

The Courage of Conviction, Part 3: Paying Any Price

Scripture: Acts 21:10-16

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In our study this morning, we are drawn again to the 21st chapter Acts, to complete our look at the courage of conviction. We almost really finished last time, but we didn't quite finish, so this morning we will, Lord willing it, in the early hour, finish this brief look at verses 1 through 15 of Acts 21. In our early hour we went off on few tangents too, and we may do that this hour, and cover some other interesting things that relate to this passage, that are not directly in it.

But in Acts 21:1-15, we have been considering this passage, though it is a narrative and a historical passage, and has not exhortation at all in it, and no particular instruction to the believer. It speaks by way of example to a very important subject, and this is the courage of conviction. We find, in this passage, the commitment and the dedication, and the consecration, and the conviction of Apostle Paul, demonstrated. And as we have learned here, in our study of the book of Acts, what we learn by example is maybe even more indelible than what we hear by precept.

And so, in studying for example, Galatians, in the evening, we're studying precept, and studying Acts in the morning, we're studying example, and both teach the same lessons. And so, we've benefited by looking at what is historical narrative and extracting from it, characteristics and principles that can be applied to our own lives. And as we have looked at this particular little chunk of the life of Paul, a simple little trip from Miletus to Caesarea. As he concludes his third missionary journey and goes to Jerusalem, we have seen in this little vignette from his life, a great illustration of the tremendous commitment that he had, to the call that God had given him.

This whole subject of commitment and dedication is something that is expressed, I think, in all kinds of ways and all walks of life. Recently, I was reading an article by George Allen, who is formally the coach of the Rams, and now the coach of the Washington Redskins football team. And he's had an amazing record of success, and he attributes it, very simply, to this - and I'm quoting him. "If I've succeed it is because I outwork most people. Work is simply a synonym for effort, and as I tell my players, 100 percent is not enough. The average American pictures himself as an extremely hard worker. Sociologist and psychologists have shown, however, that most persons are really operating on less than half power. In terms of effort, they may never get over 50 percent, although they think of themselves as 90 percent producers. Therefore, to get 100 percent, you must aim for 110 percent. The world belongs to those who aim for 110 percent. To me, the real test of every man and every

woman is how much they give of themselves. What gripes me most is that people think they want something, but when it comes to a little work, a job, or doing some extra study, they fall by the wayside," end quote.

And I think all of us can relate to that. We come home, after a day of piddling around at work, and say, "Oh, I am so beat. I've had it." You haven't had anything. It's all a matter of application of your mental attitude. Really, dedication is the key to anything, and certainly in George Allen's case. And I read somewhere where he spends 16 hours a day, every day, working on football. That borders on insanity, in my mind.

But nevertheless, you have to say something for the man's commitment. And you know, if you're in any kind of business at all, that is any way motivational, you know that there are success seminars, and motivational seminars that people pay a lot of money to go to, and basically all of those things, and all of all success in life, boil down to the same basic commodity, commitments. The world does belong to the people who give 110 percent effort, that's very well stated.

The devoted people; the dedicated people; the committed people; the people who are willing to pay the price, are the ones who make the difference; and face it, most aren't, so most people are spectators. As someone has aptly said, "There are the people who make things happen, there are the people who watch things, happen, and there are the people who don't what's happening.

In Hebrews chapter 11, I'd like for you to meet some more people who made things happen, some 110 percent effort people; some people were committed. And I do this just before we go to Acts 21, so that you can have a bigger backdrop for this particular exhortation, than you would have with just the life of the Apostle Paul. He was not the only committed individual. He was not the only man who was willing to go the extremes that we went to, to accomplish the goals that he had set for himself, or rather, that Christ had delivered to him.

What Hebrews 11, you have that great chapter on the heroes of the faith, and these were really committed people, beginning - verse 24 introduces to us, a man named Moses. In verse 24, says, "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Now, Moses had risen to the heights of Egyptian society - he was a prince. He had all of the wealth that went along with it. And those of you have recently been to Egypt, in one of our tour groups, know what kind of wealth existed in the hierarchy of Egyptian society.

And in that particular period in time, Moses had risen to the place of prince. And he had all that goes with it - Egyptian wealth and splendor, at his grasp. But, "he refused it, says in verse 24.

Verse 25 says, "Choosing rather, to suffer affliction with the people of God, than you enjoy the pleasures of sin, for a season." He was really faced with a decision. Now, according to Acts 7:23 to

25, and the sermon of Stephen, it says there, "That Moses knew that he had been called of God, to lead Israel out." So, on the one hand he had his position in Egypt and all of its wealth. On the other hand, he had the call of God to stay in Egypt and hold on to what he had, and pay no price, he had everything, there was no cost involved to him, at all. He would make no sacrifice. To become the leader of Israel, he would make the sacrifice of everything, all his wealth, all his prestige, and maybe the sacrifice of his own life. It was a tremendous choice.

Two opposites. He would exchange wealth for poverty; fame for infamy; being a hero for being a criminal, being loved for being hated. It was all opposites. But he knew the call of God was to be the leader of the people of Israel, and so he made his choice, verse 26, says, "Esteeming the reproach of the anointed." The word Christ literally means anointed. And maybe could just translate it that way. I don't think it's talking about Christ Himself, directly here, 'cause Christ hadn't come yet. But Moses was esteeming or thinking that the reproach of being God's anointed, was better riches than the treasures of Egypt."

In other words, he'd rather be hated, and be God's anointed than be loved, and be belonging to Egypt, so made his choice. And the reason he could choose that way, at the end of verse 32, "He had respect under the recompense of reward. He was willing to sacrifice temporary riches for eternal reward." That's a good decision, isn't it? "He was willing to sacrifice temporary riches for eternal reward." "He knew the pleasures of sin" as verse 25, says, "were only for a season. God's reward was eternal." So, "By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him," it was invisible." He didn't worry about a visible king, he knew an invisible God.

And so, here was a man who had to make a choice. And it was gonna cost him and cost him, everything that he had, and he made it. That's commitment. He was willing to suffer affliction with the people of God because that, was God's will, even though the price was everything that he had. There was another individual. Down to verse 31. "By faith, the prostitute, Rahab, perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Here was a lady who went against her whole society. Here, with a bunch of wandering nomad Israelites that arrived in her city, and said, we're gonna knock the place off. Now, she had a tremendous decision to make. She was fairly secure in her profession and secure in her city, but she believed God, and against all of the politics and all that was there, in city of Jericho, she chose to establish her faith in God, and believe those spies and believe God, and make a sacrifice, and she hid those soldiers at great risk to her life but she was willing to pay the price for what she believed in, and God honored her, believe me.

You know, that that woman was a prostitute, that's bad, very bad. But she was also a Canaanite, and that's bad, very bad. She was an Amorite, that's worse. I mean to be an Amorite is bad, to be an Amorite, Canaanite, prostitute, is unbelievably bad because all the Amorites and Canaanites were devoted to destruction. She was getting it coming and going. But do you know that God's grace has always been wider than Israel, and that that prostitute, Amorite, Canaanite, Gentile, was induced,

right into the line of a Messiah, and she was the mother of Boaz, the great, great grandfather, of David. That's grace, people, that's grace.

And God's grace has always been wider than Israel, and it was predicated on her faith in God, against all odds, since she was willing to stick by what she believed, at any price. And you remember how she hid those spies, it was a touch and go thing, and she believed and God honored her faith. There were others. Verse 32, "What shall I say more?" And he did say more. "For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon" and were Gideon, a judge who faced the Midianite army with only 300 men who had no weapons but only pitchers and trumpets and torches." But he believed God and he was willing to stake his life on it, "and Barak" - Barak fought the great General Cicerio, with all of his massive armies, so outnumbered and won the victory. And then there was, Samson, who won so many victories over the Philistines. And there was Jephthah, who conquered the Ammonites, and David, who conquered Goliath, and so forth, and so on.

And it says in verse 33, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions" - Daniel "quenched the violence of fire" - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - "escaped the edge of the sword" and that could refer to David - "out of weakness, were made strong" - perhaps Hezekiah - "became valiant in fight" - that could be a whole bunch of people - "turned to fight the armies or the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again." Two widows, at least, in view of there, Elijah and Elisha both involved in those. "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection."

See, they always esteemed that the ultimate eternal reward was greater than any sacrifice. Isn't that what Paul meant, in Romans 8:18? He said, "The infirmities or the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be ours, hereafter." See? That's the ultimate choice, you obey God and there's an eternal dividend. You hang onto what you've got in this world, and that's it, friend, that's it. What you see is what you see, is what you get.

Verse 36, "Others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings. You can see Jeremiah 38, for that. "Yea, a bonds and imprisonment" - that could be a lot of 'em - "they were stoned - Zechariah and Jeremiah, perhaps in mind - "___ asunder," Traditional tells us Isaiah was ___ asunder - "tested, flamed with a sword, wandered in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented." Now look, here were all these people undergoing all of this, because they believed in a goal that God had given them, and they were willing to stick their neck out, and die for it. That's commitment. That's the effort beyond the effort. That's spending himself or herself, "for that which God calls."

And, I love verse 38; it says, in little parenthesis, it says, "And whom the world was not worthy." Boy, the world didn't deserve to have those kinds of people, hanging around. They were too good for the system. Marvelous people. "They wandered in deserts and mountains, and dens and caves. And these all having received witness through faith, received not the promise." And they did it, you all, by

faith. They never did receive the promise. They never did see the end of their hopes, of all their dreams. God having provided some better thing, for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect."

In other words, it had to be in our time, and then when Christ came, that the fulfillment of all their dreams came, in the New Covenant, things that they only saw in the future and never received. They actually - and hang onto this people; they actually gave their lives for a hope that they never saw. And all God is asking of us, is that same level of commitment for a hope that is already in history, a fact. Christ was here. He did live, He did die, He did rise again, He's alive at the right hand of the Father, and He'll work His will and power through us. Do you believe that? Then level of our commitment ought to exceed the level of the commitment of those listed in Hebrews 11. Now, that'll show you far off we are from the mark, if you try to put yourself beside those people, you'll come up short.

So, we're talking about commitment, and as we saw last time, there are different kinds of commitment levels. Now, you can turn to, Acts 21. There are different kinds of commitment. There is what we call, incomplete commitment, you never give it all to the Lord. There's insincere commitment, you're a phony and there's intermittent, you're committed today, and who knows about tomorrow. But what God wants a total abandonment to His cause that is constant - never wavers. Now, as we come to Acts 21, we see this kind of commitment in the Apostle Paul, and it just sort of blossoms, in the verses we'll look, particularly today.

But we have four little points that help us to see the totality of the courage of conviction. The courage of conviction or commitment knows its purpose, can't be diverted, pays any price and affects others. Those are the four points. Now, Point 1, just very quickly; the courage of conviction knows its purpose. You can't stand for something, unless you've got something to stand for. You can't be courageous unless you've got a conviction you're fighting for. So, it all begins with something that you believe in. Now, Paul had a conviction, verses 1 to 3, which we won't read. Just remind us, that Paul was on way to Jerusalem. His conviction was, God wants me to get this money to the saints in Jerusalem, they need it and it'll help unify the church. I've gotta get there, that was his conviction, that was his objection, that was his goal.

And so, he pursued it. He had something to which he was committed, that's basic. The courage of conviction knows its purpose. You cannot, my friend, defend yourself, you cannot defend your ministry or defend your intent or your purpose unless you've got one. You can't fight for it, unless it's there. So, the courage of conviction knows its purpose. Set goals. Secondly, and this review - the courage of conviction can't be diverted. And this is the real stuff, of it. No matter what happens, you can't divert the person. He's got his goal, he's got his conviction, his face is set like a flint - he's going there.

And that was Paul in verses 4 to 6, he arrives in Tyre on journey and they all said, Oh, don't go to Jerusalem, don't go to Jerusalem. And after they all got done, he said, goodbye, and left for Jerusalem. He couldn't be diverted. That's the courage of conviction. All kinds of people, in your lifetime, maybe even your good Christian friends, will try to talk you out of things that you believe is in. Well, you measure, that if it is the will of God, it is to be fulfilled in spite of what they say.

Thirdly, and this is the point that is the major point of the passage, the courage of conviction pays any price. It can't be diverted at any price - at any price. I thought of Daniel, as I thought of this. The rule came down. You are not allowed to pray to anybody but the king. So, what did Daniel do? He did what we always did. And if you do pray to anybody, but the King, whack - you're gonna be in the lion's den. What did Daniel do? He did what he always did. He throws open his windows and prayed to God. Never changed one thing. Why? He knew what his purpose was. He knew what his goal was. Nothing diverted him, and he'd pay any price. He wound up in the lion's den. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were told to do the same thing to go the way of the king, needed the kings meet and do the things that the kings wanted them to do, and worship the way the king wanted them wanted to worship. Bow down to the false Gods, and all that, and they would not do that. And they were willing to price. They turned around and walked right into a fiery furnace. That's paying the price.

You will notice, however, that in each case, God delivered them. God honors those who are willing to stick by their guns, believe me. I'll tell you, I would rather be in the midst of a fire, in the will of God, than be resting on the beach in Hawaii, out of His will. Really. You're always safe in the middle of His will, no matter what's going on. And if you don't think that's true, you just read the book of Acts again, and watch how those people went from one fire to the next, in the middle of God's will and were protected from ever being burnt. It's exciting.

Well, as we come to verses 7 to 14, we find this little idea of the courage of conviction paying any price, presented to us. And I'm just gonna read verses 7 to 9, 'cause we covered 'em last time, just to set the stage. "And when we had finished our course from Tyre," - they left Tyre, after spending a little time there, seven days, "they came to Ptolemais" - they are now going down the Coast toward Caesarea, and from Caesarea they go directly over to Jerusalem. But they "finished from Tyre, came to Ptolemais and greeted the brethren, and abode with one day." So, they stayed with the Christians in Ptolemais for a day. A church had been established and there and the ministry in Samaria, years before.

"And the next day, we that were of Paul's company, departed and came to Caesarea." This is the last stop before Jerusalem. "We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and abode with him." You remember Philip from Acts 6, chosen to be one of the deacons of the church - one of the ministers - servants, in the early church. One of the seven - full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith, men of wisdom. And so he had been evangelist - first a deacon and then an evangelist, been an evangelist for years, and he had his headquarters in Caesarea. And it's easy to

understand why he'd wanna live there, if anybody has been there - a beautiful, beautiful place. It was a Roman city. The Romans occupied it with their soldiers and their forces. In fact, it was the place where the fortress was and the occupation of Herod.

So, anyway, he arrives in Caesarea and there he goes to Philip's house. And you'll remember that Philip was chased out of town by Saul, when Saul was persecutor and now they're meeting together in the same house, as fellow ministers of Christ. And it tells us, a little note about Philip - he had four daughters, aside from the sympathy that we might engender at that point, toward him, for having had four girls. We would have to add the fact that they were virgins, as I said, and he didn't have to worry about marrying 'em off, which would have been probably a costly item. And it says, "they did prophesy." So, he had four daughters, at least, who did prophesy. God used them, as we saw, last time, "to speak words practical and instruction to the church."

Now, in verse 10, we've got the setting. He is in Caesarea - Paul is - with all his buddies from the Gentile churches and the money, and they're on their way to Jerusalem. He's staying with Philip for a little while because he has some extra time. He's a little early on his schedule. He's gonna be in Jerusalem, chapter 20:16, says, "By Pentecost" - so, he's ahead of schedule. And so as he's waiting there, it says in verse 10, "As we tarried there many days," - and that would probably be about a week - "there came down from Judea, a certain prophet named, Agabus." I think it interesting that it says he came down from Judea, since Caesarea was in the middle of the Judea. In fact, Caesarea was city in Judea. Why would it say, "he came down from Judea, to Caesarea?" Because the Jews considered that since Caesarea was a Roman city, it was like a foreign land.

So, whenever you step from the Judean countryside into the city limits of Caesarea, you were coming from Judea, to Caesarea. It was sort of like an island of paganism. This gives you a little idea of the feeling that ran between the Jews and the Romans. Now, the prophet who came was named, Agabus. Well, the fact that he was a prophet is interesting. He is a prophet, not in the Old Testament sense, but in the New Testament sense. In the design of God, for the early years of the church, there were two key men. And in some occasions, as in verse 9, "women were used for this ministry. They were "apostles and prophets" according to Ephesians 4:11, and Ephesians 2:20.

Ephesians 2:20 says, "The apostles and prophets were the foundation of the church." Now we believe that as foundational men, they had a limited time ministry that they ceased to be. In fact the epistles of Paul, when he writes for the instruction of the church, he turns the leadership of the church over to pastors and elders, and there's no mention of apostles, and the term evangelist, all of a sudden comes into use. And so, we believe that the apostles and prophets were replaced chronologically by teaching pastors and evangelists. But in the foundational years, there were apostles and prophets.

Now, both of those were preachers and they preached all over the place, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and teaching the Word of God and they were used of God as His ministers, public speaking was their forte. As involved in that was the area of revelation. There were times when God gave them direct revelation. The Apostles' revelation was for the most part, doctrinal. They wound up writing the New Testament epistles, and there was a doctrinal kind of revelation, and as well, the gospels, and the prophets had a practical kind of revelation.

Like the difference between Agabus and Paul, Paul was an apostle; he's also called prophet, in the sense that he was a preacher. Paul was an apostle but when he gave revelation, it was revelation concerning doctrine. When Agabus gave revelation, it was revelation concerning the practical life of the church. For example in chapter 11:28, Agabus gave a revelation about a coming famine remember that? Agabus came down to Jerusalem and said there's gonna be famine, etcetera, etcetera; well here, Agabus shows up again and he gives another prophecy, it has no doctrine in it, it is only related to something very practical for the life of believers, or the church. And so, it seems that the apostles make it in doctrine, the prophets in the practical aspects.

For example, when the early church met together in the book of Acts, they studied the Apostles, what? Chapter 2, doctrine; the Apostles' doctrine. But in 1 Corinthians 14, there was still a need for the Prophets to be there, and they were instrumental in the practical life of the church, as well as used of God, to preach and teach. So, Agabus came down to give a practical kind of message to the church. Verse 11 tells us about his message, really, really, an interesting one. I want you to see it. "And when he came unto us, he took Paul's belt" - this is a dramatic illustration here - "and he bound his own hands and feet. Agabus tied himself up" - then, a belt wouldn't be like we think of it, but it was sort of a like a girdle, it could be very long. It could wrap around a couple times, if it was a rope, and he had it long enough, so he tied himself up. "Thus sayeth the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'".

Now, here's a pretty direct prophecy. He says, you're gonna get it, Paul, when you get to Jerusalem, you're gonna get bound and delivered to the Gentiles. And incidentally, that is precisely what happened. So, he was speaking revelation from God, not doctrinally, but in terms of the practical life of the church. Now, he took Paul's belt and tied himself up. You say, why all that? Well, that is a way that God has used to vividly illustrate prophecy. And I think, in an interesting sense, this shows that God is very concerned about our reception of His information. When God will go to great lengths to illustrate things, He wants us to get it.

And this is nothing new. I wanna take you just on a tangent. Go back to 1 Kings 11, and I'll show you how God has gone to great extremes to accomplish a very vivid lesson. Some things are unforgettable. And God made some things unforgettable in the way that He vividly illustrated them. Now, you remember that Solomon was a failure. That under David, Saul, David and Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel was united, all 12 tribes, but after Solomon it was all split up. Well, I want you

watch how God got this message across in 1 Kings 11:29. "It came at the time when Jeroboam went of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah," - the Shilonite - "found him in the way." So, here's Ahijah the prophet, runs into Jeroboam, who was gonna be a king, and "He is clad in new garments" - old Jeroboam was slicked up or, oh that's the indication of it, in his new clothes - "and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and tore it into 12 pieces." Thanks a lot, Ahijah, why don't you tear your own clothes.

Anyway, he tore up his new thing into 12 pieces, and you can imagine old Jeroboam standing there, saying, uh huh, yes, I see. Uh huh, well what's next? And he said, "Jeroboam, take me 10 pieces for thus sayeth the Lord, the God Israel, 'Behold, I'll tear the Kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give 10 tribes to thee.'" Now, you see, here was a very vivid illustration, wasn't it? - A very picturesque, illustration. Let me show another prophecy like that, where there was illustration used. Isaiah 20, and we'll read the whole chapter. You say, oh no; it's only six verses. Oh, we'll skip verse 1 and go to verse 2, Isaiah 20, "At the same time spoke the Lord, by Isaiah, the son of Amoz saying - interesting that the Lord speaks through these men. That's what a prophet was - 'Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins and put off thy shoe from thy foot.'" - and he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

Now, you say, stalker, huh? No, he's not stark naked. He probably had his undergarments on. You say, well what's a prophet of God doing around in his underwear anyway? Well, that's what was doing, in his underwear. "And the Lord said, 'As My servant, Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years' - can you imagine that prophet walking around for three years in his underwear? I'm glad I'm in the New Covenant 'three years and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia.' This is a sign. What's it a sign of? It's a sign of the total defeat and humiliation that's gonna come to Ethiopia and Egypt. And it was a sign to Israel, because Israel was always looking to Egypt for support. Instead of trusting God, they were always hanging onto the allies of Egypt and Ethiopia, and so God is saying, they're not gonna do you one bit of good, and it was a three year message. And do you know he didn't even have to open his mouth? There goes that guy in his underwear, again. Three years, he lived a message in front of those people - very vivid.

And in fact, their nakedness was gonna be worse. It says in verse 4, "Their buttocks would be uncovered to the shame of Egypt." They would really be stripped naked. Well, enough of that. Jeremiah 13; I'll show you another one, and I told you, this is a footnote. Jeremiah 13 - if you understand one little statement, you can interpret this whole passage here. The key to this whole Jeremiah 13 passage is that the entire Jewish people are like a good for nothing apron. Now, if you understand, you can write that in the margin of your bible - the entire people of Israel nothing but a good for nothing apron. "The Lord says unto Jeremiah, 'Go and buy a linen apron' - or belt, it says here, but it can be an apron, belt, whatever - 'and put it on thy loins don't put it in water.'" You go buy one, without even washing it. In those days, things weren't pre-washed and pre-shrunk and pre-whatever - they were just dirty, you know, and stiff and coarse - stick it on, like that.

So, he bought a belt, according to the word of the Lord, and put it on his loins, or an apron. "And the word of the Lord came to me a second and said, 'Take the apron that you have bought, which is upon thy loins.' and wear it all the time - 'Arise, and go to the Euphrates and hide it there—in the cleft of the rock, go bury it in the Euphrates." You say, now, this is ridiculous. That's a long trip to bury a dirty apron. He went and did it. And then the Lord, and he came back, and the Lord said, now go get it, after a period of time passed. Verse 7, "Then I went to the Euphrates and digged and took the apron from the place where I'd hidden it and behold, the apron was marred" - rotted. It was profitable for nothing. He dug up this rotten apron.

"The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Thus sayeth the Lord, after this manner will I rot the pride of Judah and the pride of Jerusalem.'" That's pretty strong stuff. But God again, used a very dramatic illusion. And I can show you another one. Ezekiel, chapter 4. And this is...we'll look at Ezekiel, as the last one. But to show you how God spoke through His prophets in very vivid illustrations - I think it's a good lesson for us, who teach, to remember that illustrations are important. And the more graphic they are, the more important they are, or the more retained they are.

Ezekiel 4:1, "'Thou also, son of man, take thee a clay tile" - a flat piece of clay; a tile you'd use for roof or something - 'and lay it before you, and portray upon it, the city, even Jerusalem.' Now get your tile out, Ezekiel, and draw a little deal of the city of Jerusalem - 'and lay siege against it.' Now, can't you see the prophet of God, sitting in the middle of town, with his little play fork, and it says in verse 2, he's to 'build a fort against it, cast a mound against and set battering rams.' And there's old Ezekiel, sitting in the middle of town, poking it, his little fork, and he's building a little mound. He's gonna attack it, and all this.

'Take an iron pan' - which is supposed to symbolize Nebuchadnezzar's army - 'and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city, and set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt siege against it.' There he is, sieging his little toy castle. 'This shalt be a sign to the house of Israel.' It's gonna be a sign that what's gonna happen. Nebuchadnezzar's gonna come and lay siege to Jerusalem. Pretty vivid, right? "Lie also upon thy left side" - this is represents Israel, the Northern Kingdom - 'and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it, according to the number of the days that Thou shalt lie upon it, Thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon Thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, 390 days.' The ___ ___ it says, 190 days, there may be scribal discrepancy, I don't know, but one or other, that's a lot of days - 'So, shalt thou bear the iniquity of the House of Israel.'

Well, the old prophet had to lay on his left side, around 200 to 400 days. 'And when thou shalt have accomplished then, lie on your right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah' - that's the south - '40 days. I have appointed thee, each day for a year. And therefore, thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem; thine arms should uncovered us, so prophesy against it. I will lay cords upon

thee and thou shalt not turn from one side to another till thou is end of the days of thy siege.' Ezekiel tied himself up and laid there, for all those days. And again, everybody going by would say, what's going on, initially, and then it would began to wear on 'em, when they begin to see day after day, after day, the prophecy, right before their very faces.

Then an interesting one, in chapter 5, of Ezekiel—maybe the most interesting one—just from the standpoint of interest. The sword here is, the symbol of the King of Babylon and he says, 'Son of man, take a sharp knife' - take a barber's razor - and cause it to pass on your head.' Incidentally, when you cut your hair, it was a sign of humiliation and mourning. 'And upon your beard' - and so, he just gave himself a crew cut. And incidentally, such was ordinarily forbidden, for a priest, and he said to them, 'Burn with fire, a third part, in the midst of the city' - and he's got his hair all separated and divided into little sections. And he says, 'burn a third with fire and when the days of the siege are fulfilled, take a third part and smite around it with a sword, and a third part scatter it to the wind, and I will draw out a sword after them. Some will die by fire, some will by sword, and some will be scattered to the wind. Thou also, take of them, a few in number and bind them in thy skirts.'

Take a few hairs and stick 'em in your skirt. You know who that is? That's the remnant of Israel. So, here is a very, very vivid illustration again. Now you can go to Acts 21. Now God has, throughout history then, used His prophets, to communicate strategic messages and very, very frequently they were messages of impending pain, and suffering, and they were vividly illustrated. And here, you have the same thing, Agabus arrives and in a very vivid way, in verse 11, tells Paul that he's gonna be bound and delivered to the Gentiles; and incidentally, we'll see, in a few weeks, how that comes true, in most interesting passages.

Well, verse 12, "When they heard Agabus" - here is Paul and of all his pals and all, at Philip's house and everybody, who was a Christian in Caesarea and they're all gathered together - 'and when we heard these things, both we' - that's Luke and all those with Paul - 'and they, of that place' - that's all the Caesarean Christians - 'besot him not to go up to Jerusalem.' Everybody said, oh Paul, don't go. Don't go. You're gonna get bound. You're gonna be delivered to the Gentiles. Your ministry is gonna be over, and they begged him, and you know all those dear friends and beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, when they started doing that, they got to him. I mean the man was not rock. He was a sensitive man, and they're getting to him. And you know, they were crying and carrying on, and it was big sad dramatic deal.

You say, how do you know that? Verse 13, Paul answered, "What mean ye to weep, and break my heart?" All this crying is getting to me. And the word there, that's translated to "break my heart," is really to, soften my heart, by pounding it like a washerwoman pounds clothes. Why are you beating on me, trying to soften up my will? He calls 'em to stop. My determination is weakening. My will is softening. Cut this stuff out. He reaffirms the courage of his convictions, at this point, and he says, "I am ready, not be bound, only but to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." Cut this stuff

out.

You know, I think that this opens us to an interesting area of discussion. We won't pursue it very long, but I would venture to say that there are probably hundreds, maybe thousands of people who never do accomplish the objective that God gives them because well-meaning family, and well-meaning friends and loved ones, softened up their determination by talking them out of it. Oh, it's too risky. Oh, too many sacrifices. Why you'll never be able to endure in that circumstance. Why such and such and such and such...I wonder how many lives finally wiped out, without ever accomplishing the will of God, all on the basis of well-meaning loved ones, and friends? Something, to think about...

And I'm sure that the friends of Christians have done, perhaps as much as the enemies, of Christians, to deter them, in some cases, from accomplishing the objectives of God. You know what Jesus said? Sometimes, friends - sometimes, Jesus said, "It's gonna be necessary for you to forsake everything, and if you're not willing to leave father and mother and everybody else that you love, and follow Me, you're not worthy to be," what? --"My disciple." And let me say something, moms and dads, someday you may have to give a kid up to the mission field. Be objective enough to let your own mind settle on the fact that if he's in the will of God, he's safe, and he's as safe as the sovereignty of God is, strong. And that's all you need to know.

And don't ever be hesitant when you know that somebody feels that this is God's direction, and that they've set their mind to do this, don't ever soften their will towards that determination. You under gird them. Let's not talk people out of doing what God wants them to do. If they're gonna be talked out of it, let it be the enemy that does it, not us. Let it not be the enemy, but if you have your choice, don't you get in on the enemy's work. Make him work alone, anyway. And I say this too, I think, we all have to be willing to pay the price. Sometimes we don't want to see people make sacrifices, but we've got to be willing to pay the price.

And I can illustrate that in my own life, you know, sometimes people, well meaning, and dear people, will say, "John, you shouldn't do that. You'll get overtired. John, you shouldn't go over there and do that." You know, and that all goes into your little computer. Now, I know that everybody's gonna rush to me, and say, go do that, John, go do that. You know? That's all right. But there are certain things that I believe are God's will, and in spite of the fact that people say, well you'll get overtired, or such and such - that immaterial. And if you know that, in your own heart, and you love people, sometimes it becomes a confusing issue when people try to dissuade you, so.

Well, we won't say any more about that. Anyway, what happens here is, Paul says, "I am, ready." And you know, you could preach a whole evening on just, that. That man was ready for everything. You know there's something about the Christian life, as Paul, that I like; it's kind of an instant readiness. I like the kind of Christian who doesn't have to have a running start to get involved in anything, he's ready any instant, for anything. This man was ready to do whatever needed to be done, when it

needed to be done. You know, sometimes you know, in our situation, we say, well, you know, I've got to-I'm gonna substitute teach; I've got to teach a class for two weeks, so I'm going now to begin to pray and, humph, you know, and get ready for that opportunity.

And we store it up, or maybe some young person says, this summer I'm going out on a missionary project. And I'm going to have to get ready for that. You know, you ought to be ready do it, now. That's why sometimes, the Lord really can't use everybody, because everybody's not ready, and He hadn't got time to fiddle around with preparation. The job has to be done. So, He goes back to the people that are always ready. Paul was ready. In Romans 1:15, he says, he's "ready to preach to Rome."

In 2 Timothy 4, he said was, "ready to die." He's ready for whatever. Readiness. Well, he says, "I'm ready to be bound" - and that, of course, would be painful and cruel, "and ready to die" - and that would be an execution, probably by torture. There was no other execution, in Rome, than just the most torturous kinds, crucifixion or the merciful kind, that Paul got, which was chopping off your head with a sword. But let's face it that would be an excruciating torture, just in its anticipation, for most people. And so, Paul said, "I'm ready to die." You say well, that's easy for him to say, because he knew his life was over. His dreams were finished. He didn't have any more ambitions.

Oh no. When he was finished with Jerusalem, where had he already planned to go? Rome. And when he got to Rome, where was he going? Spain. He wasn't done. What he was saying, if all those dreams and all those hopes have to die in Jerusalem, and that's the will of the Lord, in His name, I'll die. I mean this man's set his face to accomplish the will of God, at any price. He paid whatever it cost. You know, I like this kind of determination. There's a great passage in Ezekiel 3:8-9, that expresses it—just listen to it, as I read it. "Behold," - well, you know, God says, to Ezekiel, you're My prophet, but nobody's gonna listen to you. They're gonna hassle you and give you a lot of trouble. Not gonna harken to you. They're gonna be impudent, hard hearted. But He says, "Behold, I made your face strong against their faces." You're gonna stand nose to nose, with Israel. "And your forehead strong against their forehead." Can't you just see him just gritting his teeth, hmmm, like this, see?

"Like an atom that's harder than flint, have I made your forehead," - it's like a rock - "fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house." You just stare 'em in the eye, nose to nose, and tell 'em the truth. Set your face like a flint. This is commitment, at any price. And you say, well that's fine but when you start hearing you're gonna suffer, that makes it rough. You're right. But you know, and I'm gonna digress for a minute. You know that the problem that people have with pain and suffering is not a problem of the suffering, and it's not a problem of the pain; it's an inadequate doctrine of God. Did you get that? It is an inadequate doctrine of God.

For, if you have an adequate doctrine of God, then whatever happens, is acceptable. When I see anybody fall apart or crackup, under any kind of anxiety, whether it's the pain of persecution, which is

a little bit rare. Whether it's the pain of broken relationships. Whether it's the pain of death in a life, or whether it's the pain of illness - when anybody collapses underneath that, it is because they have an inadequate doctrine of God. It is not too much stress for them. God would never have you go under something you couldn't bear, 1 Corinthians 10, never. What is happening is, your God can't stand up - you're a doctrine of God, like J.B. Phillips said, "Your God is too small." You say, well what do you - what kind of doctrine of God do you need to be able to handle this kind? I mean how can you face suffering?

Well, let me show you. Go to Hebrews 12, for a minute. And if you have an adequate of God, you can handle any kind of suffering, and there are several aspects. And we'll just hit 'em briefly. First of all, you have to understand the Fatherhood of God. You can write 'em down; I'll give you five of 'em. You have to understand the Fatherhood of God, verse 7, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the Father chastens not?" Listen, if you're having discipline in your life, through suffering, thank God, that's proof He's your Father. Because you know that God does not discipline the unsaved? You know, people have always asked, for years, why is it the unsaved prosper and the saved seem to go through the worst trials? Well it's simple. The unsaved do prosper, read the Psalms, they do, they go along, winging it, and nothing happens. You know why? That's because God is not active, in the daily way, disciplining them.

No. Romans 2 says, "They treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." An unsaved guy could go through his life without a bad circumstance. But boy, when he dies, that wrath that he's treasured up against the day of wrath, in judgment, is gonna hit him full force. On the other hand, in the life of a Christian, God is dealing on a moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, day-by-day, discipline basis, so He's active in your life. So, the very fact that you see these things happening in your life, as God is whipping you into shape, through the things that happen, indicate He belongs to you, and you belong to Him, as a child. And so accept the chastening of the Lord as the unique character of a son of God. Something an unbeliever doesn't have. All he does is keep piling up an account of wrath that gets unloaded at him in whole fell swoop at the judgment.

So, it's a great indication that you're a son. And in case you think you're the only son that gets what you get, you'd better read 1 Peter 5:9, where it says, "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world." We're all there, folks. A father disciplines for three reasons; retribution that is direct chastisement for sin; you did it, so bend over, that kind of stuff. And they also discipline for, prevention. Sometimes our children say, but why? Everybody did; but you're not gonna do it; we know what's best; trust us - prevention. And the other is, education. Sometimes discipline educates us. If nothing else, discipline educates you to lean on God, all the more, as your only resource.

Remember, at the end of Job, after all he went through, the whole summation of the book of Job, is chapter 42:1-10, where he says, "Now, I understand God. Now I know God." That's education,

friends. The seminary of suffering is a tough way to go, but when you graduate, you got a great doctrine of God, if you've allowed God to teach. So, if you're suffering, first of all, seeing the Fatherhood of God, He's a loving Father. He's chastising His children because He wants us to grow up into the image of Christ. Secondly, we see love of God. And that we see in verse 6, of Hebrews 12, "For whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges on whom He receives."

Boy, the very fact that you're getting chastised indicates He loves you. Why? Because, He's conforming you, to image of Christ - I can always tell a child that isn't loved. You know why? He's not disciplined. When parents love children, they take the time to disciple 'em. You can respond to this kind of discipline in two ways. You can learn from it, or you can worry about it. You can say, Oh Lord, I don't know what You're teaching me, but boy, it's exciting lessons, and I don't want more, or you can you, oh, oh, what's happening? Anxiety, worry, oh pain, oh, I'm going through so much. And you know, you just sort of crackup. And for those of you who learn from it, there's Christian service, with great fruitfulness. For those of who crackup under it, there's the counseling clinic; it's where you go and somebody tells you, you shouldn't have cracked up from it, you should have learned from it.

You know, worry is so dumb. Worry is really stupid. It's sinful. Sin is stupidly, sinful. You say, well where do you get the idea that it's stupid? Well, Matthew 6, Jesus had the greatest section, in the bible, on worry. Matthew 6; let me show you something, there. I told you we'd jump around a little bit. Matthew 6 - I'll just show you how ridiculous it is to worry about suffering or about any anxiety or about anything in life. This is a footnote here. First of all Matthew 6 says that, "Worry is useless." Verse 27. "Which of you, being anxious, can add one cubit to your stature?" Can you change your circumstance by worrying? Nope. So, it's useless - nice to know.

Secondly, it's hurtful. It hurts you. You say, how do you know that? Verse 34, "Be, therefore not worrying about tomorrow." Why? "For tomorrow will bring its own worries. Sufficient unto the day, is its own evil." In other words, if you worry about something, you have to go through it at least twice - once, in your imagination, and once in reality. Better that you should just wait that it'll come, sufficient under the day is the evil thereof, just wait to you get there. So, it's not only useless, it's injurious. Once is enough to go through pain, without anticipating it.

Not only that, worry is an indication that you think you're unworthy. Listen to this, verse 28, "Why are you worrying about your clothes? Consider the Lilies in the field how they grow, they don't toil, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, wasn't arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today isn't tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much clothe ye," - clothe you - "oh ye, of little faith?" You know something? If you worry about what you wear; if you worry about your daily sustenance, you are actually saying to God; I am less significant than a lily. Now, Lilies are nice. That's ridiculous.

Worry denies your nobility. Verse 25, "Be not anxious for your life, what you shall you eat, what you shall drink, for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body, than raiment?" And then he goes on, talking about the fowls of the air, "Doesn't God feed them?" You're more worth more than birds and lilies. And you know something, else about worry? It isn't childlike, either. Verse 32 says, "For your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things." He knows what you need and what you can handle.

I'll tell you, worry is also unheavenly, it's earthly, verse 33, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." When you worry about what's going on, on earth, you've got earthly thoughts, not heavenly. It's idolatrous, too. Worry is idolatrous, verse 24, "You cannot serve God and materialism." - Money, mammon and worry is heathen, the first part of verse 32, "After all these things do the heathens seek." Worry is ridiculous. It's sinful. In the midst of suffering, you can trust the loving Father, and you trust that He's doing that, for your benefit.

Back then, to Hebrews 12, and we find a third characteristic of God, that you need to have in suffering. Father, the God, the love of God, thirdly, the wisdom of God. Verse 10, "For they verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure, our fathers" - earthy fathers - "but He, for our profit." Do you know that God is wise enough to know what you need? The Heavenly Father never makes a mistake. He never takes a wrong approach with a child of His. He takes the right approach. Some of us take the wrong approach with our children, don't we? Not God. Always the right approach to bring about the right lesson - everything is calculated to result in you coming to the image of Christ.

In addition to the wisdom of God, you need to understand the authority of God. He has the right to do what He does, verse 9, "We had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence" - human fathers - "shall we not much rather be in subjection under the Father of spirit and live?" God is God. He's acting, He's not watching. He's doing it for our benefit. We should bow to His authority without rebellion. Willingly submitting to Him. He knows what He's doing. Even the pain that comes to you, comes directly through God's allowance. Amos 3:6, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?" And it doesn't mean sin, it means negative, things; shall there be pain, shall there be suffering, shall there be problems and God has not done those. God is no spectator, friends. God is not a spectator. And everything that reaches you, in your life, passes before God.

You know, people talk about the permissive will of God, but you can't find it in the bible. It isn't there. God's not a spectator. He isn't beside the events; He isn't behind the event; He's in them, and that's the only way to look at it. God is sovereign. Fifthly and lastly, we have to look at suffering through the Holiness of God. Verse 10, at the end, says, "that we might be partakers of His Holiness." Verse 11, "that we might yield the peace of the fruit of righteousness." So, in suffering, it's all a question of how you view God. If you see that God is Father who is loving, who is wise, who has authority, and is Holy, and is bringing about all of these things, that you might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, then you can view suffering with a positive look.

That's the bible's meaning in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God, and they're called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow he also predestined just to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ." So, everything happens, happens to that end. So Paul - now, go back to Acts 21 - So, Paul says, look, "I'm ready to not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Why? "Because I see God in this, a Father, who loves me, who is wise; who has all authority and who is conforming me to the image of Christ."

Beloved, that's the only way to look at suffering. Well, verse 14, "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased" - they ceased crying and begging and said, "the will of the Lord be done." And that's the ultimate assignment for everything. Matthew 6:10, the disciple's prayer, "Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven." Jesus in the Garden, "Not My will but Thine, be done." The ultimate assignment of everything, the will of the Lord be done. Here they were saying, don't go, don't go; Paul saying, I'm going, I'm going; they're having a discussion, they don't know who's right. The will of the Lord be done. They gave it to God, they acknowledged His sovereignty; and He's sovereign, believe me.

In 1 Samuel 3:18, Samuel says, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth right to Him." And so, Paul just gave his life to the will of the Lord. Courage of conviction knows its purpose, can't be diverted, pays any price, lastly, and just simple. Courage of conviction affects others. I love this. Verse 15 - and you wouldn't even notice. You'd go right on by it, if you weren't really applying this thought to it. "And after those days, we took up our luggage" - carriages doesn't mean horse drawn carriages, it's luggage, baggage - "we took up our baggage and went to Jerusalem." They went anyway, but watch this. I just love this. "There went with us certain of the disciples of Caesarea." Isn't that fantastic?

Here are all these - don't go, don't go; oh, you're gonna be persecuted. And you know what happened? Paul left and they all went with him. And you see courage is contagious. Instead of all their moaning and weeping affecting him, his courage affected them. He was a marked man, he was hated; he was gonna be imprisoned and they were gonna be identified with him, but they became willing to pay the price because he was. That's leadership, by example. D.L. Moody told a story a young man who had 500 soldiers and he went to war ___ the King who had 3,000. The King saw the discrepancy, of course, in the two, and so he sent a messenger to the young man and he said, "You can surrender and I'll treat you mercifully, and we'll save the lives of both sides."

The young man called up, with two of his soldiers, and said to the first soldier, in front of the messenger from the King, he said, "Take this dagger and drive it into your heart." And the soldier took this dagger and drove it into his heart. Fell on the ground, dead. He said to the second one, "Dive off that precipice into that chasm and the guy dove off and smashed his body on the rocks, below. The young man looked at the King's messenger and said, "Now, you go back and tell your King, I have 500 other men, just like those."

Courage is contagious. Those men were willing to die for the leader they believed in. And the little band of weepy, mopey Christians at Caesarea, all of a sudden became courageous giants. People, if you have the courage of conviction, let me tell you, God'll use you to affect the lives of others. But it all boils down to commitment. I think of the words of the King of Israel, to Ben Hadad, the King the Syria, he said to him, "My lord, and my king, according to thy saying, I am thine and all that I am." If one man could make that commitment to another man, certainly we should make it to our Lord. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for insights gained again this morning, in Your Word to practical areas that apply to our lives. We know that You desire from us, a total commitment, a total giving of ourselves, for Your usefulness, and the accomplishment of the goals and the tasks that the Spirit of God does desire. God, help us to be committed, to know our purpose, to not be diverted, to pay any price and affect others. And even as we close, we pray that You'll seal to our heart, these truths from Your Word, in Christ's blessed name, Amen.

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