

The Courage of Conviction, Part 2: Singlehearted Purpose

Acts 21:7-9

1782

We're talking about the courage of conviction. That's the title of this little look at the 21st chapter of Acts. And to give you a broad perspective, we have been studying the Book of Acts, which is the story of the history of the church in its early years from its beginning in Jerusalem until the time that it became founded and formed in Rome. So it's the sweep of Christianity as it begins in Jerusalem and sweeps across the gentile world to Rome.

We found that the history of the church is not the history of events, but it's the history of people. We found that the church catalyst in the early years was Peter. And soon after Peter, we met people like Philip and Steven, who had great force and impetus in the growth of the church. And then there were others unnamed. And then we met the Apostle Paul. And starting in the 13th chapter of Acts, everything sort of issues from Paul. And we see him in combination with Barnabus and Silas and Timothy and Luke. And we're watching Paul now, as he will fill out the rest of the Book of Acts in his ministry. As we come to chapter 21, he is concluding his third missionary tour. He is on his way back to Jerusalem.

And as we have studied the book of history...and it is a book of history...we have been reminded all the way through the Book of Acts that what we're reading is not just history, but that woven into the history and the narrative that we have been studying are principles that apply to life. And I suppose that the Book of Acts has become, for all of us, a very precious and practical instruction manual on the life of the church and the life of the believer in the church, as we have seen by example rather than by precept, for the most part, great principles that are applicable to our lives.

And as we have looked at chapter 21 verses 1-15, we have chosen out of that the principle of conviction or the courage of conviction for kind of a focal point. And as I've said to you many times, you could probably focus on a multiple of options in any given passage, and that's the genius of Scripture. But for this time, for this Lord's Day, for this series, and for my mind, it seems as though I read in these verses that Paul is a man of conviction, and that conviction needs to be translated to us.

Certainly there is no substitute for conviction. And by that, we maybe could substitute some old Baptist words that some of you probably grew up on, like dedication, consecration, yieldedness, surrender...those last two sound more like Methodist words. But somewhere along the line, those words have fit into all of the past of our various vocabularies and religious experiences if we've been in the church for any time. We've all been to conferences, camps, and Bible meetings, etc. And we've heard about being dedicated, consecrated, and committed. And this is really basic and, well, we should hear about it.

But as we come to 21 of Acts, we're not so much exposed to a sermon on commitment as we are to

a life that is committed. And I've said this in my own mind over and over again, that I see more of what Paul is from what he does than what he says. But what makes it so powerful is that he winds up being what he talks about. And if I am to study the epistles of Paul, and I am to get all that exhortation that's good. But then I go back into the Book of Acts, and I say to myself, "This guy believed that. He made it operable. And here are the results of it." And that's exciting because that gives feet to exhortation. That gives application to information. That gives example, and I need an example. I need more than a lecture...I need a pattern. And so I see in the Book of Acts a man who is what he preached. And consequently, I learned from him.

Now Paul expressed something of his commitment...something of his dedication, if you will, or consecration, or the courage of conviction...whatever happens to say it to you. In chapter 20 verses 22-24, this kind of sets the pattern for what we're seeing in 21. He's on his way to Jerusalem, and he knows that that's going out of the proverbial frying pan into the fire. It was bad enough to be in Asia Minor and have the Jews against you, but it's worse to be in Jerusalem and have them against you. After all, that is where they're at. In great numbers and with great fury do they defend their Judaism at home base.

And so Paul moving toward Jerusalem, already despised and hated by the Jewish hierarchy for his preaching of the Gospel, which they simply determined is a heresy. And the closer he gets, the hotter it gets, and he continues that way. And verse 22 speaks with these words: "Now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem." In other words, he was compelled to go. "Not knowing the things that shall befall me there." In other words, the particulars. "I know this though, that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city that bonds and afflictions await me." Now he knew that because every town he went to, somebody told him that. Somebody used the Spirit and informed him he was going to get it when he got there. "But none of these things move me off my course. Neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, which is to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." Now he says, "I have a ministry. The Lord gave me that ministry. I'm going to fulfill that ministry...I don't care what the price is." Now that's what I call commitment. Of all the words that are used, I prefer that word. But you might call it the courage of conviction, consecration, devotion, dedication, surrender, or yieldedness. Whatever other terms it comes under, it is basically the same thing. He says, "I have an objective. God has committed to me a ministry. I'm going to see that thing to its fulfillment. And the price that I have to pay is inconsequential to the fulfillment of the objective."

Now the issue is this: you take all those words that I've mentioned...all of them...and the basic definition of all of them in terms of practice...not in terms of dictionaries...but in terms of practice, the basic definition is the issue of the supreme and undivided lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of a believer. It is not a question of whether He is Lord...He is Lord, right? It is a question of my submission to His supremacy and my undivided obedience to that lordship...that's what we're getting at. We know the Lord Jesus Christ is a plan for my life...a plan to unfold for my ministry, and for yours as well, because you're a minister of Christ equally as I am. And that unfolding plan is done in terms of the mind of God. It is an accomplished fact, at least in terms of preparation...God knows what it is He wants us to do. And we have been given the opportunity to do that ministry...to fulfill that ministry. The question of consecration or devotion is simply whether we submit ourselves to that lordship undividedly accomplishing what He has called us to do.

Now we've called it the courage of conviction only to divide it into two parts. First of all, this whole idea of dedication begins with a conviction, and then secondly with the courage to see it through.

And there are different levels of conviction or commitment...let me just share them with you, just to help you to put everything in perspective. And I think most Christians fall under these categories. First of all, there's what I'll call incomplete commitment. In other words, you're committed up to a point if it doesn't get too hairy, or if it doesn't really intrude on my schedule a lot, or if it doesn't hassle me at the point of my own self-desires. I'm committed up to a point.

There was a man like this...there are a lot of men like this in the Bible...but one that came to mind was a man by the name of Demas. He was a nice fellow, I assume, or Paul wouldn't have chosen him as a companion. And Paul dearly loved him, which says something else about his character. And he accompanied the Apostle Paul on certain ministries with apparently some degree of involvement and success. But Paul gives a very pensive statement regarding Demas when he says, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved" what..."the present world."

Now there was a rival in the life of Demas for the lordship of Christ, and it was the system that he loved. Somehow Demas loved the world, the world that he knew in Thessalonica. And the time came when it got right down to the nitty-gritty of sacrifice that he opted out for the love of the Thessalonian system rather than the love of Jesus Christ. That's what you call incomplete commitment. His commitment was valid up to a point, but at a certain point in time and under certain stress, he cut out on his whole commitment and went the way of his own whims.

And you know, there are a lot of people like that. There are a lot of people who are very committed, except to the very crisis issues. When it gets right down to it, there's something missing. If you're struggling in your life with the conflict of the lordship of Christ and something else, you're incompletely committed.

The second kind of commitment that I'll just bring to your attention is what I call insincere commitment. This is the verbal commitment that doesn't have any feet on it. This is Peter..."Lord, whatever happens, I'll die for you." And immediately when given the opportunity, he denies Christ on three occasions. That's a lot of verbal balderdash, to use an old word, defined in Scripture under the term hypocrisy. This is all talk and no action. This is the person who is piason the outside and supposedly very consecrated, very godly, and so forth, and so on. And when it comes right down to it, there's nothing there at all...it's all fluff...it's all show...it's all pretense...it's all superficial.

A classic illustration would be a couple in the early church by the names of Ananias and Saphira, who wanted to get in on being treated like they were holy people. So they tried to play the game, so they said, "We'll give all we have to the Lord." And then they gave the Lord part, and stuck the rest in their pocket. And Peter said, "You've lied to the Holy Spirit." And God took their life...they both died, executed by God on the spot.

You see, that's insincere commitment, and that is going all the time. And I think that there's nothing...and I guess maybe in the tradition of Jesus Christ, there's nothing as sickening as this...that facade of spirituality that has nothing behind it of genuine commitment. That's the person who...and I see this all the time...because there are people who, you know, they want to come on to me like they're very godly people...see, this is important...I mean it's the preacher, you know..."Here comes the pastor, cool it." And so I get that a lot, and then I find out what's really going on behind the scenes. And I wish that they were at least honest to begin with so you could at least begin to

evaluate somehow to help them rather than to play games. There's a lot of insincere commitment...all talk and no action...Ananias and Saphira...dishonesty in the heart.

But there's a third kind. And I suppose all of us, at one time or another, get trapped into this deal, and this might define most Christians too, and that's what I call intermittent commitment. It all depends on which day you talk to them whether they're committed or not. It comes and goes. And the extreme form of it is in the church of Ephesus, as our Lord wrote and said, "I have this against you. You have left your first love." These are the bouncing balls of Christianity. And very often, the bounce goes out, and they just roll along at the low level.

Now God's choice for his people is not incomplete, insincere, or intermittent commitment. God's choice is total, constant, complete, and full commitment...that kind of dedication that goes along, and whatever happens happens, but that doesn't change the commitment.

Now Paul was this kind of a man. He had convictions, he was committed to them, and it didn't matter what the consequences were for him...he had the courage of conviction. And as I would stress to you, he did not have a different Holy Spirit. He had the same resources you have, right? So you can't say, "I'm no Apostle Paul." Well, he wasn't an Apostle Paul either. He was just a plain old Saul of Tarsus. It was the Holy Spirit that made him what he was. And you're nothing either...neither am I...but we do have the same Holy Spirit. So you're right in the sense that you're nothing, but you're not right in the sense that you can't do anything, because in His energy, you can.

All right, he had the courage of conviction, which means he was absolutely abandoned to the cause. And this is the kind of thing God desires. Those other kinds of commitment are worthless. I think Jesus established the norm when he said this: "If any man will come after Me"...Luke 9:23..."Let him" what..."Deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

You know, it is basic to commitment that you've got to crucify self. You've just got to deny self...it's got to be put out of the way. It's over with. You say, "Yes, but that's for the great saints. That's for the spiritual giants." No, that's for the spiritual normals. All the rest of us are retarded, abnormal, subnormal. No, normalcy is that kind of attitude that Paul had.

Now in our passage, we're looking at Paul, the example, and we see in him the courage of conviction has four features. The last time we considered the first two...this time, we'll consider part of the third (*Laughter*). Anyway, after the sermon in the first hour, somebody came and said, "You didn't have any conclusion to that sermon." (*Laughter*) I said, "I know." We just ran out of time...that was it.

The courage of conviction involves, first of all, the knowledge of purpose. The courage of conviction knows its purpose. You cannot be convicted to fulfill something if you don't know what it is, right? You've got to have an objective. You're never going to win a race unless you know what race you're in. So the courage of conviction knows its purpose...that's the beginning. Secondly, it can't be diverted. Thirdly, it pays any price. And fourthly, it affects others.

Now first of all, by way of review, just to mention some thoughts, the courage of conviction knows its objective. A Christian knows his objective...Paul put it this way: "That I may know Him." That's a great objective. Or maybe the objective can be to walk in the Spirit, which we're going to talk about tonight. Or maybe your objective is simply to fulfill your life to the glory of God...that's general, that's

good. Maybe your specific objective is to win your husband to Christ, or to win your neighbor, win your son, your daughter. Maybe your specific objective is to accomplish a ministry for Jesus Christ that you're beginning. I don't know...whatever it is...but there needs to be something there.

As I told you two weeks ago, when you say to a Christian, "What's your goal? What's your objective?" And I may start saying that to folks just to see how well you're doing on this. When I meet you, don't be surprised. If I should say to a Christian, "What is your objective? What's your goal? What are you shooting at?" You ought to be able to say, that fast, "This is my objective." You can't have the courage of conviction if the conviction isn't there.

Paul was a man of conviction, and his goal was Jerusalem. He was going to get there, and he was going to get there with that offering. And we see him in verses 1-3 on the way. And we went through verses 1-3...we'll not go through it again this morning. But he traversed across the Mediterranean Sea, stopping at all those little spots that it mentions...Coast, Roads, Patar, Fenicia, all the way past Cyprus, Syria, Tyre, and the whole thing...coming all the way to get to the land of Israel in order that he might deliver the money. You say, "What's so big about delivering the money?" Well, he felt it was important to unify the church, and to meet the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem...we've been into that.

So the courage of conviction begins when you know your goal, you know your objective, and you know your purpose. And also it helps to know that, because then you can have a sense of fulfillment. If you don't have any particular direction you're going, you're not going to have any satisfaction when you arrive. So you've got to really know what you're doing.

Secondly, the courage of conviction can't be diverted. Now once the conviction is established, the courage comes at this point. The courage of conviction, in its truest sense, can't be diverted...once you get that conviction, then the courage to see it through. That's illustrated in verses 4-6.

And you see there...it says in verse 4, "Finding disciples"...they landed at Tyre, and that's on the coast north of Jerusalem and Israel...they found disciples and carried seven days. And these disciples, apparently using the gifts of the Spirit to communicate, warned Paul or told Paul about the suffering that was going to happen in Jerusalem, and their natural response was, "Paul, don't go to Jerusalem. Paul, you're going to get it." You say, "Well, did that scare him?" No, no, because you see, it said back in chapter 20 verse 23, "The Holy Spirit witnesses in every city saying this is going to come." No, he was expecting it. I mean it was just, you know, "Guys, let's find a Christian so I can get that message again." He got it everywhere else. And the fact that they told him does not mean that God was trying to prevent him from going to Jerusalem.

The fact that he heard this everywhere he went fulfilled prophecy. What prophesy? Acts 9:15. Remember that Paul was on the Damascus road, blinded...wound up in a house in Straight Street. It was kind of exciting a few weeks ago to be on Straight Street. It's kind of thrilling to think back to this time.

But Paul was in the house, and Ananias came...God used Ananias to communicate to him. Well, verse 15 says, "The Lord said unto Ananias, 'Go your way, Ananias, you can leave. He's a chosen vessel unto Me. Go your way, and get down there to Paul. You can trust me.'" You know, he told Ananias to go see Paul. And for all Ananias knew, he was a persecutor, so God had to get him on

his way a little bit. "He's a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Now watch. "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My namesake. Now God didn't say, "I'm going to make him suffer." God said, "I'm going to show him how much he's going to suffer." Which means God promised there to reveal to Paul his sufferings before they came...do you get this?

So all these testimonies to what's going to happen to Paul fulfill Acts 9:16. They were not to prevent Paul from going to Jerusalem. They were to prepare him. They were saying to him, "Paul, you're still on course, friend. You're still on target. I told you this, the first of your conversion. You're right on schedule. Now it's coming. Here's what it's going to be." God was really confirming to Paul that God was still on the throne of his life. God was still ruling. God was still directing. God was still running his course in spite of what he knew was going to happen. This is fulfilled prophecy.

Isn't it beautiful, how God prepared him for that? He knew it was going to happen, and God just fulfilled the prophecy all along. You know, it would have been easy for the human being to just sort of say, "Boy, things are falling apart. I mean this is cracking up. It's getting to be the end." But no, he'd just look back and say, "Yeah, but this is what God said He was going to show me, so I expect it right on schedule."

And so when he was going, even though they were warning him because they loved him...you know, they were saying, "Don't go, Paul, don't go. The Spirit is saying these are going to happen to you." Verse 5..."When we accomplish those days, we departed and went our way." You see, it didn't stop him at all. He could not be diverted from his objective. "And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, until we were out of the city." It says something for him...he'd never been to that church before. And after seven days there, they all loved him, and the whole bunch went out. "We knelt down on the shore, had a little prayer meeting, and when we had taken our leave, one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again.

So the Apostle Paul was not out of God's will. He was not disobedient. He was following the leading of the Spirit of God, fulfilled prophecy...God had told him exactly what was going to happen. He was ready for it. He anticipated it. He was a man of conviction.

Now in the Bible, there are a lot of people who illustrate to us a lack of this kind of courage. There are a lot of people who maybe have the conviction, and they believe and they know their objective, but they somewhere along the line just gave it up.

Such a person, I think, is portrayed for us most aptly in the 13th chapter of Acts. And I would call your attention to the 13th chapter. There was a church in Antioch...the first gentile church...and there were certain prophets and teachers there...that is, their pastors and so forth...Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Now these five pastors were God-blessed men. But God had a special task for two, so he selected Paul and Barnabas, shot them out of there, and sent them on a missionary journey. But verse 5 says, "And when they were at Salamis"...that's Cyprus..."They preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John as their helper."

Now they had this guy named John whose surname was Mark...John Mark...a young fellow who felt the call of the mission fields, so he's going to go...going to take off and be directed in that. So they went a little ways and doing great...they got into Cyprus there, and they met a sorcerer and took care

of him. The Spirit of the Lord and some great things happened.

And then in verse 13, "Paul and his company loosed from Pathos"...that's the coast north of Cyprus, the little island, the northern city in Cyprus. And they came across the little part of the Mediterranean...they landed at Perga, which is the port for Pamphylia, which is a little hotdog-shaped strip of land right at the coast there. And right behind that, and way up in the mountains is Galatia. So they landed at Pamphylia, and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. John stepped on the land at Perga, took one look at the Taurus Mountains, and knew about all the robbers, briggins, and the wild people that inhabited the caves of those mountains. And when he heard the plans, he said, "Guys, God bless you all, but I've got to go home. More important things are waiting." So he just cut out. Now John probably started out with a lot of conviction, but he didn't have any courage...no courage at all. And you know something? That really caused problems...believe me, that caused problems.

Over in chapter 15 verse 36, Paul and Barnabas want to go on another journey. They came back from the first one, and incidentally went without John Mark, of course. And Paul said to Barnabas, Acts 15:36, "Let's go and visit our brother again in every city where we've preached the Word of the Lord and see how they're doing. Let's go back, Barnabas." And Barnabas thought it was a good idea. Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. So now Barnabas says, "Let's take John again." "But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work."

Now Paul was a very strong man and had a very difficult time tolerating weakness in anybody else. And so when he heard this suggestion, he said, "There is no way that I'm taking that guy with us. The last time he showed that he didn't have the courage to go through with it." "And the contention was so sharp between them that they departed one from another." Paul and Barnabas split up. God used that for His glory...he had two teams from thereon. Paul took Silas, and Barnabas took John Mark, and went to Cyprus. But you see, the failure of one man to fulfill his commitment, his conviction, really caused problems. That's not Paul. No, that's like most of us. Paul saw his convictions through no matter what it cost him.

There's a third thing, and now we'll get into the real fresh study for today, leaving our general review...and that wasn't all review, but some new thing. But the third thing is this: the courage of conviction pays any price...and this is just where John Mark blew it. He wasn't willing to pay any price. He'd pay some price, not any price. I mean he had his price. He would actually forsake the work of the Lord at a certain point, you see, and face it.

Most of us probably have already done that a zillion times. It can become as simple as this: you know you should share Jesus Christ with somebody, but for the sake of your own ego...that is, you don't want to be rejected or embarrassed...you don't do it. That's selling out for your own self, you see...for your own prestige, position, self-image, or whatever else...reputation.

Or maybe you know that God wants you involved in a ministry. But if you got involved in that ministry, it would cut down the time that you need to make the money you want to make. So you fail to do the ministry, and you maintain the level of involvement in your job that you are. You are therefore selling out at that price, whatever it is.

And you know, one of the really practical ones is maybe just laziness. Maybe you're not effective for the Lord because you sell out at the point of the bed..."Oh, sluggard, get up," it says in the Old Testament.

I don't know what it is, but whatever it is in your life that is the point at which you fail to fulfill your commitment or your conviction, that's the price at which you sell out. And man, some of us are cheap stuff...I mean we are bargain basement commodities. But the courage of conviction has no price...it has no price. This is the crux of it friends...this is the crux.

Now back to Acts 21:7: "And when we had finished our course from Tyre"...interesting verb there, "finished our course." It's a very peculiar verb appearing only here, and it means to make the last stop or to completely finish. So apparently, the ship they had crossed the Mediterranean with docked up at Tyre, and that was it.

But they went to Ptolemais...now they may have taken another little ship and hopped down the coast. It was only 27 miles...they may have walked...we don't know, but anyway, they came to Ptolemais. Ptolemais is a very old city. It wasn't always called Ptolemais. For the Greek Roman period, it was called Ptolemais, named after Ptolemy the second. But before that, it was called Accho, and it's mentioned in Judges 1. It's an old, old city, but today it's still there...it's called Akka, or Acre. So it's been around as a port city.

So they went from Tyre 27 miles to Ptolemais, either by a little ship or they walked, "And they greeted the brethren and abode with them one day." Now isn't this interesting? They've only got one day there, but they take that one day and maximize it, and they meet with the Christians. You know, Paul absolutely staggers you with his commitment to the priorities, doesn't it?

And this is what I was driving at earlier. Think of it this way. I could pick up my Bible, and I can read to you Ephesians 5 verse...I don't know, what is it...15 or 16, where it says that "We are to walk circumspectly, not as fools, redeeming the time." And you know, you can pound the pulpit about that. and Paul could have stood up and said, "Buy up time, and that's fine." And you say, "Right, good, I got it, Paul."

But the message comes through a lot louder and a lot clearer when you see him in the Book of Acts. The guy had no concept of wasted time. I mean it was only one day, and he made the day count. He met the brethren. You can imagine that he taught them, that he shared with them. he listened to their problems, and he solved some of their problems. He worked with them. this was his kind of life. He was totally committed. There was no point at which he sold out...not for rest, not for money, not for saving his life, not for the failure to be punished, or to have wounds...nothing was his price. He couldn't be bought off.

And here he is...he has one day, and he maximizes that day for the ministry of those saints there. Now he didn't found that church, so he didn't have any particular obligation. It was probably founded in the overflow of the persecution that occurred in Jerusalem. Remember, if you read in Acts 11:19, the saints were scattered from Jerusalem, preached all over the place, and since it was near Tyre, probably was founded about the same time. And so it wasn't his congregation. But at the same time, he felt a spiritual obligation to maximize his opportunity and his time on the behalf of the saints.

So they stayed there one day...verse 8..."And the next day, we that were of Paul's company departed and came unto Caesarea. Now this is the last leg of their journey, if they were on a ship. If they took a little ship from Tyre to Ptolemais, to Caesarea, this would have been it. Caesarea is due west of Jerusalem almost in a straight line, 65 to 70 miles. It is the port of Jerusalem in Bible times...not now. Today you have to go south of Caesarea about 20 minutes or so to the port of Tel Aviv, which has become the largest city in Israel. But in those days...and incidentally, Tel Aviv is ancient Japa...Jonah knows about that as he took off from there. And Peter lived there too.

But Caesarea was, in those days, a very important place. In fact, that whole area is the area that was used as a port for years when King Hiram, the king of Lebanon, floated the cedars of Lebanon down. You know, the cedars were used to build the temple. They floated them down the coast of the Mediterranean and brought them ashore there in this area and right up to Jerusalem. So this is an area that is loaded with history. There are many ruins there even today.

It was a Roman city. And it was the headquarters of Pilate. And it was the headquarters of the Roman Garrison. It was a fortified city and remained a fortified city throughout many centuries, even to the time of the crusaders, and the crusaders' fortresses are still there. But it was a great Roman city. And in fact, the Jews even considered it, though it was in the territory of Israel, to be almost a foreign city.

Later on you'll see...it's in verse 10...it says a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea to Caesarea. Well, Caesarea was actually the most important city in Judea. But it was such a Roman city, that the Jews looked at it as if it was a foreign place. So they said he came from Judea to Caesarea. So Caesarea was important...well, they went to Caesarea.

It just so happened that there was a man who lived there that's well known to us...the middle of verse 8..."We entered the house of Philip the evangelist who was one of the seven." What seven? The seven in Acts 6. "And abode with him." You say, "Who are the seven in Acts 6?" Well, I'll show you that...Acts 6...you remember that. The church got started, and things were growing so fast, they didn't know what to do. Thousands of thousands of people...probably by chapter 4 he got 20,000 people in the Jerusalem church alone.

And just ministering to those people is logistically difficult, so they're trying to get everybody ministered to. They had a lot of people that didn't have anything to eat, especially widows that didn't have husbands who could provide. The state wasn't too good at welfare. So the church accepted that responsibility, which I think the church still has. And in those days, there was some griping because some of the people thought that the Hebrew widows were getting better goodies than the Greek widows, or the non-Jewish widows. So the disciples...the apostles, I mean...didn't want to get caught up in all of that paraphernalia. So they said, "Look, it's not fitting for us to leave the study of the Word of God and go feed widows. Now that's a nice job, but we want to give ourselves to the Word and prayer. You choose some men"...seven men...verse 3..."full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, men of honest report, and you put them over this business."

And they chose them in verse 5...men full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit...Steven, Philip Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas...and those seven men were chosen. Now they were what we call the first servers...the first deacons in a sense...servants of the church.

So it is the same Philip...but it's also the same Philip who is mentioned in chapter 8 verse 5: "Philip

went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them." And boy, he had a great time. "The people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

And chapter 8 verse 40 says, "He was found at Azotus. Passing through, he preached in all the cities"- listen to this..."till he came to Caesarea." Now here's what happened: Philip preached as an itinerate evangelist. It says in Acts 21, as we just read it, verse 8, "Philip the evangelist." That's the only time in the Book of Acts anybody's given that name. And I think the Holy Spirit has a beautiful purpose. He started out as a deacon. He became an evangelist.

Matthew puts it this way...words of our Lord..."Well done, good and faithful servant, thou has been faithful over a few things. I'll make you ruler over many."

There's a principle, people, that you can't repeat often enough, and it is this: God gives His primary priority top confidential ministries to those who have been faithful in little things. There are a lot of people who want the big things, but they never learn that that comes when you're faithful in the little things. God lifts up those who are faithful. He was a faithful deacon. He was a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. He was faithful of passing out food to the widows. And because of that, God made him one of the leading evangelists, if not the leading one, apart from the apostles themselves in the New Testament.

God honors faithfulness, beloved, that's the key. If you want a ministry in the future, you be faithful now. If you want to be used of God, you let God worry about lifting you up to the ministry of the future. You be faithful in what it is He has given you for now.

So Philip was a dear and faithful deacon whom God made a fruitful evangelist. Now I think a couple of comments on Philip further will help us to see what this scene must have been like. Get the idea...Paul arrives in Philip's house and lives with him. And he stayed there a while too, because he had a fast trip across the Mediterranean. He had a few extra days until Pentecost when he was supposed to arrive in Jerusalem, so he spent it with Philip.

What's interesting about that is that Philip had met Paul indirectly 20 years before. You say, "Under what circumstances?" Paul was breeding out threatenings and slaughter against the church. And Philip was one of the ones who ran into Samaria. So it was Saul who had persecuted Philip, and now Philip hosts Saul in his own home as a brother in Christ. That's transformation, friends.

20 years before this, Philip had been driven out of Jerusalem by Saul. Steven was martyred. The prosecution flamed under Saul. The Gospel preachers were scattered everywhere, and they started preaching. He preached all those years, and then he says in Acts 8:40, as I read you, he made his home in Caesarea. So that was his home. From there, he moved out and preached Christ. 20 years have passed. Can you imagine what a joy it was to meet his original persecutor and know that he'd been a preacher of Christ all through the years?

It's like Galatians 1:23 where Paul says, "You know, when I went through that area, that territory down there, those people got so excited because they said the one who used to persecute is now preaching." In Galatians 1:24, they said, "And they glorified God in me." God must be a glorious God if He could transform that persecutor into a preacher.

And so there was a little sort of historical interest in the meeting of Paul and Philip. I imagine they had some interesting notes to compare.

But there was something else that I think was beautiful. I think there was a sense in which Paul could honor Philip, and it was this sense. When we think about evangelism to the non-Jewish world, or evangelism to the gentile world, we think in terms of two people. We think in terms of Peter, who first delivered the Gospel to Cornelius, don't we, and sort of cracked open the whole thing. And we think of Paul...the apostle to the gentiles who preached the Gospel everywhere from Jerusalem to Rome.

But you know, when we think of non-Jewish evangelism, the first guy that ever got involved in it biblically was Philip. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, when the persecution came, he was the guy that was preaching in Samaria to the non-Jews, the half-breed Samaritans. And while preaching in Samaria, the Holy Spirit said, "Get out of here. I want you to go to Gaza," which is desert. He went to Gaza, and who did he meet? An Ethiopian unic...reading Isaiah...and what did he do? Led him to Jesus Christ and baptized him, and that was the first gentile convert.

You see, Philip is the guy who really opened up the horizon to the non-Jewish world. So in a sense, he was the predecessor to Paul. And so there's a beautiful kind of tie-in as well in that. God used Philip to begin what Paul really expanded. And so they must have had a time of reminiscing and sharing together.

And you say, "What is an evangelist?" An evangelist is somebody who declares the Gospel...uongoldzo...to preach the Gospel...somebody who speaks out, who declares the good news. It's a messenger of good news.

And one of the two great ministries in the church today...evangelist and teaching pastor...are the two ministries defined in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11. There are apostles and prophets in the early church, and there are evangelists and teaching pastors today. And oh, it's important...the work of an evangelist is to plant churches...to establish churches.

Paul said to Timothy in 2nd Timothy 4-5, "Watch in all things, endure an affliction, do the work of an evangelist." And Philip was one of those preaching Christ, where he was not named, founding churches...ministering...and ministering all those 20 years, for the most part, in obscurity, but not in the obscurity of God, only in terms of biblical notes...there's not anything about him.

But look what happens. He comes to his house in verse 8. Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and abode with him. Now the verse 9 throws in kind of an interesting little statement here that is very difficult to figure out...why it's here, and what it's all about. It says this: "And the same man"...that is Philip..."had four daughters, virgins"...and that means unmarried, obviously..."who did prophesize." And that's all it says. They didn't prophesize anything particular. It just says they were prophesizing. They had the gift of prophesy...four daughters. Now that's a very interesting thing...very interesting.

By this time in the 20-year interval, Philip had a flourishing family...at least four daughters...we hope he had at least one son in addition to soften the blow a little bit or to harden the blow, whatever, for variety sake. But we don't know...at least he had four daughters...he may have had four more, and

he may have had five sons, but at least we know that he had these four daughters who were unmarried and who prophesized.

Now I think it's important that the Holy Spirit puts this in here. The difficult thing is to know just why the Holy Spirit puts it here. And maybe I can grab bag at it a little bit. And I'm going to shoot at it from all kinds of odd directions, and maybe you can pull something together in your head. But first of all, it's interesting to me that they were unmarried, because there is a certain feature in being unmarried that is to the advantage of an effective ministry.

Now I find this in 1st Corinthians 7 verse 34 to be clarified by Paul in these terms: "There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin." And the difference is this...we assume there are other differences, but this is the one he's hitting. "The unmarried woman"...and so you see, unmarried woman is equal to virgin here, and the word is used in that reference.

"The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit." In other words, an unmarried woman...and you know this...that there are unmarried women used effectively in God's ministries all over the world...there is a certain level of commitment and devotion that they can have in a singular kind of way because they have no other attachment.

"But she that is married cares for the things of the world...how she may please her husband." In other words, just being married involved all of that stuff. You know, you've got to take care of the husband, the kids, the house, the whole thing, wash the clothes, make the meals for everybody...that is a time consuming thing. But you know God intended you to do that because that's a very beautiful pattern within the framework of His sovereign design for a whole family and a whole relationship. So that's not bad...that's good.

But this is different...it's not a question of good or bad, better or worse...it's different. God has some women who have a single kind of devotion to His service. And believe me, the church has profited through the centuries from these women. Believe me, God has used them.

And I think that it is probably here mentioned that they were virgins to indicate that these women were set aside by God for a very particular kind of ministry. And it tells us what kind...they did prophesize.

Now the gift of prophecy...I don't want to go into all detail on the gift of prophecy...we'll get more into this in 1st Corinthians. And when we finish Acts, we'll be in 1st Corinthians. If the Lord doesn't come in the next year or so, we'll get into that.

But they had the gift of prophecy. Now in the early church, there was the gift called prophecy. It appears as though the gift of prophecy functioned in two capacities. One, the gift of prophecy functioned in terms of revelation...God speaking directly through the individual. Two, in terms of just preaching or proclaiming the truth...for example, did you know that Paul is called a prophet in Acts 13? So is Barnabas. And we have not necessarily to throw into that the concept that every time they opened their mouths, revelation came out. No, they preached.

It seems as though prophecy is defined in its preaching terms in 1st Corinthians 14:3 as consolation, exhortation, edification, where it's "preaching the Word to build the body...1st Corinthians 14...that

seems to be the message there. So prophecy was preaching. And certainly in the Old Testament, it was that. In the Old Testament, it wasn't always revelation. The prophets preached to the people, they warned the people, and they spoke God's message to the people repeatedly.

And sometimes though, prophecy means direct revelation...like the prophet would just say, "Thus sayeth the Lord." In the New Testament times, we see prophets like Agabus, who will meet in a minute, who predicts a famine, and that comes right from God. So prophecy was twofold. It was to foretell or to speak revelation, and it was to teach or preach.

Now there are some who believe the gift of prophecy has ceased today. They would tell us that the gift has totally ceased. Well, it may be that if you interpret it only as revelation, I agree. But the difficult part of that is, you've got a prophecy in Job that says, "In the end time, you're young men are going to prophesize." Now if the gift had ceased, what's that? So it's still to come. That's another subject.

But apparently, the gift of prophesy...now notice...apparently the gift of prophecy was both to preach and to give revelation. And you say, "Which part of it did these girls have?" Well, I certainly hope they had the part where it was giving revelation. Because if they had the preaching part, then Paul contradicts himself, or we have trouble trying to fit them in as an exception.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, Paul was very clear about his women preachers. And it seems to me that if you're going to take this verse in its simplicity, it says that these daughters prophesized, you have to submit that to all the other Scriptures involved. I don't think these were the four women pastors of the caesarean church...no, I don't think so, because I think that Paul clearly covers that ground elsewhere.

Apparently...now I'm going to try to just...this is...I'm just grabbing at straws at this point because it's speculative in a sense. But apparently, as best I can understand it, they probably functioned in the area of revelation. God used them to speak through them with revelation as He used the gift of tongues for that in the early church. But they would be exceptions rather than the rule.

Now let me hasten to say, God has used women as prophets. In the Old Testament, you have several women prophets...Miriam the prophet, Debra the prophet...Luke 2:36...Anna the prophet. God has used women. There must have been at least the possibility of a woman who spoke messages from God in the church, or the church of Thyatir never would have even gotten involved with one who turned out to be Jezebel, a false prophet. So God has, in exceptions, used women for that purpose, and it's a glorious thing.

You say, "Well, are there some standards for this?" Yes, there are, and I want to draw your attention to a couple of passages just briefly. 1st Corinthians 11...and I think it's important...we'll just look at this, and this is where we'll have to stop. But 1st Corinthians 11...and we'll get into this when we really get into Corinthians.

Now he says...the Corinthian church, of course...you name it, and they had it...negative. They had every problem there was. And the women...they had women's lib in Corinth. The women were liberated. They were going around town taking their veils off. Can you imagine? You say, "No big deal." Well, it was a big deal then because the veil was a sign of modesty, humility, and submission.

It was a cultural thing. And when a woman did that, boy, she was flaunting herself.

And you know that even in the Arab world today, they still wear veils. And you know a man who really loves his wife, they say in the Arab world, doesn't want her to take her veil off because he does not want his wife to be molested or harmed, or he does not want to incite in the minds of other men any kind of wrong attitudes towards his wife. He cares about her purity and her sanctity in that marriage relationship. I think that's kind of a nice thing in a sense. And so he certainly doesn't want to put his wife on display. That still goes on over there, and you see veiled women.

But in that day, it was a sign of modesty and humility. And it really took the pressure off the temptation end of things, believe me, in a sense, at least overtly. And so veils were the sign of the submission of the woman, as was the long hair.

But it's interesting that apparently in Corinth, according to some commentators and interpreters...apparently what happened was women started prophesizing, you know? Like they were doing the same thing with tongues and everything else in Corinth, and Paul had to put the squash on the whole deal.

But they started prophesizing. And when they started doing that, they began to feel their oats a little bit. And they began to sense that they were equal with men, so they started pulling off their veils. And the whole church was becoming chaotic because women were putting themselves on an equal plane with men.

And verse 3...Paul says, "I would have you know, the head of every man is Christ. The head of the woman is the man. And the head of Christ is God." There's the hierarchy...every man who prays or prophesizes having his head covered dishonored his head. No, men aren't supposed to wear veils and all that stuff. But when a woman prays or prophesizes with their head uncovered, she dishonors her head. Who's her head? Her husband.

Listen, if you've got an unruly wife who wants equality with you, you're dishonored as a husband, right? She is just dishonoring her husband. If a man wears a veil, he dishonors his head. Who is his head? Christ. Because God has given him the authority, see? Men are to take the authority God has given them. Women are to take the submission God has given them, and not to usurp the place of authority.

You say, "Well it says here that women pray or prophesize." It doesn't condone it, does it? It just says the ones that are doing it are doing it out of kilter with Scripture, with God's standard, with God's pattern.

So it may have been that they actually had the gift of prophecy, and they were misusing it in the service of the church. Or it may have been that they falsified the gift. We don't know. There may have been a legitimate actual real-live woman there with the true gift of prophecy, but it was to be exercised other than preaching in public and exercising authority over men. So the principal of submission was clear, and the women in Corinth had violated it.

Now just to take you to a further word, go to 1st Corinthians 14. And friends, please...you know, somebody will say, "Oh, you're anti-woman." I love a woman...my wife! I mean I wouldn't have it any

other way, believe me! I am not anti-woman. I am just wanting to be consistent with God's revelation. And there is no difference...there is neither male nor female in Christ the same spiritual resources, the same blessing of God...it belongs to all. But there is set up a certain authority and submission pattern for the sake of wholeness and holiness in the family, and that's all where talking about...and in the church.

But notice 1st Corinthians 14 verse 31. "For you may all prophesize one-by-one." You say, "Oh, terrific, we can all prophesize." Now he told them he could only speak in tongues, two or three of you, but all of you can get up and teach and speak the Word, "that all may learn." And again, prophecy, you see, is related not necessarily to revelation, but to instruction here, and the two could be the same. "And comfort...and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not the author of confusion, but peace," and so forth.

But...verse 34..."Let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience as sayeth the law. If they learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. It's a shame for women to speak in the church."

Now here Paul makes a very clear statement. So it seems as though, beloved, these four daughters of Philip could not be preachers...women preachers. But that what they did have was a gift of God to receive revelation from the Holy Spirit that was strategic to the life of the church.

Now you say, "Well, what kind of revelation are you talking about?" I thought you'd ask that. It is interesting to surmise, and there is good evidence, that Luke himself...mark this...received much of the revelation of the Book of Acts from these four women, and that that's why they were placed here. Their role was not to preach in the church, but to be a vehicle of revelation, and in one case for Luke.

You say, "That may be why Luke put that little verse in there because they don't do anything...I mean they don't prophesize in this passage. He just says that, and then we leave him, and never hear about him before or after." But maybe Luke is putting this in as just a little hint to their involvement with him.

You say, "Whatever makes you think they were involved with Luke?" This. We know Luke didn't know what he knew because he was always there, because he wasn't always there in the Book of Acts, was he? He didn't have firsthand experience of everything, so the Holy Spirit had to get it to him. How did the Holy Spirit get it to him? Well, the Holy Spirit used revelation. But the Holy Spirit could have used a human vehicle to give him that revelation.

Some people feel, for example, that Peter was Luke's source for the Gospel of Luke...that God actually gave the revelation through Peter to Luke. We don't know that. But in this case, it may have been that some of this information came to them...came to Luke through these girls. Now he had some time there. He had this period of time that he was there with them to get some of the information.

Plus, Paul, once he gets to Jerusalem in the next couple of chapters, he becomes a prisoner, he gets shipped back to Caesarea, and he stayed there two years. Did you know that? And the two years that he was in Caesarea, Luke would have had a great deal of time to spend with these girls.

You say, "Well, that's all conjecture." Well, except for this: there was an early church father right up against the early church by the name of Papius. And Papius said that Philip's daughters were commonly known as the informants on the early history of the church. That's a very interesting statement.

In fact, the historian, Usivius, who is again a very early church historian, quotes Papius. And to give some credence to the fact that these four daughters were used to transmit the revelation of the Holy Spirit. In some cases, they even got the Gospel's information as well as the information of the Book of Acts. So that's a possibility. And historically in the church, it has been agreed upon by those in the first century after the early church.

Another interesting note that I want to draw to your attention here is the fact that these four virgins who did prophesize didn't prophesize on this occasion. Another one came...a man came named Agabus in verse 10...and he gives the predictive prophecy of the future, which may in a sense support the idea that these gals weren't around to do the predicting of the future or to do the preaching. But they had a very specific ministry of the Lord, and that was to be used as vehicles of revelation on the history of the church past...we don't know. And again, I say that's just guessing. But it least it seems to fit together, and we must submit all of this to what we know in other Scriptures.

So Paul arrives in the house of Philip. Then having met Philip and his four lovely daughters, and whoever else was there...verse 10 says, "They tarried there many days, and there came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus." Now the reason they could stay for many days was because they got a fast ship coming across the Mediterranean, and they had some time before Pentecost. So everything was set for some fellowship.

Agabus arrives, and he gives a fantastic revelation message to Paul. In fact, it was done in such a way that makes us reminiscent of all the Old Testament prophets. Now if you want to know what that prophecy was and what it meant, you come back next Sunday, and we will study that.

Let me just say this. For the moment, Paul is going to be confronted by Agabus with some very distressing news. Now watch...in the case of most people, this would have been a point to sell out. And it draws us back to the main point of what we're talking about...the courage of conviction.

If you get nothing out of this morning but the fact that God expects you to accept the ministry He has given you, and to see it through, you've got the message.

But let me add this thought. You say, "John, I'd like to see it through, but what's going to happen?" Do you know what the real issue in courage is? Here it comes...the real issue in courage is one word...trust, right? Because of you believe God has called you to do something, and that's your goal, then do you think God who called you is able to perform what he called you to do? It's a trust question. And so if you cop out on your commitments, you have dishonored God because your questioning God's faithfulness.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for again opening up our insights to the word. We thank You for what we see in the life of Paul by way of courage and commitment. We pray, Father, that in a special way, you would help us to apply these principles that have become ours in terms of hearing...that they become ours in terms of doing. And Lord, we would ask that each of us would recognize the

very same spirit that made Paul what he was as our Holy Spirit living in us. Help us not to stop short. Help us not to halt when the Spirit wants to move out. Help us to see the fulfillment of everything God intended because of our availability and the courage of conviction. Thank you, in Jesus' name, amen.

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