



36 | ACTS 21:1-16

BOLD STEPS FOR CHRIST

As believers we are not to be afraid of the unknown but take bold steps to follow Christ no matter what the cost.

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Call to Worship

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. ²The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. —Psalm 98:1-3

Songs

It is Well with My Soul
All Hail The Power of Jesus Name
I'd Rather Have Jesus
Blessed Be Your Name

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

Sometimes in life we need to take some very bold steps. It's always done in humility and brokenness. We walk by faith, and **the moment we surrender to God is the moment his sovereign hand begins to move** the mountains.

Centuries ago, when **map makers** ran out of known world before they ran out of parchment, they would sketch a dragon at the edge of the scroll. This was a **sign to the explorer** that he would be entering **uncharted** territory at his own risk. Unfortunately, some explorers took this symbol literally and were afraid to push on to new worlds. Other more adventuresome explorers saw the dragons as a sign of opportunity, a door to new territory.¹

Today, God is calling our congregation to bold, new steps of faith, to higher ground in holiness, but it's going to cost, and for us it is all uncharted territory, though the Lord has planned it from the foundation of the world.

Key thought: As believers we are not to be afraid of the unknown but take bold steps to follow Christ no matter what the cost, as long as Christ is at the center, leading us by his word.

In Acts 21, Paul travels to Jerusalem despite **prophecies that he will be imprisoned** and despite his friends' pleading with him not to endanger his life by going. Yet **God is leading him, so he is unafraid**. Sure enough, in Jerusalem Paul is arrested and brought before the city's Roman commander.² He's not afraid. He is willing to follow Jesus no matter what.

We see there are three things Paul did that left a legacy. He **followed** the Lord unconditionally. He **fellowshipped** with the saints as a priority. And he **forsook** the world unreservedly.

1. DETERMINE TO FOLLOW THE LORD (21:1-3)

We take steps every day. Some forward, some backwards, some steps of fear, some steps into the unknown. God calls us to take bold steps of faith. Big things don't happen in our life without taking bold steps in faith. As we take bold steps for Christ, we cannot be afraid to follow the Lord and his word, no matter what the price.

Sometimes in order to bear fruit there is much pain. Some of you are entering a time of trial precisely because you are choosing to do what is right. The message today is, don't be afraid of the pain because there's going to be so much joy. Jesus said that when trial and persecution come, we should rejoice and be exceedingly glad. We need to "count it all joy" when our faith is tried (Jas 1:2-3). Don't be afraid of the pain dear saints. God has to prune the vine before much fruit can come.

THE PRICE OF FOLLOWING GOD

Paul pays a huge price for following God, which means **he eventually loses his life**. Nero is in power. It's 57 A.D., but Paul will die the year Nero infamously sets fire to Rome, in 64 A.D.

¹ Roger von Oech, *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1986), 39.

² H. L. Willmington, *The Outline Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), Ac 21.

Paul leaves the Ephesian elders in Miletus and sets sail for Tyre, on his way to Jerusalem. Paul knew the prophecies about his arrest in Jerusalem and eventual death in Rome 7 years later under the tyrannical Roman emperor. Yet a lot of good fruit will come out of Paul's willingness to be imprisoned and suffer. It all starts with a journey toward Jerusalem.

Acts 21:1-3 | 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. ²And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³When 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.

The cost of following the Lord will be high. Usually it means humbling our ego in total surrender. It means dragging our sin out into the light, confessing our sin one to another, so that we can hate it and forsake it. It means submitting to discipleship and learning how to walk with stability. All these things Paul did early on in his life. But then there is a time to launch out, to count the cost, to suffer for the cause of Christ. Paul was willing to go anywhere, do anything, pay any cost, as long as Christ was exalted in his life.

Paul lands at Tyre, north of Jerusalem, but his destination is the holy city. Paul was going to have two fairly long imprisonments as a result of his journey to Jerusalem, but during those imprisonments, he would write seven of his thirteen New Testament epistles to the churches. During his first imprisonment, under house arrest in Rome (60-62 A.D.) he would write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. He was likely free for a year when he established a church in Crete and wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then, during his second and final imprisonment in Rome around 67 A.D., Paul wrote 2 Timothy. Satan meant Paul to suffer but God meant Paul to study and write and prepare his legacy!

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

I love all the seemingly random things mentioned in this text. They passed through various cities, and then they "found" a ship crossing to another city. They had various travels that would land Paul in Jerusalem at a specific time for a specific event. God's providence is his overarching sovereign guidance that weaves all things together for your good and his glory. Solomon speaks of this very comforting doctrine in Proverbs.

Proverbs 16:9 | A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

Or here's another.

Proverbs 19:21 | Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

As children of God, we are to be comforted by the providence of God. He's guiding your life. He is getting you to where he wants you to be.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

Paul wasn't going blindly to Jerusalem. He knows something bad is going to happen. But what is bad in this realm of brokenness and sin can work together for good in the realm of the kingdom. In fact, God can make bad things work together for good.

Paul's going to get arrested (*cf* 21:27-37). But God's leading him right to where he wants him to go. We can't understand how the difficulties can work together for good, but we need to trust God. Listen to Solomon again.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 | He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

We are called to trust that because we are predestined to be conformed to Christ (Rom 8:29), that the Lord will make all things beautiful in his time. Get your eyes on the Lord, like Paul did. He knew he was called to go to Jerusalem to suffer. But there was an incredible plan that God had for the church through Paul's suffering. Paul is not afraid of suffering because he wants to follow Christ no matter what.

2. DETERMINE TO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS (21:4-7)

Paul arrives in Tyre, and he fellowships there for seven days and gets encouragement from fellow believers. What we find, is that if we are going to take bold steps, we have to have support from our fellow believers.

FELLOWSHIP IS ESSENTIAL

Notice that the first thing Paul does in Tyre is **seek out disciples to fellowship with**. And he stays there for a week. The disciples have received a message from the Spirit for Paul.

Acts 21:4 | 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.

These unnamed believers, led by a prophet speaking through the Spirit, urge Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. It seems clear that the Spirit is telling both Paul and the other believers, that Paul was headed for a lot of suffering at Jerusalem. But Paul and his brothers in Tyre had different opinions as to what God's will was.

Nonetheless, we see that **fellowship is essential**. His friends didn't want Paul to suffer, but it seems Paul had great leading from the Spirit that it was ok to go and suffer in Jerusalem. God had great plans for Paul, though they included suffering. The Holy Spirit had never before prohibited Paul from going to Jerusalem. According to Acts 20:22-23, He warned Paul repeatedly of what would happen to him when he got there but did not tell him not to go. **The Spirit's message** to Paul in Tyre, as elsewhere, **was a warning, not a prohibition**.³

Notice that **fellowship does not replace a relationship with God**. Paul was also hearing from the Spirit that he would have to suffer, but he had a different understanding what God's leading was. That's ok. There was **a clear leading from the Spirit confirmed by his fellowship with the brothers, that Paul would suffer**.

This reminds me of our Lord when he told his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer, and Peter rebuked him. Peter understood what was going to happen to the Lord, but he didn't want it to happen. The same occurred with the

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 237-238.

believers at Tyre who tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Despite the disagreement, Paul's heart was joined with his brothers in Christ. We are not meant to live the Christian life alone. We need each other.

FELLOWSHIP IS ENCOURAGING

It is touching to see how the believers had come to love Paul, though they had known him only a week.⁴

Acts 21:5-6a | 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 prayed⁶ and said farewell to one another.

The Spirit predicted persecution against the apostle, and the people's love for Paul caused them to beg him not to go. This was rough on Paul! He was in Tyre for only seven days, and yet when he left, they "all," along with "their wives and children," escorted him out of the city and knelt with him on the beach for prayer! They loved him!⁵ As much as it hurt for them to say goodbye, it must have been an incredible encouragement for Paul to know how much the brothers loved him so much, though he's only been there a week.

Fellowship is such a cure for our depression, despair, and discouragement. It helps us shut the doors that allow Satan in to harass us. It's like "taking up the shield of faith" together, and it "quenches all the fiery arrows of the wicked one" (Eph 6:16). We need to constantly be seeking out fellowship with believers.

FELLOWSHIP IS EVERYWHERE

Paul boards a ship again to journey further to his destination in Jerusalem. He makes it to Ptolemais, on the coast, parallel with Galilee. There he finds even more believers.

Acts 21:6b-7 | 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.

Our fellowship with God brings us fullness of joy, but sometimes we can be discouraged and not feel the presence of God. This is why we need other believers. They can be "Jesus with skin on." They are temples of the Holy Spirit, ministering the presence of Jesus.

The depth of camaraderie among the first Christians is portrayed in the early chapters of Acts. The believers met together in house groups for teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46). So profound was their sense of togetherness that the Christians pooled their possessions and distributed them to brothers and sisters in need (2:44-45; 4:32-35). Perhaps the dominant characteristic of this early Christian fellowship was the love among the believers (1 Thess 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22).⁶ Paul made this fellowship a priority in his life.

Dear saint, we need to make fellowship with the saints a priority. If all you do is meet with the saints on the Lord's day, that's good, but it is not enough. You need to share the

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 489.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 286.

⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 484.

presence of God with other believers during the week. You need your family, but as a man, you need another man. As a woman you need another woman. You need their encouragement, and they need yours. Seek out fellowship continually.

3. DETERMINE TO FORSAKE THE WORLD (21:8-16)

On Paul's way to Jerusalem, his final stopover is Caesarea. Now what we find out next is that the world is constantly trying to divert our walk with Christ. Christ followers do not love the world (1 Jn 2:15-16). We live lives separate from the world, not given to the counsel of the ungodly but to the word of God (Psa 1:1-3).

THROUGH GODLY FRIENDSHIPS

Paul visits with **Philip the evangelist**, one of the seven deacons. Remember he led **the Ethiopian eunuch**, who was a high-level statesman, to the Lord there in Caesarea. It was there that Philip settled with his wife and four daughters.

Acts 21:8 | 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.

One amazing way to stay away from the paths of the world is to have good, godly friends. Someone said, "Show me your friends and I will show you your future." Do you count the warriors of God as your friends? Do you have those around you who are fighting for your holiness and your joy in God? Paul had this.

THROUGH GODLY FAMILY

Philip has **four unmarried daughters** who have the gift of **prophecy**.

Acts 21:9 | He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

We see here that Philip's daughters have the gift of prophecy. It's interesting to think of this since the New Testament has no place for women in the eldership of the church. Yet **some women indeed have the prophetic gift to apply the word of God** and study the word of God and give guidance. This guidance is not to be on the level of an elder but in a robust ministry to other women, or as we consider in Pricilla and Aquila's case, **Pricilla was able to teach Apollos more fully under the headship of her husband**. The main thrust of the ministry of Philip's was the reiteration or exposition of existing divine revelation, much like today's preachers and teachers of the word.⁷ Paul described the gift in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 14:3 | The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation

What about you? If you are a parent, are you seeing your children follow Christ? Are you encouraging them in their spiritual gifts? Philip had obviously fanned into flame the gifts in his daughters. They knew their way around the word of God and could prophesy.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 240.

What does the gift of prophecy look like today? For some men, it means the ministry of elder and pastor and shepherd. For most men and women, it means a biblical counseling ministry and discipleship ministry, helping people walk in the word, growing and changing into the image of Christ from their hearts.

THROUGH GODLY FELLOWSHIP

Paul now has fellowship with a dear prophet and elder from the church in Jerusalem, named Agabus. Now we get to the place where Paul's willingness to suffer is tested. We find that he wants to do the will of God no matter what, following his Lord and ours. This beloved prophet Agabus enters the scene.

God speaks through Agabus, warning Paul of his arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:10-11 | 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.'"

Agabus at that moment was following a **rich tradition in Old Testament** history. Even in the New Testament, prophets not only delivered the oracles of God with their lips but with **object lessons**, dramatizing the word God had given to them.

In the Old Testament one prophet (**Ahijah**) **tore his garments**, symbolizing that the united kingdom of Israel would be torn asunder after the death of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:30). **Isaiah** shocked everybody when **he stripped to his undergarments**, and walked down the street barefoot, giving the message of how God was going to deal with the Egyptians. He would humiliate them and drive them away (Isa 20:2-3). Ezekiel **built a replica of Jerusalem** and used it to show the people what God was going to do when he destroyed the city (Eze 4:1-17).⁸

So **Agabus takes Paul's belt and binds his own hands and feet** and says, this is what is awaiting you. You will be delivered to the Gentiles. Paul had always wanted to go to Rome and preach the gospel. This, I'm sure, was quite different than what Paul imagined.

Of course, we know that within seven years of his arrest in Jerusalem (57 A.D), Paul would be put to death in Rome (64 A.D.). He would have two years of house arrest in Rome, be set free briefly, but then after his second arrest die by beheading under Nero's rule.

THROUGH GODLY FORETHOUGHT

Paul's traveling companions and the believers at Caesarea beg him not to go to Jerusalem. They know by the Spirit what is going to happen.

Acts 21:12 | When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

There is a genuine plea not to go to Jerusalem, because they knew Paul would suffer, and eventually, we know, he would die there. Paul appreciated his fellowship with Agabus,

⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 353.

and the prophecy he received that he would be bound and sent to the Gentiles. Though the news was discouraging, the prophecy was helpful for Paul. He didn't want to take the easy way out. He wanted to do God's will no matter what the cost.

THROUGH A GOD-HONORING FUTURE

Realizing Paul is determined to visit Jerusalem, the believers declare: "The will of the Lord be done!" The believers saw Paul's motive was to honor God, and they recognized this sacrifice as God's will.

Acts 21:13-16 | 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.**"¹⁵ 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.

"Your will be done!" What a profound theological insight! Of course, the will of the Lord was going to be done, and Paul knew that. Jesus knew the will of God when he wrestled in the garden and prayed.⁹ Consider Jesus' prayer!

Luke 22:42 | Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

So it was with Paul. You can almost hear him saying, "I want to follow my Lord. As he went to Jerusalem, I follow him." **Wherever the Lord leads us, we should follow.**

Conclusion

We are called to follow the Lord, wherever he leads, no matter what the cost. The Civil War battle of Antietam (An-tee-tm) was one of the bloodiest days in American military history. On that September day in 1862 nearly 6,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were killed, and 17,000 others wounded. To put that in perspective, one historian writes:

The casualties at Antietam numbered four times the total suffered by American soldiers at the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944. More than twice as many Americans lost their lives in one day at Sharpsburg [Antietam] as fell in combat in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Spanish-American war combined.¹⁰

Some of the fiercest fighting on that awful day took place in a part of the battlefield known as the **Cornfield**. Some Union soldiers, their ranks decimated by heavy Confederate fire, fled toward the rear in wild panic—only to be stopped by the **contagious courage of one young man**. Historian Bruce Catton describes the scene:

The Pennsylvanians broke and ran again—to be stopped, incomprehensibly, a few yards in the rear by a boyish private who stood on a little hillock and kept swinging his hat, shouting: "Rally, boys, rally! Die like men, don't run like dogs!"

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 355.

¹⁰ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 544.

Strangely, on that desperate field where men were madly heroic and full of abject panic by turns, this lone private stopped the retreat.¹¹

Like that nameless soldier, Paul had the courage not only to face the enemy himself but also to inspire others to do likewise.¹²

Dear saints, do you understand that Christ laid down his life? He is calling you to make some bold steps of faith toward holiness. Drag your sin in to the light. Choose to reach out to another brother or sister for life-on-life discipleship. If your marriage is in need of revitalization, get some of our marriage enrichment discipleship.

God may be calling someone here into full time ministry. He may be calling you to start serving at this church. He may be calling you to give the gospel to a loved one. He may be calling you to love your spouse in a way that is radical. Search yourself. Open your heart. What is the next step that God is calling you to take? Don't retreat. Don't run from the fight. Boldly lay your life down for Christ.

¹¹ Bruce Catton, *Mr. Lincoln's Army* (New York: Fairfax Press, 1984), 162.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 242–243.