

World Wide Witness: The Trials Of Mission

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[0 : 0 0] The readings from Acts chapter 21, starting in verse 1, and the page number in the church Bible is 1117.

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos.

The next day we went to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria.

We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.

[1 : 1 2] After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemaeus, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day.

Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, The Holy Spirit says, In this way, the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, The Lord's will be done. After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Nassan, where we were to stay.

[2 : 2 8] He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day, Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.

Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Thanks very much, Simon.

Well, this morning we're going to be ambitious, and we're going to be looking at three long chapters.

We're not going to read them all, but I do think they are a unit, and we'll see what they have to tell us. As Ralph helpfully reminded us earlier, it's not just history, it's actually our history.

It's the history of this church, how it began, and it's also helping us to see how that mission continues, even in our day.

[3 : 48] So let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word together. Father, we thank you for this amazing account for Luke who wrote down all that Jesus' name, all that Jesus began to do and teach through his gospel, and all that he continues to do through the risen Jesus.

we thank you for this church. We thank you that our lives and this church is anchored in history and is anchored in the future, which gives us meaning and purpose for today, that we are people who are living out the mission of God.

Lord, please help us this morning to grasp what that means for us individually, what it means for us corporately, and that by your Spirit you would empower us and that you would equip us as your people to live that out in all its wonder and in its danger.

Please help us this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. You've probably never heard of them.

They live hidden away, deep in the valleys of the Himalayas, one of the least evangelised and extreme regions on the face of the earth.

[5 : 48] The Kalasha people live here. They fear mountain fairies and demonic dogs. They worship their dead and they don't know who Jesus is.

The six million Babhi people also live in the Himalayas. Between them they have 330 million gods, but yet they don't have a Saviour.

Today, there are no known believers among either group. You see, there are still places in our world where the Gospel has not yet been heard.

And there are still people who walk this planet who are still untouched by the Gospel. Now, I have a question about all of this.

But it's not a question for me and it's not a question for you. It's a question that we are going to direct at God. You see, God has made a promise that the Gospel would reach every people group on the face of the earth.

[7 : 14] We read it at the beginning of Acts and it sets out the whole theme of the book. Let's read it again. Acts chapter 1 verse 8. Where the risen Jesus speaks to his disciples and this is what he tells them in Acts 1 verse 8.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

literally to the unreached peoples of the world. Now, I want to know will God keep his promise?

Will God make sure that the Kalasha people and the Babhi people who are living in the valleys of the Himalayas will they get to hear about Jesus Christ?

Or is this simply a failed promise? Because there are places where the gospel has never been heard, there are people like you and me with their families and their children who remain untouched by the gospel.

[8 : 37] So here is our question to God with the greatest respect and we say it to God this morning, will you keep your promise?

will you do what you said you will do? Will you bring the gospel to the unreached peoples of the earth? Well, in Acts 21 to 23 we get an answer from God because in these chapters we begin to see God's promise fulfilled and worked out.

But as we read through we'll discover that the promise that God has made involves people like you and me. God's promise to bring the gospel to the unreached people of the world involves people like us.

So there's three things we need to know about this promise that God has made and our participation in God's mission.

Three things about the promise and about our participation in God's mission. The first is this. The mission that God calls us to is marked with suffering.

[9 : 57] The mission that God calls us to is marked with suffering. Acts 21 marks the start of Paul's final journey.

We've followed him on three journeys so far. This is his fourth and final journey and it starts here in chapter 21. It's a journey that takes him into Jerusalem and then onto Rome further than he has ever travelled before with the gospel.

Because God has made a promise to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth and here we begin to see it being worked out. But it's a journey that's going to involve much suffering.

Look at 21 verse 4. On his way to Jerusalem Paul has arrived at a place called Tyre and this is what we read in verse 4.

Finding the disciples there we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit the disciples urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

[11 : 07] Now why don't they want Paul to go to Jerusalem? Well look down at verse 10. They travel down a little bit further down the coast and they arrive at Caesarea.

Verse 10 After we had been there a number of days a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea coming over to us he took Paul's belt from round his waist he tied his own hands and he tied his feet with it and he said the Holy Spirit says in this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.

You see Paul has been called to bring the gospel to the unreached peoples of the earth but it's going to be a journey marked by suffering.

Now I think Luke the author of Acts wants us to see the similarity of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

So hold your finger in Acts 21 and go back to Luke chapter 18. This is Luke's first book which tells us all about what Jesus began to do and teach.

[12 : 30] Acts is everything that follows on after. So Luke chapter 18 verse 31 and as we read see the similarity.

Acts 18 verse 31 Jesus took the twelve aside and told them we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be turned over to the Gentiles. They will mock him. They will insult him. They will spit on him. They will flog him and they will kill him.

You see as Jesus went up to Jerusalem he knew he was going to die because the suffering on the cross was the way in which God would make salvation come to all people that the gospel would be available to all people.

And now Paul in Acts 21 we see him as the model disciple who now follows in the footsteps of his Lord and Saviour who follows the example of Christ.

[13 : 49] So in Acts 21 verse 12 we read when we heard this we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem because they know danger awaits him.

Verse 13 then Paul answered why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

when he would not be dissuaded we gave up and said the Lord's will be done echoes of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

After this we got ready and we went up to Jerusalem. You see bringing the gospel always has and it always will mean suffering.

It's not that God enjoys watching his people suffer. No the reality is when the gospel is lovingly taught and simply explained there will be those who have religious authority or positions of authority or those in political power and they will see that when the gospel comes it's an attack on their influence over people and because of the gospel claims that Jesus is the one and only true saviour and king over all peoples and that repentance and faith is the only right response there will be always people who will attack the messenger or the bringer of that good news as Jesus suffered so Paul suffered and every disciple who brings the gospel to the unreached will face suffering too God's promise is being fulfilled

[15 : 59] Paul is going to go to Jerusalem as God has said and from Jerusalem he will go on to Rome but it's a road marked with suffering it's what we sang earlier on blessed be your name in the road marked with suffering you see if we are a Christian this is our mission this is what God has called us to this is why we exist this is why we live this is what our purpose is in life we might not be the person who actually goes to the Himalayas maybe you are perhaps it will be one of your children but whatever our specific calling we are all commanded to see that the gospel goes to the unreached this is our responsibility but let's be very clear that it's going to involve a life of suffering and that will come in all kinds of different shades for some of us it's going to mean rethinking how we are going to use our retirement package or perhaps letting go of some of the comfort that you treasure and that you hold on to and releasing them so that you can support somebody else who will go to the unreached for others it might mean forgoing a salary or an increase in promotion because you take your

God given gifts and you go and live among the unreached the degree that you're studying for in college right now might not be for a nice comfortable job and home here in this country it might be to take what you learn and get in college to go and serve in a different country but for all of us it will mean turning our backs on safety and security turning our backs on comfort and pleasure and learning to embrace the words of Paul as our motto for life which we read in verse 13 look at those words I am ready not only to be bound but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus God's promise is being fulfilled but do not forget

God's call to mission is always marked with suffering the second thing we want to see is that the mission God's called us to is not going to fail the mission that God called us to is not going to fail verse 17 of chapter 21 when we arrived at Jerusalem the brothers the other Christians received us warmly now not everybody in that city was happy to see Paul as we read through these chapters we'll discover that four times Paul faces being killed within an inch of his life while he's in Jerusalem there are four attacks on his life but each time God intervenes to save and protect his messenger so that the gospel reaches the unreached let's have a look at these different events the first incident

Paul is spotted in the temple chapter 21 verse 28 and this is what the people say about Paul verse 28 men of Israel help us this is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place now of course that was not true Paul simply taught that the law would not get you to God only Jesus can and he taught that the temple is not the place to meet God Jesus is and look at their response verse 30 the whole city was aroused and the people came running from all different directions and remember this is the time of Passover that Paul has arrived so there were thousands more coming into the city so the whole city with all these extra people came running from all directions seizing Paul they dragged him from the temple and immediately the gates were shut and while they were trying to kill him news reached the commander of the

Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in uproar this is a passionate aggressive hate filled angry mob vying for Paul's blood but God has made his promise he is a mission to fulfill and it will not fail verse 32 he at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd when the rioters saw the commander and the soldiers well they didn't want to get killed by them they stopped beating Paul we read on that he was taken into the barracks verse 35 and when Paul reached the steps the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers for his own safety and the crowd that followed him kept shouting away with him later on the same crowd would have another go at

[22 : 03] Paul chapter 22 verse 22 in in the third incident Paul is just faced a Jewish court and again they are very angry chapter 23 verse 10 the dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them he ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks for safety but once again

God has his hand on Paul and he preserves his life and he gives Paul this assurance and this promise again verse 11 the following night the Lord stood near Paul and said take courage as you have testified about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome God will fulfill his promise in the fourth incident of Paul's the attempted take on his life here is Paul in the barracks and we read in verse 12 of chapter 23 the next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul more than 40 men were involved in this plot they went to the chief priest and the elders and they said we have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed

Paul now then you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information before his case we are ready to kill him before he gets here you see they have tried three times already and this time they are determined to succeed in getting rid of Paul but God has made this promise he has a mission to fulfill and this mission is not going to fail verse 16 but but when the son of Paul sister so this is his nephew heard of this plot he went to the barracks and he told Paul everything that they were going to do to him then Paul called one of the centurions and said take this young man to the commander he has something to tell him so he took him to the commander and Paul's nephew goes and tells the commander of the

Roman army all about the plot to take Paul's life verse 22 the commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me three times they tried to take him again on the fourth time they tried to take him but this time God intervenes not through a Roman commander but through a weak little boy to preserve God's messenger you see despite all the plots to take Paul's life we can be ensured that God's messenger is going to be preserved whether it's a Roman commander who steps in or whether it's an insignificant little boy what God has promised God is going to fulfill and God is going to make sure that the gospel does go to the people of the Himalayas because

God will preserve and God will protect the people that he chooses to go there until the job is done God but as we've said God uses us to fulfill that promise so for those who do go and receive that call to go to the unreached whether you are somebody who digs deep into your pocket so that you can support somebody to go or whether you are actually somebody who does go be sure of this no one can take the life of one of God's servants without God's permission our lives are completely in God's hands the servants that God calls to his work and

[27:13] I say this carefully but I think it's true the servants that God calls to his work are indestructible until God should call them home we will not die a day early we will not die a day too late God is sovereign over the lives of his people who support or who will carry his message to the unreached peoples of the world God made a promise his promise is being fulfilled and let's take encouragement that though the road is marked with suffering this will not fail it will not fail so he calls us to a road that is marked by suffering he calls us to a mission that is not going to fail and third the mission that

God calls us to is set to continue Paul leaves Jerusalem in the most extraordinary of ways look at verse 23 of chapter 23 the commander called two of his centurions and ordered them get ready a detachment of 200 soldiers 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight 470 armed men verse 24 provide mounts for Paul so that he can be taken safely to governor Felix isn't that extraordinary the way in which God provides for the safe passage the safe arrival for Paul to eventually get to Rome nobody is going to lay a hand on God's man and we know as we read through

Acts that the gospel does reach Rome and it moves beyond Rome into Spain and into the rest of Europe and it would come to the island of Ireland but the mission still continues and we are still part of it because as we said at the beginning there are many places in this world where the gospel has not yet been heard and I want us to get the reality of what that is let me give you some figures to show the reality of what we are talking about this mission is not finished with the book of Acts it is our life it's about us there are 16,000 people groups in the world 3,700 of those people groups remain unreached that means they don't have any

Bible in their language they don't have a church established in their people group they don't have a person who is working in their people group that means there are 350 million people who have no access to the gospel nobody to bring it nobody to tell them nobody to give them a scripture nothing in the Christian world there are 2,100 full-time Christian workers that's paid Christian workers for every one million people 2,100 paid full-time Christian workers for every one million people in the unreached world there are only six workers for every one million people there's an imbalance so the mission continues it is not finished there are places in our world where the gospel has not been heard there are still people like you and me with the same needs and concerns for our children and our families and are still walking this planet and are untouched by the gospel that's why we ask the question will God keep his promise well God's promise remains it will not fail but it involves people like you and me it involves the church of

Carragoline and one way that we are involved as a church is our support of many we've heard of many before through Radstock Minnie is from Mongolia she's now working in a cafe which borders a country that is untouched by the gospel and remains deeply hostile to the gospel and Minnie is at the minute working in getting her visa with Mongolia and the China embassy to get into that country that we won't mention and she is wanting to go and live there amongst those people to love them to serve them so that she can bring the good news of Christ it remains one of the hardest places in the world to be a Christian torture prison and death await those who are found out by the authorities but listen to what she said in a recent interview remember Anthony Adams who was with us a little while ago he was out there and he interviewed her and he sent back a clip of the interview and he was asking her all about her trip heading towards there and he said to her you really want to go don't you and in a bright excited and joyful voice she says and remember torture and prison and death await those who go if they are found out she says yes

[33 : 39] I really want to go because Minnie has understood the cost and she knows that her life is in God's sovereign hands but what about my commitment what about your commitment well we need to go on praying and supporting people like Minnie but we also need to respond to this huge challenge of reaching the unreached with the gospel what will it mean for us perhaps it will mean and I encourage you if you are here with your husband or your wife and your family to talk about this afterwards and to think through maybe it's just reviewing and thinking yes we are doing the things that we should be doing maybe it will mean giving a little bit more maybe it will mean cutting back in another area maybe it's going to mean committing to praying for somebody it might involve actually going or praying that people will go what is my commitment but what is our commitment together as a church well as we consider our commitment

I want us to move directly to the Lord's Supper and let's as we think about our commitment let's remember Christ's commitment to us we are a people who were unreached a people who were untouched by the gospel by Christ but yet he came into the world giving up his life for you and for me he took the path that is marked by suffering he took the ultimate path of suffering taking my sin and your sin on the cross to die my death to die your death to take the wrath of God for you and for me to take the punishment that you and I deserve to take the judgment that is ours he took it on himself he would suffer hell so that we would never have to go to hell that's the reality of Christ coming to rescue us and to save us so as we think about our commitment let's remember

Christ's commitment to us and the life that he gave when he took bread in his hands and he broke it before his disciples and he said this is my body broken to you for the part ripped apart but us so that we could have life life in all souls life in all places Christ brings back to us into our conscience so that we could have everything let's remember Christ's commitment to us so that the bread is being passed away hold on to peace and just use the quietness to be reflected in the faith and what life itself has been fun let's just do that now to be quiet now go of tranquility he he the trying to to