

The Spirit's Drive to Jerusalem

How do you know God wants you in NZ?

- Often times people would say: but why NZ? Why Hamilton?
- We never had a voice from God
- But through prayer, conversation and considering a range of options we truly felt God was leading us to NZ
 - o Even with a long delay!
 - o Either that or we're really really stupid and can't get a hint from God that he doesn't want us in NZ

We're continuing our series in Acts and Paul's been striving to get to Jerusalem

- We'll hear today that the Spirit has been driving Paul to Jerusalem

Point number one:

The Spirit's Contradiction?

21:1

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

As we heard last week from Michael, Paul has been making his way back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost

- He's winding up his third missionary journey which he started back at the end of **Acts 15:36** with this purpose:

"Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

- Paul is very much a pastor and you heard that last week in **Acts 20** when he caught up with the Ephesian Elders at Miletus and said farewell
- A farewell filled with the Elders embracing, kissing and weeping because they would never see Paul's face again, he'd been with them for over 2yrs
- And this farewell pain was felt by Paul and his companions in **21:1** they literally had to tear themselves away from them
 - o It was emotionally painful for Paul to say goodbye
 - o Saying goodbye is really hard, as many of you know
 - o It's particularly hard for pastors who have shepherded God's flock
 - o Seen them grow in maturity, seen them become Christians
 - o We were at our last church for 8yrs, it really felt like we were being torn away from deep friendships and partnerships in the gospel to come and serve alongside you all

After they've torn themselves away we get a travel log of Paul's travels

- He went from this city to that city to that city
- Now I don't know about you but sometimes, just sometimes when I read list in the Bible my eyes can glaze over
- So why is Luke the author of Acts giving us all these travel details for Paul, why can't he just say: Paul went from Ephesus to Jerusalem
- Doesn't Luke know that papyrus in those days is expensive?
- So why all these details?

We need to remember that Luke cares about the details

- Back in his first volume: the Gospel of Luke he writes in **Lk 1:3**

it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Details matter and they remind and encourage us 21 centuries later that Luke did his homework, and we can trust his account

- It's not made up, it's not a fairy story, it's history
- Which can be a gentle reminder to those who write Christianity off as make believe

It also shows as John Calvin writes:

'Paul was prepared to be tossed and troubled with such long, unlevel and troublesome journeys than provide for his own quietness'

But it's in Tyre that we discover a potentially massive theological problem:

21:4

And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

Seems pretty clear: the Spirit through the disciples in Tyre tells Paul: don't go to Jerusalem
But the problem is back in **Acts 20:22**:

I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there

So back in **Acts 20** the Spirit says go to Jerusalem, but now in **Acts 21** the spirit says don't go

- Is the Holy Spirit contradicting himself?
- Has the situation changed?
- What do we make of this?
- Well we need to read the rest of the passage, but before we do
- It seems like the Spirit has told the Tyre disciples what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem
 - o It won't go well for him: trouble and hardship
 - o Although the Spirit has told Paul that back in **Acts 20:23**: *in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me*

- So it seems at least this is an example of the Spirit reminding Paul through the Tyre disciples that Jerusalem is going to be hard work
- The Tyre disciples have then taken what the Spirit told Paul about the coming Jerusalem hardships and then inferred that Paul shouldn't go
 - No doubt because they care about him deeply
- But Paul is still firmly convicted that the Spirit is indeed sending him to Jerusalem
 - And get this: even though the Tyre disciples initially believed the Spirit was telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem
 - It seems like they realise they are wrong and so support Paul's Spirit led journey by accompanying him to the boat and prayed together on the beach
 - A sign of support and in a sense partnership
 - And notice it's not just a couple of people, those with nothing else to do
 - It's all of them: wives and children included:
 - This is a big send off

Which takes us to our second point, point number two:

The Spirit Says

21:7

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

Even with Paul's deep desire to make it back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost

- He still makes time to meet-up with other disciples in Ptolemais

When he arrives in Caesarea we're introduced to Philip the evangelist

- The same Philip who had been appointed as one of the seven to look after the distribution of food for the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jewish widows back in **Acts 6**
- And the same Philip who explained **Isa 53**; the Suffering Servant passage to the Ethiopian Eunuch back in **Acts 8**
- And we learn in **8:40** that after traveling around preaching the gospel: the good news of Jesus he settles down in the very same Caesarea that Paul find himself in
- And so for 20yrs Philip the evangelist has been living in Caesarea, we assume he's been preaching but we're not told
 - All we're told is that he has 4 unmarried daughters who prophesy
 - Whatever else he's been doing it seems like he's been doing his job as a Christian father to bring up his daughters in the training and instruction of the Lord
 - Also, we see that women in the early church were recognised as having the gift of prophecy

- But before we learn anything more about these daughters, Luke shifts our attention again in **v 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.'"

It's a bit like a mini-Acts reunion, we meet Philip again and now we meet Agabus

- We met Agabus back in **Acts 11:28** that Agabus was one of the prophets who came down to Jerusalem from Antioch
 - o And prophesied through the Spirit that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world- and it did
- So Paul knew Agabus
- And Agabus was a legitimate prophet with runs on the board
- And it seems like Agabus' prophetic gift had to do more with predicting the future, whereas the other form of prophecy in the NT seems to have to do with encouragement, evangelism or applying the Word to a particular situation

And so in classic OT prophetic style Agabus acts out the prophecy for Paul

- Taking his belt and binding him just like the Jews will in Jerusalem
- Let's face it Agabus and many of the OT prophets probably would've been pretty awesome kids and youth ministers: great talks

What's the point?

- The point is the Spirit has consistently said to Paul, the Tyre disciples and now through Agabus that
 - o Paul will suffer hardship in Jerusalem at the hands of his own people
- And notice as well that when Agabus speaks in the Spirit in **v11**
 - o he gives Paul a warning about what's going to happen
 - o he doesn't tell Paul that the Spirit says don't go to Jerusalem
- and that combined with **Acts 20:22** confirms at least for me that the Tyre disciples were wrong in inferring the Spirit was telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem in **Acts 21:4**

But when others hear of the hardship Paul will face, they react like the Tyre disciples in **v12**: pleading with Paul not to go

- again because they care for him
- there would be something wrong with you if you knew someone whom you loved and cared for was heading for hardship and you didn't plead with them to avoid it
 - o suffering and hardship is a result of our broken world
 - it's not good
 - You should be concerned if someone willingly seeks it out just for the sake of it

So is Paul being a suffering junkie?

- Well no
- Even though Paul has suffered much he has often fled from suffering
 - o **Acts 9** after his conversion he flees Damascus and Jerusalem because the Jews plan to kill him
 - o **Acts 14:5-6** he learns of a plot against him and flees Iconium
 - o **Acts 14:50** he's expelled from Pisidia Antioch
 - o **Acts 17** he's sent away from Thessalonica and then Berea because of persecution
 - o **Acts 19** he doesn't go into the riot in Ephesus
 - o **Acts 20:3** he avoids Syria because the Jews had previously plotted against him
- God can and does use suffering for good and the spreading of the gospel
- In fact the gospel often spreads the most through hardship and persecution, the biggest danger for God's people and his church is comfort and prosperity
- And yet that doesn't mean as Christians we go out actively looking for persecution and brining it on: we don't make ourselves martyrs

So what's different here?

- Paul already knows that hardship faces him in every city
- But he also knows the Spirit is calling him to Jerusalem
- And so even with hardship before him his first priority is not comfort or safety, or a long life, but faithfulness to the mission
- Friends I wonder how you would feel if your child come home one day and said:
 - o When I grow up I want to be a missionary to some of the least reached and least resourced people in the world, or I want to be a missionary to closed countries, one of the countries Barnabas Fund regularly mentions
 - o Or your adult child says: I believe the Lord is calling me into the ministry, to leave my career, my education- which you paid for, to pastor God's flock and reach the lost
- Or if God puts on your heart to reach your co-workers or friends and family with the good news of Jesus
 - o But you know it will cost you greatly

Paul has been reminded again and again in **Acts 21** that serving the Lord is costly

- And even when his friends vividly plead with him and break his heart
- He reminds them he's willing to pay the cost
 - o In fact throughout **Acts 21:1-16** Luke parallels Paul and Jesus
 - o Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem: death and yet for our salvation he resolutely set out for it **Lk 9:51**
 - o Jesus didn't relish facing the cross, he begged his father in Gethsemane for another way if another way was possible
 - o And yet Paul like Jesus committed himself to God's plans and purposes

And just like the Tyre disciples, despite what they thought was best they realise that Paul is sent by the Spirit

- That it is right for him to go to Jerusalem, towards hardship and suffering for the gospel
- And so in **v14** they submit to the Lord's will

Vv15-16 tell us that Paul did finally make it to Jerusalem

And so what do we make of this passage today?

That's our third point, point number three:

The Spirit's Guidance

Acts 21:1-16 is really about how the community of believers is trying to work out God's will

- To work out the Spirit's guidance on a high stakes situation, high stakes at least for Paul
- Should Paul go to Jerusalem?
- There were believers who genuinely felt the Spirit was leading them to tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, yet Paul genuinely felt the Spirit was driving him to Jerusalem
 - o And did you notice the process they went through to determine the Spirit's leading?
 - o It sounds like there was lots of discussion, lots of discernment and lots of prayer, that is genuine interaction and openness to being wrong rather than digging in to defend one's position
 - o And it makes sense right: if all believers possess the Spirit then we must be willing to learn from each other and hear each other and even change our interpretation of events
- One commentator puts it this way:

Sometimes well-intentioned people can be wrong about what God desires

And we need the humility to admit that we are, or have been wrong or mis-interpreted events

- Of course, it's easier to see how clearly right Paul was, we have the big picture revealed as we read Acts
- Oftentimes in life as we seek to be guided by God and seek his will we don't have the big picture now or even ever

And so how can we determine the Lord's guidance, the Spirit's leading today?

5 Principles from *Guidance and the Voice of God* by Philip Jensen and Tony Payne:

- 1) God in his sovereignty, uses everything to guide us 'behind the scenes'
 - a. Nothing can thwart his plans, we must never underestimate God's ability to guide us

- i. Nothing is too small
 - ii. Nothing too evil
 - iii. Nothing too difficult
 - iv. Nothing too great
- 2) In many and varied ways, God *can* speak to his people, and guide them with their conscious cooperation
 - a. But just because he has doesn't mean he will
 - b. But how has God promised to guide us?
- 3) In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son
 - a. Heb 1 especailly: Jesus is the big Word from God
- 4) God speaks to us today by his Son through his Spirit in the Scriptures
 - a. By the Spirit God unstops our deaf ears, opens our blind eyes as the words of the Bible come to our minds and we see clearly
- 5) Apart from his Spirit working through Scripture, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect him to
 - a. God can guide us in dreams, writings on the wall, a burning bush or an inner conviction like Paul's but there is no promise
 - b. He's given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Pet 1:3)

God gives us wisdom individually and corporately to make decisions

- Areas of righteousness:
 - o The Bible guides us how to live a godly life
- Areas of judgment:
 - o Usually involves perspective, context, experience, good judgment, understanding how the world works, this can be through science, history, economics, politics, consultation with other wise people, don't necessarily need to be Christians because of God's common grace
- and triviality
 - o just make a decision

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you make decisions in your life?
- Read the passage
- Is there anything that stands out from the passage and why?
- Why is Paul so keen to get back to Jerusalem?
- What faces Paul in Jerusalem?

- Why do the Tyre disciples and those in Caesarea tell Paul not to go?
- How is it resolved?
- From this and what was said in the sermon what can we learn about how God guides us today?