jesus instructs the disciples to wait until the Holy Spirit comes and tells them what will happen when He does. When the Holy Spirit comes, Acts 1.8, Jesus says, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

So there's this promise of the coming of the Spirit, right? There's something that's going to happen necessarily as the coming of the Spirit. You will receive power and you will witness. And you'll witness in concentric circles.

[21 : 37] You're going to go as you're going. You're going to be sharing the good news of Jesus Christ as a result of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. And this, Acts 1.8, I think is an expansion.

It's an explanation of the words that Jesus spoke to the apostles in Matthew 28, verses 18-20. This is often called the Great Commission.

Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. So catch where I'm going here. Point number three, God invites you to become involved with Him and His work.

God is working. God loves you. Jesus says, go and make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them everything that I've commanded you.

[22 : 45] But He sandwiches that between two wonderful realities. That is, that Jesus now has all authority. He's got all authority in heaven. He has all authority in earth.

He's promised to build His church. This is a work that He is accomplishing. Go therefore. Go therefore and make disciples.

I have all authority in heaven and on earth. And at the end, the promise. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

So as we are confident in the things that God would have us do, His revealed will, we can look in the Scriptures and we know for a fact there are things that we are meant to do revealed, more general, as well as His specific.

How is it exactly that I am meant to walk? Where am I supposed to go? Whom am I supposed to marry? What am I supposed to study in school? Which job should I take?

[23 : 49] As we are led in these things, we can be confident that it is God's invitation to join Him in His work. And therefore, He is with us in it.

So God is always at work around you and He is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal. And He's doing so by inviting you to become involved with Him in His work.

Fourth, I apologize for this one, note takers. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways.

I'll give it to you again real quick. I didn't write this. Let me remind you. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways.

A major thing of the Bible is that God's people need God's good counsel. That it is very often not heeded, but it is most certainly needed.

[25 : 23] Consider, even before the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, that they needed God's counsel. God gave to them instruction about what to do and what not to do.

Man was not created to be autonomous, separated from the loving instruction of God. He had always needed it. How is it that we understand God's character, purposes, and ways?

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, our Helper. If you have placed believing faith in Jesus Christ, you have the Spirit of God who indwells you to be your Helper, to come alongside and help you to persist in God's ways.

Now, at this point, we must be careful. How does the Holy Spirit reveal such things to us? So many in our day have erred into a new mysticism, being led along by their feelings.

believing that the primary way in which the Spirit of God works in the follower of Christ is by giving us impulse, feeling impulses about the way in which we should go.

[26 : 38] A most common phrase among American Christians is, I feel led to. I feel led to, blank, to such and such.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we, at times, will not have some inclination in one way or another.

Often, particularly young people in our church come to me and say, what should I do?

And there are two very good, very God-honoring options on the table. And my response is, so you know, when you come to me and ask these kinds of questions, I'm going to go, what do you want to do? Pick one.

Which way do you think you should go? Just go. So we may have some inclinations at times, one way or another, but the Spirit uses means, uses real, tangible means, most often to instruct us.

In Romans 12, 2, Paul's very aware of this. He writes, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. How are our minds renewed? By the Word of God.

[27 : 42] That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. So God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible.

Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17, All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Beloved, this is the go-to verse for the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible contains everything within it to direct holy lives.

That's why we call it the Holy Bible. And I hope to connect you to Christ if you're part of this church and secondly to the sufficiency of Scripture.

You walk out of here loving Jesus and then loving the Bible, I've accomplished something by grace. the Bible must be seen in this light.

[28 : 47] It must be respected in this light. I am so saddened that in our day we seem to need a new reformation. People would pick up their Bibles and read that would be literate in what it has to say.

Be about the work of practicing God's revealed general will for the Christian. Be about that work. There's so much good instruction found in the Scripture.

Clear things that we are meant to do. Pick up those things and do them. You will find most of your time filled if you're doing those things. Be about following Christ in the very clear way in which we've been instructed to follow Christ.

Do not neglect that and get altogether consumed by the specific will of God for you. Don't get so consumed with what major you're going to have in school or which job you're going to take when you graduate or who you'll marry.

And just neglect altogether all of these clear commands that have been given to us which are for your good and the glory of God. Secondly, God speaks peace by the Holy Spirit through prayer. [30 : 08] Pray that God would accomplish his revealed general will for the Christian in you. But also pray for God's specific will for you. I know that there are questions that have to be answered.

There are deadlines that must be met. What should I do is a real felt question. You need to know which way Lord would I go.

In prayer we have the opportunity to bring our will in line with his by casting the anxiety of that on him. Paul knew this.

He wrote to the Philippians chapter 4 verses 4 through 7. He said rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand which I take to mean the Lord is near. Therefore we have no reason to have anxiety about these things. God is with us. God is at work. God loves us. He intends to direct us. [31 : 08] Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Thirdly the Holy Spirit directs us speaks through circumstances. I don't think that the authors of experiencing God intend to be too mystical at this point.

I don't think that's what they're trying to accomplish. In fact, if you're really looking at the totality of what they're saying, it would be impossible for them to be. But if God is always at work around you and he is inviting you to join him in his work, pay attention to the opportunities to do so.

I think that's what they're saying. I think they're just saying, look. Look and see how God is at work. What is he doing around you? An example from my life is that back in the very early days of Christ's family church, myself and my brother-in-law who's here today, which is a wonderful surprise, were bivocational.

Both of us were working full-time jobs. We were flip-flopping back and forth a couple weeks on, a couple weeks off, just trying to fill preaching time. Sam, my wife, and I seriously considered working for Eagle Ranch, which is a home for troubled kids, and we applied.

[32 : 33] We were going through that whole process. We had decided, had we been offered the position, we would have gone to live there, it's south-south Howell County, that we would probably have to stop being in any kind of leadership here.

Still wanted to be part of the church, wanted to be in fellowship but I wouldn't have time to give any kind of leadership here. At the same time, the church was growing and good things were happening.

Not only were we growing in breadth, but we were growing in depth. We were seeing some really good work of God happening here at the church. I didn't know which way to go.

We applied and went through an interview process. We had just barely been married long enough to meet their minimum requirement. I think it was three years at the time. They went with a couple who had been married, I think five, which was wonderful.

Good for them, really wise decision. I'm glad they did that. For me, that was confirmation that I was meant to be here, that this was a good thing. God was at work.

[33 : 33] I could see it happening around me. So we just leaned into it. We said, okay, then let's go. Now we know where we're supposed to be and what we're supposed to be doing. So a way that a circumstance, an example, could be guiding you.

pray for opportunities to practice God's revealed general will for your life. Then look for those opportunities, those specific things in which you could do. Pray in the morning that God would give you the opportunity to share your faith with somebody and then don't be hesitant to share your faith when the opportunity arises.

Specific will. There it is. I prayed for it and it's happening. My word. Lean into it and do it. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16, 8 and 9, but I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost for a wide door for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries.

There was a great work to be done in Ephesus. God was accomplishing things by the hands of Paul, working through him to accomplish his will, and there was a lot of opposition to the church and so Paul saw that it was a good thing to stay and so he did.

Fourth, God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the church. Through the church. One of my big grievances with the I feel led to mentality is that it's very individualistic.

[34 : 57] Very individualistic. I have a plan and God has told me it's the thing to go do and we don't seek the counsel of the church. I have acquaintances, even some friends, who went to seminary and are pastors of churches and they have no business being pastors.

And everyone that I know that knows them sees that, but they never asked anybody and none of us were ever brave enough to tell them that they were wasting their lives. Gifted in some way, but not in that way.

Don't just assume because you have a feeling for something that it's the thing that you ought to be doing. In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are commissioned on their very first missionary journey.

Let's note who the Spirit of God comes to in Acts 13. This is verse 2 and 3. This is the church gathered together while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting. The Holy Spirit said to the church, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Commissioned by the church. The Spirit speaks to the church for the work of Barnabas and Saul who we now call Paul.

[36 : 17] It does not record for us that Barnabas and Saul went to the church and told them they had a feeling and therefore the church said, great, we'll let you get up and talk about fundraising. The church came around them and fundraised and sent them off.

Paul rejects the intervention of the church in our text though, doesn't he? Isn't that interesting? That's what was so captivating to my mind as I was studying it this week.

It's like, well, wait a minute. Here in two different occasions, the church is going, no, don't go. But he had a confidence, a conviction about him that this was the thing that needed to happen and God had been speaking to him by other means.

And that is to say that the church can be wrong. The church is not the absolute, the end all of all things. This reminded me of a story of a missionary that I really love and admire named John G. Patton. He went to a group of islands in the day, what are called the New Hebrides. Now it's called Vanuatu. So you want to look up John G.

[37 : 27] Patton, Vanuatu. And the islands were known for cannibalism, extremely dangerous place. He has a fantastic story. One of the elders of his church implored him not to go.

He said, do not go. And he wasn't the only one. There were many people in his church that tried to restrict him from going. and the elders said, you will be eaten by cannibals.

And this was Patton's response. He said, Mr. Dixon, you were advanced in years now and your own prospect body is soon to be laid in the grave there to be eaten by worms.

I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I'm eaten by cannibals or by worms. And God did an incredible work in the life of John G.

Patton in Vanuatu. But Paul did not thumb his nose at the church in Caesarea. First part of verse 13, Paul answered, what are you doing weeping and breaking my heart?

[38 : 42] He knew that he was meant to go and his response to them and pleading with him to stay is please stop because I'm having to go against the very thing that you're asking me to do. You're weeping and you're brokenhearted because you know what's going to happen to me but I've still got to go.

So stop is what he was suggesting. He doesn't thumb his nose at them. He simply says stop weeping because I must go. So God is always at work around you and he is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal and he's doing so by inviting you to become involved with him in his work and this invitation is extended to you as God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal himself, his purposes and his ways.

This starts to build like the twelve days of Christmas. Number five, God's invitation for you to work with him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.

God's invitation for you to work with him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action. When God asks things of us, when he invites us into the work that he's doing, wants to do through us, whether it's the revealed and general or specific, they're always his things.

They're always God-sized things. And therefore, they're beyond our natural abilities. We're really humble, really honest with ourselves.

[40 : 26] We have no innate ability that really accomplishes anything for the kingdom of God. And as such, that means that we have to believe that God can and will work through us in the activity.

We have to become desperate that nothing happens apart from God's work. And so many in this day run off. I've done this.

We run off on our own course, going to do a work that God's not even about anyway. He's certainly not going to join us in it. Rather than recognizing that he is at work and he wants to use me as part of that work and he will work in and through me to accomplish that thing.

So that's the crisis of belief. What do I believe to be true about God's working in the world and how it is that he works in me in his working in the world? Paul was aware of this.

He wrote to the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians 9-8. This encouragement, and God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

[41 : 41] God provides for all that he commands. So we need not to be afraid to be obedient despite what may come.

The rest of verse 13 in today's text, Paul says, for I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

What a wonderful profession. God is able to make all grace abound to me so that whatever it is that he asks of me, that he expects of me as I'm obedient to his will, he'll provide for me.

Paul says, I am ready. Prison, death, I'm ready by the grace of God. And then I love their response. I think this is wonderful and worth noting in verse 14.

Since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, let the will of the Lord be done. So, here it comes again on the first day of Christmas.

[42 : 43] So God is always at work around you and he is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal and he's doing so by inviting you to become involved with him in his work.

This invitation is extended to you as God speaks by the Holy Spirit, which will always lead you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.

Six, and I'll speed up, you must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what he is doing. Beloved, the ways of the world are not the ways of God.

God's economy seems so often to be upside down, when in reality the world is upside down and God's economy is right side up. So we will have to make adjustments if we're to obey God.

It always requires change on our part. These major adjustments may relate to our thinking, circumstances, relationships, commitments, jobs, actions, beliefs.

[43 : 49] God intends to bring our lives into conformity with him. We are to be holy as he is holy. Paul understood this and made radical adjustments for the sake of following Christ.

He wrote to the Philippian church in Philippians 3.8, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

It is better to know Christ. than everything else. Everything in my life goes into the loss column if I can have Christ in the gain column.

And he goes on, for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. In order to be obedient to God, you will be asked to change.

Don't resist such good command. this is good for you. Don't think that as God brings you to the end of yourself, as he twists things that your hands clench onto so tightly, that it's not for your good.

[45 : 01] He loves you. His intention is the best for you, even if it's arrest and imprisonment. Because in that we gain more of him.

Don't resist it. God is always at work around you, and he's pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal, and he is doing so by inviting you to become involved with him in his work.

This invitation is extended to you as God speaks by the Holy Spirit, which will always lead you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action and major adjustments in your life to join God in what he is doing.

It is easier to copy and paste that than it is to read it. Seventh and lastly, you come to know God by experience as you obey him and he accomplishes his work through you.

Beloved, we ought not just know things about God, but know him, and it is through obedience in his work that we come to know him.

[46 : 12] For many followers of Jesus Christ, this is the all-too-important missing ingredient to keep their hearts warmed up to the truth of the gospel.

The daily experience of walking with God, seeing him alive and active in the work he is doing and has graciously invited us into.

to not treat him merely as a philosophy far off that we can read facts about, but seeing him bear out his character before us that we might experience him.

Listen to Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church in Ephesians 1, verse 16 and following. He says, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Now, if you were like me and tend towards being academic, I'm not suggesting that I'm smart, I just tend towards that. I'm more of a thinker than a feeler.

[47 : 27] You could read that wrongly. You could read that what Paul is saying is that they would know facts. I don't think so. I don't think so. I think what he's praying for them, they'd have this wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God himself, that they would know him, not just about him.

And I think that because of the following two verses. Verse 18, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, not just your minds, but your hearts, that you may know what is the hope, these words, this indwelling type of knowing God, what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

that doesn't feel far off and distant to me. That feels personal. That feels experienced. And I think that's what Paul meant.

And so Paul had not a copy of experiencing God, but he had these biblical truths that he understood and was working out.

And we see these evidences of it, both in his living and in his writing, his doctrine and in his practice. And I believe that's why Paul could have this firm, convinced conviction that he was meant to go to Jerusalem.

[48 : 56] And so he pressed on in obedience. And all the things that will follow in the book of Acts are the result of his obedience and continued obedience. The rest of the book is not a tragedy.

It's not Paul sinned and did the thing he wasn't supposed to do and now God's having to throw into place a different plan and try to work some good out of it all. God's providence reigns all the same and Paul's going to Jerusalem.

So, in conclusion, one more time. God is always at work around you and he is pursuing a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal and he is doing so by inviting you to become involved with him in his work.

This invitation is extended to you as God speaks by the Holy Spirit which will always lead you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action and major adjustments in your life to join God in what he is doing.

This is of great benefit to you as you come to know God by experience as you obey him and he accomplishes his work through you. Let's pray together.

[50 : 03]