

The Courage of Conviction, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 21:1-6

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This morning we continue in our series in the book of Acts, and it's been with great anticipation that I've waited to approach the 21st chapter. As we continue in the journey of the Apostle Paul as he concludes his third missionary journey and zeroes in on the city of Jerusalem.

I've entitled the . . . look at verses 1 through 16, "The Courage of Conviction, the Courage of Conviction." We'll be considering this in at least two parts. This morning we'll be looking at verses 1 through 6.

Somewhere over Greenland, which was quite a sight on a clear day, I was reading Sports Illustrated, which I always keep very near my Bible and my study books, just so I never get behind on important matters. And I read a most interesting article that I thought was perhaps a very good setting for the thoughts that were in my mind, in regard to this particular portion of Scripture. There was an article in there - brief article, it said this, "Sentiment is running high at Iowa State to name the new football stadium for an ex-football player, and not, as ordinarily happens, after the heftiest contributor. The player, Jack Trice, by name, was no all-American, except for one game, the only game he ever played for the Cyclones. He was not even a starter. That was 50 years ago. In the noiseless footsteps of time since then, memory of Trice on the Ames campus had all but vanished."

"One day last year an English teacher, Alan Beals, became curious about a plaque attached to the old state gym. Under a coat of dust and bird droppings was a tribute to Trice. Beals assigned some students to find out why? Jack Trice, they learned, was a sophomore in 1923. He was married, majored in animal husbandry with a 90 average, and played football. He also was black. Because of that, he was kept out of the first two games of the season, but the team and coaches rallied behind him, and he started against Minnesota at Minneapolis."

"Ahead 14-10 in the third quarter, Minnesota ran a cross buck and the Iowa State defensive line crumbled. Trice rushed in to close the gap. He stopped the play, but fell on his back and three charging Minnesota players ran over him. As he was carried from the field Minnesota fans rose and chanted, 'We're sorry Ames, we're sorry.' Trice returned to Ames, lying on a bed of straw in a Pullman railroad car. He was taken immediately to the college hospital, two days later died of hemorrhaging lungs and internal bleeding. The day Trice was buried friends found in his jacket pocket a note that he

had written to himself, in the Minneapolis hotel room, on the night before the game - headed, 'My thoughts just before the first real college game of my life,' It read: 'The honor of my race, my family and myself is at stake. Everyone is expecting me to do big things. I will. My whole body and soul are to be thrown recklessly about the field. Every time the ball is snapped I will be trying to do more than my part.'

Now you can have different reactions to that. You can be analytical and say, "Now that man is a fool. Anybody who would give his life for something as stupid as football, needs psychiatric counseling." But you didn't think that, did you? What you thought. . . your first response was, "There is a man with tremendous courage." And that's normal. Even though carrying a piece of pig across a white line isn't ultimately very significant, I know, I spent enough years doing it. Even though, in fact, it doesn't matter at all, and even though it isn't a cause worth dying for, there is something about somebody giving his life for anything that speaks about conviction and about courage, doesn't it? As foolish as it is to die for a game, it's the courage and the commitment of the man who believed in something enough to abandon his own self-pleasure to see it come to pass. Now that's the spirit I think that is characteristic of all of God's greatest people throughout the history of biblical revelation.

You can go back into the book of Numbers, for example, and not just there, but in Numbers 13 and 14, "The spies were sent into the land," remember? "God said, 'That land is for you, now spy it out.' And they went in and ten came back and said, 'We can't go into that land, there are giants over there and we're like grasshoppers.' But Joshua and Caleb said, 'No problem. Let's go get it.' Formidable cities, massive armies, and they believed God, and they were willing to risk their lives for what they believed.

There was a lady in the book of Judges, who happened to be a judge in Judges 4. Her name was Deborah. And Deborah believed that God had given the children of Israel a victory, and so Deborah encouraged the army, said, "Look, the victory's ours, let's just go take it." And she led them out and they did.

And there is in 1 Samuel 17, that marvelous story of a young boy who had a handful of rocks and a slingshot, and said, "It's only a giant, and God is going to give the Philistines into our hands." And went out there and twirled that slingshot around and won a war. He had conviction and he was willing to stake his life on it. There were three young men in Daniel chapter 3, by the name of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who were willing to stake their life on a spiritual principle that it was proper to worship God and not idols, and they walked up to a fiery furnace. They said, "Go in," and they did. They were willing to die for what they believed. They would not bow to a false god. There was another man who had the same feeling, and he was the same man that the book is named after, Daniel. Daniel chapter 6, they said, "If you don't quit praying, we'll put you in the lion's den." They put him in the lion's den. Courage of conviction.

And as we've studied to the book of Acts in the New Testament, we have been finding out repeatedly that these people have convictions that they're willing to die for. Didn't they? God's greatest people have always believed their cause was worth dying for. And Paul was one of those people. Paul said to the Ephesian elders in the parting that we just read in the last studies that we've had in Acts 20. He said, "You will see my face no more," verse 38. This made them very sad. But he said, "You're not gonna see me anymore." Why did he say that? Because he was moving towards Jerusalem, and in the back of his mind he was well aware that all the way along, every step he took, every town he came to, the Holy Spirit kept testifying to him that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But did that stop him? No, not a bit.

As much as he realized the danger awaiting at Jerusalem, as much as his heart burned to reach the city of Rome and use Jerusalem only as a stop and then to Rome, as much as he knew the saints loved him and appreciated him, he still didn't stop because he had a conviction, and he had the courage to see it through. His conviction was this: for several years he had been collecting money to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem church. He had collected it from all the Gentile churches. It was a two-fold project: one: to show the Gentile churches loved the Jewish church, and to unite the church into one and two: to meet the needs . . . practical money needs of the poor saints. And he believed this. He believed God had given him this goal, and this cause, and this objective, and he pursued it. And he saw the Jerusalem church kind of, like a . . . a beleaguered or besieged garrison. It was cut off from supplies, it was weary, it had been through famine and persecution, and the power spiritually was being blunted.

And he saw the possibility of going and giving them the money, not only relieving the physical need, but injecting spiritual blood and spiritual energy into this church that was suffering from its persecution. Of course it wasn't a safe thing to do, because all over the world the hierarchy of Judaism had hated Paul. From place to place . . . remember how we've seen? They chased him and chased him, and chased him, and tried to kill him. And now he's gonna go from the frying pan into the fire. He's gonna walk right into the main headquarters of the whole operations - Jerusalem itself. And all the way along, everywhere he goes, people keep saying, "You know what's gonna happen when you get to Jerusalem?" The Holy Spirit kept telling him in every single city that bonds and afflictions awaited him. He knew that, but he had a conviction, and he had the courage to see it through without worrying about the consequence. Do you see? That's the courage of conviction. You've got to have a purpose and follow it up. Safety comes long after obedience. Safety isn't even a factor.

Now as we look at chapter 21, and just start, really, and take the first two points and the new two next time. As we look at chapter 21, we see Paul's courage of conviction. It's a tremendous lesson for me, I know, and I trust it will be for you, to see this man who had such crystal clear objectives and who marched towards those objectives with no thought for anything but meeting them. Now we see here, I think, four aspects of the courage of conviction. If you were to define the courage of conviction you'll

never get a better definition than right here. Four aspects of the courage of conviction. These . . . the courage of conviction: 1: knows its purpose, 2: can't be diverted, 3: pays any price, 4: affects others. The courage of conviction knows its purpose, can't be diverted, pays any price.

Like the young man in the article who throws his body recklessly, and affects others. Like the young man who died in 1923, and is now gonna have a stadium named after him. The courage of conviction . . . first of all let's look at this point: knows its purpose. You can't have courage if you don't have the conviction. I think that's basic. The first factor in expressing courage is you've got to believe in something. There's got to be an objective, there's got to be a goal, there's got to be a purpose that you're going at, in which you can express your courage. This is the conviction itself.

Now, for Joshua and Caleb, what's the conviction? The conviction was God has given us this land. Right? Then if God has given us this land let's be courageous and go possess the land that God has given us. But it all begins with the belief that God gave the land. For Deborah, the conviction was, "God promises victory." For David, the conviction was, "God wants Israel preserved from the Philistines." For the three Hebrews, "God wants to be worshipped, and does not allow us to worship any other gods," and we have the courage to believe that conviction, whatever it costs. For Daniel, same thing.

Patrick Henry, just to use a secular illustration, said, "Give me liberty or give me," What? "Death." The conviction was he wanted liberty. The courage is expressed in the fact that if he couldn't get it he'd die for it. The conviction is the basic point or object to which you set your sights. Now Paul was a man who lived by conviction. I'll tell you, I don't believe that that man ever had a five-minute period in his life when he wasn't going towards some objective. He was saying, "I've got to get to Jerusalem, so that I can get done with Jerusalem and go to Rome." And do you realize that before he ever got to Jerusalem, before he ever got to Rome, he sat down in Corinth and wrote the book of Romans that says, "I'm going to Jerusalem, and as soon as I get to Jerusalem I'll come to you in Rome, so that I can go from you to Spain. And if he hadn't have been beheaded he probably would have discovered America. The man was a man who lived constantly with objectives in mind.

Somebody said, "If you don't have any goals, you'll be sure and hit it every time." Must be an objective. And in this particular case, he had a very clear objective. He said, "There's a need in Jerusalem for two things: an understanding of the unity of the church, and some financial needs." And so, he said, "If I take this offering and these dear brothers from the Gentile church come along with me, we can sew the church together, practically into one unit, and we can meet the physical needs. This was his conviction. And he was a man on a crusade to that end, and he was willing to die for that. That's right. He said, "After the Holy Spirit . . . in Acts 20:23, "The Holy Spirit witnesses in every city that bonds and afflictions await me." He says, "But none of these things move me. Neither count on my life, dear into myself. I'll die to get this money to Jerusalem." Now that's conviction, and he was in a hurry.

Chapter 20 verse 16 says, "He wanted to get there by the feast of Pentecost. In chapter 20 verse 22, He says, "I go to Jerusalem bound in the Spirit." I mean, he was compelled. He was a man who functioned on conviction. Now as you approach our text, he's on his way to Jerusalem. He's got the money, and the men from each area of the Gentile church, as well as Luke, who's writing as he goes. And he's concluded his farewell to the Ephesian elders, and they all cried, and so forth, verses 36 to 38 of chapter 20, and had a terrible farewell there at Miletus, because they hated to see him go. He sets off to go to Palestine, and at that point we pick up verse 1.

And at that point we pick up verse 1. And in the first three verses we see the fact that the courage of conviction knows its purpose. And it's just implied here, because in these three verses we have a little narrative of the little journey they take from Miletus to the coastline of Palestine. But it serves just to speak to us of the fact that Paul was on a journey toward an objective.

Verse 1: "It came to pass that after we were parted from them," and that's a most interesting phrase because it literally translates, "After we tore ourselves away from them." It's kind of a beautiful little thing there in Miletus. These Ephesian elders didn't want to let him go, and they cried and fell on his neck and kissed him, and all that stuff, and then in verse 38 they went down to the ship, and they got to the ship, and he couldn't get away. You know, that probably was being very bothersome to the people on the ship who wanted to leave, but finally they had to tear themselves away. That phrase also is used in Luke 22:41, the same word to speak of our Lord tearing Himself away from His disciples in Gethsemane. It speaks of a love bond, which is hard to sever physically, and so they had a sad kind of parting. Well once they had broken . . . they got on the ship. It says, "They put to sea." A nautical term, they just took off in their boat. "Now we came with a straight course onto Cos, and the day following to Rhodes, and from there to Patara."

The interesting note of these is apparently it was a nice wind. They went on a straight course, didn't have to tack back and forth. But also it's interesting to note that those are stops 45 miles to coast, 70 miles to Rhodes, 70 miles to Patara. Again, they probably only sailed during the daytime. The winds would blow in the daytime and calm at night. And so they would sail at the day and stop at night. Also interesting that they sailed along the coast. They never got very far. From one little island on the coast, to the next little island on the coast, to Patara, which is not an island, but a city on the coast, on the Xanthos River in Asia Minor.

So they sailed unto Cos. That indicates they had a little boat, just a little ship that hugged the coastline. And so they went to those various places, stopping along the way. Well when they finally got to Patara, they arrived at a place that was a port. Patara was a large port, and since the Xanthos River emptied there, into the sea - the Mediterranean Sea, certain ships would unload cargo and it would be taken up the river to various inland spots, so it was a place where larger ships would dock. And there they would have gotten off their little boat and they would have gotten on to a larger one.

Verse 2 says, "Finding a ship sailing over unto Phoenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now this is gonna be a non-stop shot, right from Patara to Phoenicia. And Phoenicia, incidentally, is the coastline of Palestine - the old ancient land of the Phoenicians - the coastal area of Palestine. Now the indication is, is this is a large ship, and the reason we feel that is because it went straight to Phoenicia. And that meant it would have had to sail right out into the midst of the Mediterranean. But another reason we think it's large is in verse 3. It says, at the end of verse 3 that it unloaded its cargo in Tyre. And verse 4 says, "They stayed there seven days." Now any ship that needed seven days to unload must have been a large ship. And so very likely it was a large ship that they were on at this time, and it would go straight across.

Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers says, "From Patara to Phoenicia or Tyre, was about a five day sailing trip, if you had good winds and a straight course. So they took a larger ship and sailed. Now notice verse 3 says . . . "They had gone forth," in verse 2. "They sighted Cyprus on the left hand. They sailed south of Cyprus and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre." Syria, of course, the coastline area, Tyre the city that's famous in the Old Testament. "And there the ship was to unload her cargo." Now all we can really pull out of this, for our spiritual application, along the lines of the theme of our study this morning is, again to see that Paul is a man on a mission. He is directly going towards Jerusalem. The fact that he went, incidentally, across the sea in probably five days, and they got a large ship, which he may not have anticipated, meant that he had a little more time that he could spend before the time of Pentecost. And that perhaps is why he was tarrying seven days in Tyre, and waited till the ship again left Tyre, and would sail down the coastline to the ports near Jerusalem. So he sails pursuing his course to Jerusalem. A simple narrative, and yet it has lying underneath it a tremendous truth - the Apostle Paul accepting the tremendous challenge of bearing this gift to the Jerusalem church.

And I can't help think about this, and I did, as I thought about it in terms of my own life, that this is a man who has a conviction. The conviction is get the money to Jerusalem. And I began to think about that, and I thought, that becomes . . . now watch . . . that becomes the basis of his courage. Now hang onto this thought. I think part of the reason that we feel so detached from the kind of courage that Paul, and part of the reason that we cannot express in our own lives that devotion until death, if need be, that he knew, is because we don't live the kind of object-oriented conviction that he lived. You see, the only time that you really get that depth of courage is when you have that depth of commitment to an objective.

If you were to go to the average Christian, and I'm sure this is true, though you'd never be able to get a survey on it, and just pick a random group of Christians and say, "What is your greatest objective right now?" You'd probably get something like, "I don't . . . huh? Could you rephrase the question? I'm going to church tomorrow." No. "What is your objective?" If I were to ask you right now, take out a piece of paper, and I'm not, this is rhetorical, but if I were to ask you, for the sake of your thoughts, to

write down the three great objectives of your life today - this day, what are they? If you have to think about 'em very long you don't have any. You might try to form some just to write it down.

But, you see, the Apostle Paul never lived a day of his life, from the time of his conversion to the time that they cut his head off, he never lived a day, that I can find in Scripture, when he wasn't going somewhere to do something that was so consuming that he would die for it. He just traded one of those things in for another one. You see, it was a question of conviction, which precedes the acts of courage. And you can't just say to Christians, "Be courageous." They can run around saying, "I'm going to be courageous." Courageous about what? If you don't have an objective you never get into a situation where you have to be courageous. Nobody ever got courageous sitting on the bench in football. You don't get courageous there; you only get courageous when you get in the game. And a lot of Christians sitting on the bench wonder why they don't have any courage. Don't have any reason to be courageous; you're not doing anything. So there needs to be a goal orientation, an object orientation, you're going somewhere, you're accomplishing something.

Now in case you don't know what your objectives are I can help you a little bit, in a general way, and then turn you over to the Holy Spirit for specifics, but in a very general way . . . just let me illustrate. Philippians 3 might serve as a good illustration. If you would say, "All right Paul, I want to get in on this objective thing, this purpose thing, this goal idea. What is your objective in life? Let's talk about a general, spiritual objective. Let's not get specific, in terms of any specific ministry, like going to Jerusalem with a bag of money, but let's get general first. Paul, what is your objective?" Philippians 3:10, He kind of shares it with us. Here it comes. You ready? "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Paul says, "I'll tell you what my general, overall, spiritual objective is, that I may know Him."

Now if you're looking around for a good objective, try that one. That's a good one. If you were to ask me, "John, what's your objective?" I would not say, "My objective is to know the Bible." That is not my objective. My objective is to know Him, but if I'm ever gonna know Him, what am I gonna have to do? Know the Bible. The Bible is not the objective; the Bible is the means to the accomplishing of the objective. Just to know the Bible, in itself, doesn't mean anything, unless the God of the Bible becomes to be all that He wants to be through His revelation. So my goal is not to know the Bible, my goal is to know Him, but in order to know Him I gotta know His Word.

Then, in a general sense, I have another goal. Just to illustrate from my own personal life. And that's what Paul's saying, "I wanna know Him. I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to know everything there is. I want to put myself, as it were, into Jesus Christ. I want to know the expression of His resurrection power. I want to feel the pain of His sufferings, as I suffer for His sake. I want to know all there is of Him." That's a great objective. But if I were to analyze my own objective I would say, one, I want to know Him. Two, I desire, more than anything, to feed His flock. But in order to know Him I have to know His Word. In order to feed His

flock I have to know His Word. So my objective, though it is far off and spiritual, becomes very real and actual. In order to accomplish the ultimate objective there is a very practical thing that I have to do, and that's pursue Scripture. So you can have a very spiritual, general goal that can become very, very, very practical.

But what about specifics? What are your goals? Do you have an objective? You say, "Yeah, my objective is to win my unsaved husband to Jesus Christ." That's a good objective. Are you willing to pay any price to do that, sacrifice your own self-will, your own pleasure, anything for that objective? "My objective," somebody might say, "is to be in the ministry. Is to accomplish my study and my training and to serve God." Are you willing to make any and every sacrifice to accomplish that? Good.

I always think of the Bible teacher, who taught so well, and a young man came and said, "I'd give the world to be able to teach like that," and he said, "Good, that's what it'll cost you." And maybe that's right. Maybe your objective is to win your neighbor. Maybe you say, "My objective is to get ole Sam over there who sits on his lawn and drinks beer every Saturday. That's the guy I want to win to Jesus Christ." That's a good objective. That's a good objective. I don't know, but you ought to have some. Right? Because if you never have an objective you're not going anywhere, and you'll never have the occasion to know what it is to express courage, and to be able to set your will aside to accomplish what it is that God's laid on your heart.

There have been some great people . . . I always think of the preacher who said, "Give me Scotland or I die." And God did get an objective. All right? Then the courage of conviction begins with a conviction. Do you have any? What is it that you want? What is it that you're shooting at? Or are you just saying, "Well, I'm just going along and someday Jesus will come and I'll get raptured." You might as well have your own private rapture now for all the good you are. If you're just sitting around there ought to be something you're shooting at. All right, then the courage of conviction begins with a conviction. First of all, the courage of conviction knows its purpose. Secondly, the courage of conviction can't be diverted. You can tell how deep a man's conviction is by how fast you can get him off the track.

There's an old, old story, you know, about the old monk who was always saying to the head of the monastery, "I want to be a martyr . . . I want to be a martyr. . . I want to be a martyr." So the monk kept begging, and begging, and so finally the guy who was head of the monastery decided, "I'll just let him get a shot at being a martyr." And the story goes that they sent him out and put him a very precarious situation and he was forced to be burned at the stake by certain people or recant his faith and he bowed down to idols. And so they let him go and he crawled back to the monastery a broken man. You see, the courage of your convictions has to do with what it takes to divert you from them. Right? "I really want to win that person to Christ." And there he is sitting on his lawn and you're saying, "Oh, I've got to go over to get the tickets to the ballgame tonight. I don't know if I have time to . . ." What does it take to divert you? If it takes . . . whatever it takes to divert you is the measure of

your conviction. Right? Wouldn't you agree to that? So the courage of conviction, if it's genuine, can't be diverted.

Now look at this in the case of Paul. And go back, if you're in Philippines still, to the 21st chapter of Acts, and watch, verse 4, "And they landed at Tyre there - coast of Syria," and that's right in the north of Palestine there, so they're not far from Jerusalem. "And they come to Tyre . . . and verse 4 says, "And finding disciples . . . I like that. I think the greatest part of traveling is when you run into Christians. On our trip to the Holy Land, a couple of times, somebody would come in and say, "Oh, you'll never believe. Today I met a Christian." You know, which is, you know, exciting meeting a brother or sister in Christ. I had great fellowship with a Christian brother I met in Beirut, Lebanon. We had such a good time that he's gonna come to Southern California. It's either this month or the first of next month, and we're gonna get together and have some more fellowship. But, you know, it's exciting to go somewhere and find Christians. And these were Christians Paul didn't know. Paul did not found the church in Tyre. No. Indirectly he had a lot to do with it, as I'll show you in a minute, but he didn't found it. So these were new people. So when they went to town . . . you know, most visitors go to town . . . to a new town. The first thing they want to do is find out, "What's going on in this town? What do you do here? What do you do for fun in this town?" In the early church they said, "Where do the Christians meet?" I like that better.

Verse 4, "Finding disciples, we tarried there seven days." And these disciples said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. Now this isn't anything new, same song, second verse, everywhere he's gone they've been telling him the same thing. Chapter 20 verse 23, "The Spirit witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Now they knew there was a church in Tyre. You say, "Well, how did that church get started?" I'll tell you how. Paul didn't start it himself, but he indirectly did, because it was started out of the overflow of the persecution of Stephen.

In Acts 11:19, it says that, "As a result of the persecution and execution of Stephen, the saints were scattered." And it says, "They scattered into Phoenicia, into Cyprus, and into Antioch." And so the scattered saints, you know . . . the greatest thing that ever happened to the Jerusalem church is persecution. It just shot the preachers all over the place. And so they all went out preaching, and the church of Tyre was founded in the overflow of the persecution of Stephen. So the guy who was the catalyst behind the persecution of Stephen was Saul. So Paul was good for the growth of the church even before he was saved.

Well they got there and they got a familiar message. They said to them . . . they stayed with them seven days. It must have been a sweet seven days for them to be sitting under the feet of Paul. And they fell in love with him in those seven days, as I'll show you in a minute. But they said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. Now if the little phrase, "Through the Spirit," wasn't there that verse would be real easy. They said to Paul that he shouldn't go up to Jerusalem. And that could have been easily understood. They loved him and they didn't want him to go up there,

'cause they knew he was so hated of the Jews and that the people were after him, and so forth, for what he had said. And that there was no sense in putting his life on the line. . . blah . . . blah. But the problem that really gets to us is the one that says, "They said to him through the Spirit." Now the question is this: Did Paul get a word from the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem? If he did, then he went anyway, he was disobedient. So the question that comes up, is Paul disobedient? Did he make a mistake in going to Jerusalem?

Now let me give you an indication of what the phrase, "Through the Spirit," means. I don't think that's conclusive. I don't think the phrase, "Through the Spirit," can prove either way. The phrase, "Through the Spirit," means, through the exercise of the spiritual gift. Now in the early church there were many who had the gift of prophecy. Now the gift of prophecy was manifest two ways: one, through preaching. Like, 1 Corinthians 14:3 it's defined as, "Edification, consolation, and exhortation," teaching, preaching. But the gift of prophecy was also predicting, wasn't it, in the early church? God would speak practical things regarding the life of the church in prediction form very often. And so they got there and somebody with a gift of prophesy . . . that's what the phrase, "Through the Spirit," means, I feel. That the phrase, "Through the Spirit," means, in the exercise of a spiritual gift. Now you can exercise a spiritual gift in the true energy of the Spirit or in the flesh. I don't think it's conclusive there how it was, but the phrase, "Through the Spirit," means that somebody exercised the gift of prophecy and said Paul shouldn't go. Now just because a person prophesies doesn't mean you have to believe it, because in 1 Corinthians 14 it says that people should prophesy in two's and three's, and that the spirit of the prophet should be subject to the prophets. In other words, you need to check on the prophecies.

I just read a book written by a Pentecostal pastor who was saying in the book that we've got to be careful about the prophecies. And he was talking repeatedly about the problems that are going on in various Pentecostal churches because people are standing up giving prophecies and creating chaos. Somebody will stand up and say, "I have a prophesy from God that the pastor is to be dismissed." That happens quite frequently. Or they'll be having a discussion about a certain problem and somebody will say, "I have a word from God that this a solution." Well you get enough people doing that and you don't know who to believe. And this was what was true even then, that people would prophesy in the Spirit, but they also could enact that gift sometimes in the flesh, and so there needed to be kind of two or three that could check on each other. But somebody prophesied that he shouldn't go to Jerusalem. It's inconclusive as to whether or not that's legitimate or not, from that verse, but it does create the problem that if Paul did get this word from the Spirit and go to Jerusalem, he disobeyed. Some think he did. Some think Paul disobeyed, and that's fine. They say, "He disobeyed, but let's face it, it was a mistake out of love." I mean, if you got to make a mistake make that kind. Right? It was selfless. I mean, it was gonna . . . it could cost him life, and he made it out of love.

Absolute, overpowering love for the Jewish church caused him to do what he did. "Oh, it was a mistake to go," they say. But the motive was so fantastic - love - and, of course, that's great. If you

got to make a mistake make one of those, will you? It was a mistake to go but . . . and I like that . . . I like this viewpoint. Actually I prefer it for this reason: because it's an encouragement to me to know that Paul made a colossal mistake. I like that, because that makes him human. I lean toward liking this view better. Peter blundered, Paul and Barnabas quarreled, and I like that too. It's encouraging to me. In fact, if you read in the Bible you'll find that everybody that God ever used, His choicest people fouled up. Noah failed after the flood and got drunk, Abraham denied his wife, Isaac due to fleshly lust, Jacob failed daily, Moses failed and was left out of the Promised Land, David had a terrible blot on his life. And that's the best that God had. That's the best. John; gentle, loving, tender, John the Apostle, did one of the most stupid, self-motivating, materialistic, selfish things in the world, when he got his mother to try to get Jesus to give him the chief seat in the Kingdom. Peter denied Jesus, Thomas doubted.

God could have written failure over every one of those lives but listen people, God's in the business of picking up failures. Aren't you glad? So I lean toward that view, in terms of preference. However, I don't believe that's true. I don't believe Paul failed here. I don't believe he made a mistake. I just like that view better. I don't believe it. You say, "Well, what do you mean? Do you think he was not disobeying the Spirit?" No, I don't think he was disobeying the Spirit at all. "Why?" I'll give you some reasons: first of all his life was lived in sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. I cannot see the Apostle Paul, all of a sudden, becoming carnal, without any indication from God that he did. He lived his life in sensitivity to the Spirit.

Illustration: Acts . . . just back a few chapters, chapter 16 verse 6, "When they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia." You know something? The Holy Spirit forbid them to preach in Asia. You know what they did? They didn't preach in Asia. Paul didn't violate the Spirit. Verse 7, "When they come to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit allowed them not." They didn't go there either. "In a vision that appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia beseeching him saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After he'd seen the vision immediately we endeavored to go to Macedonia." Now watch, the Spirit said, "No," Paul said, "No." The Spirit said, "No, Paul said, "No" again. The Spirit said, "Go to Macedonia," and what did Paul do? Went to Macedonia. Listen, this man lived is life in sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

First of all, I think that Paul obeyed here because he lived sensitively to the Holy Spirit. Secondly, his reasons for going to Jerusalem were right kind of reasons. His motives were so pure; that I don't think you can get an impure act out of an absolutely pure motive, if you're really plugged into the Spirit. Listen to Acts 20:24. Now I keep saying to them, "You're gonna get it, you're gonna get it." Notice verse 23, "Except the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying bonds and afflictions await me." Now listen to me. Does the Holy Spirit say, "Don't go?" No, the Holy Spirit says what? "When you get there this is what's gonna happen." I like that. The Holy Spirit knew he was going, and I believe it's the Holy Spirit that sent him there, and it was a case, not of prohibition, but of preparation. You see the

difference? "Get ready, Paul, this is what will happen." So that his heart would be ready and prepared for it, not prohibition. He just told him, verse 24, listen, "None of these things move me, neither count on my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have. . . now here comes the crux . . . received of the Lord Jesus." Do you know that the Apostle Paul felt that his journey to Jerusalem was something that the Lord Jesus, Himself, had commissioned him to do? Do you get that there? This wasn't his own plan. He says, "I don't care what's gonna happen in Jerusalem. None of those things move me. I'm gonna finish this thing that Jesus has given me to do." I believe that he felt in his heart that going to Jerusalem was something, which the Lord Jesus Christ had commissioned him to do. His motives were right all the way along the line.

In chapter 24, in verse 17, he says, "After many years I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings." In verse 11, he says, "I went to Jerusalem to worship." He went because he loved the church. He loved the saints. He believed it was the Lord that gave him the job. He went to bring alms to his own people, and he went to worship God. I dare say, that to put all those motives together and have them issue in disobedience is very difficult. I'll give you another reason: I feel the Apostle Paul was not disobedient, because I feel he was urged in his heart by the Holy Spirit. If you look at 19:21 of Acts, "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the Spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem." And you say, "Well, that's his human spirit." All right, I'll buy that. Some say it's the Holy Spirit. Well that's fine too, because you can't prove it by the verse. It's just a question of a capital S or a small s, and there's no capitals in Greek, so you can't prove it either way. You say, "What do you believe?" I think it was his human spirit under the control of the Holy Spirit. I think they're both there. But it was an inside thing. It was compulsion in his innermost being, purposed in the Spirit, controlled by the Holy Spirit. Chapter 20:22 says the same thing, "Bond in the Spirit."

Now let me give you another thought. "The Spirit had been revealing to him," as I read in chapter 20:23. "It had been revealing to him that bonds and afflictions awaited him." The Holy Spirit had shown him that it was going to be difficult and he was gonna have problems. But that was to be expected. Why? Because in chapter 9 and verse 16 when he was converted . . . remember he was taken to the house at the end of the street called Straight, and Ananais came to him and said, "The Lord has instructed me to show you and tell you about the things which you are going to have to suffer." So this wouldn't have been any surprise at all, in the plan all along. So I think he was obedient. I think he was right because his life was lived in sensitivity to the Spirit, his motives were all right, he was going by the urging of his heart, his innermost spirit, under the control of the Holy Spirit, and he knew the dangers awaited him, but they had been predicted to him from the very start.

And another reason: the very fact that Paul gives no indication that he thought he had sinned is good evidence. I think he was a sensitive enough person to have admitted his error, but he does not. After he finally arrives in Jerusalem and he's got to give testimony to the Jerusalem hierarchy, in chapter 23 verse 1. Just listen to this. "And Paul earnestly beholding the council . . . he looks at these guys

and said, "Men, brothers . . . and not Christian brothers, but Jewish brothers . . ." "I have lived in all clear conscience before God until this day." Does that sound like the testimony of a man who's just been disobedient? No. You say, "Well, maybe he didn't feel like he was disobedient." You can't be disobedient and not feel it.

Chapter 24:16, he said something similar. "And this I do exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God." Listen, he was so sin conscience, he was so sensitive to the Holy Spirit, that I do not feel that he flagrantly and openly disobeyed God. The message the Holy Spirit was giving him was this. Now here's the point. The message is this: "Paul, don't go unless you're willing to suffer what's gonna happen." And he was. That's the courage of conviction. And it was natural that his friends, who, by prophetic spirit, could foretell his pain, would try to talk him out of going. It's natural. But Paul had no concern for safety, only for service. And he's like Jesus who set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. This is the courage of conviction. It can't be diverted.

Soon after the beginning of the reign of Bloody Mary, in England, an officer was sent to bring various preachers in for trial. A particular officer went to take the good and godly preacher, by the name of Hugh Latimer, and to bring him to London. Latimer had six hours' notice that they were on their way to get him. But instead of running, fleeing, he just packed and prepared for his journey, a journey which he knew could end in execution. When the officer arrived to take him, Latimer said to him, "My friend, come in, you're welcome. I go as willingly to London to give an account of my faith, as ever I went to any place in the world. And I doubt not that as the Lord made me worthy formerly to preach to two excellent princes, he will now enable me to bear witness to the truth before the third, either to her eternal comfort or discomfort." And off he went to London and Bloody Mary burned him at the stake. She didn't burn him alone; she burned two other preachers with him. And as the flames were leaping up Latimer said these words: "We shall light a candle in England today that will never go out." The costliest fire the Roman Catholic Church ever lit was that fire. It became the flame that ignited the English Reformation and the death of Catholicism in England. A man who had conviction and who had the courage to die in flames for his conviction, and the confidence to believe that in the sacrifice of his life, God would bring to fulfillment the goal and the dream that he had in his heart. That's the courage of conviction. But friends you'll never have the courage unless you've got the goal.

The disciples at Tyre were not all friends of Paul. Look what happened. And we'll just read these two verses. "When he'd accomplished those days . . . I like the word accomplished, they were doing something . . . we departed and went our way. They all brought us on our way . . . that beautiful custom of accompanying someone going on a trip, and the term, "Brought us on our way," means they gave them supplies and all that they would need . . . with wives and children till we were out of the city and we knelt down on the shore and prayed." See the beauty of that premedy? We just saw, just before, in the last chapter, that's with old friends. This is to do with new friends. One thing about Christianity, it doesn't take long, does it? Doesn't take long to make a sweet fellowship. "They knelt on the shore and prayed, and when we had taken our leave, one of another, we took ship," and they

returned home again.

And so in the city of Tyre we see the fact that Paul could not be diverted. Even these dear, sweet, beloved Christian brothers and sisters, newfound, with all their love, and all their instruction, as well meaning as it was, could never divert him one wit from his objective. So the conviction: he knew his purpose, and the courage: he couldn't be diverted.

Let's pray. We acknowledge Lord that it's easy to live without objectives. It takes nothing, nothing but indifference and indolence. God help us to sit down and set some objectives, some goals. If, no more than to know You and teach Your Word, that others may be fed and grow, to start there. Whatever it is, Father, help us to set a goal, the energy, the spirit, to go at the courage of conviction, to pay any price.

We thank You for the testimony of this dear Paul, who was willing to pay the supreme price of his own life for what he believed in. God, give us Christians like that. Help us each to be like that. Help me to be like that. Help us to be willing to go wherever You send us, to do whatever You lay upon our heart, whatever the cost, whatever the price, and never be diverted.

Father, we know that if it's true that we are people of conviction, and if all we learn out of this message today is that we're to have some convictions, and some goals, and that we're to be courageous in the attaining of them. If that's all we learn, Father, we would be revolutionized this moment. May it be so, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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