

Acts 21:1–16

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[0 : 00] We arrived this morning in chapter 21 of Acts, where Luke is picking up the narrative on a part where he himself has joined Paul, as indicated in the first person language.

And we also get an opportunity to see this third missionary journey underway, but coming to an end shortly as the third journey began back in chapter 18 of Acts.

However, this chapter depicts a missionary journey that has a final destination to Jerusalem.

It's a journey to pursue a mission already underway. Mission underway. It's a mission that is already at work.

It already has legs. The word of God has already done its work. As we all see and we will see in the text, people come to faith because of this mission already underway.

[1 : 14] People, whole households will come to faith. They have come to faith. There's been numerous amounts of converts because of the mighty work of the word at this time.

And while I've chosen the title, this sermon mission underway, I did play around with a few other titles as I was trying to come up with something clever.

One easy one, Missio Dei, the mission of God. Because it's not Paul's mission that we're witnessing here in the text. And it's not your mission. It's not something you just come up with.

No, it's God's mission, knowing that God himself needs to be glorified and will indeed be glorified in heaven and earth and hell below.

Despite Paul's popularity, despite, you know, your attraction, despite even your support.

[2 : 13] It's the mission of God at work. But then the next title, you know, because I'm a movie buff. I was thinking Mission Impossible. I didn't fit well, but it sounded cool.

Mission Impossible. The thought is because the journey that Paul is setting out and embarking on is so grand, so big, it's impossible for him to do it on his own.

He's going to need the aid of the Holy Spirit. I mean, it's the Holy Spirit at work even before Paul stepped on the scene. But this mission can only be accomplished by Paul's submission to the Holy Spirit.

For Paul, he had every reason to go the other way. He had every reason to pack up and take his ball and go somewhere else. I mean, especially after receiving persecution, after being under the gun, after even being questioned by peers.

Peers, like, are you the Saul? Are you, which one are you right now, you know? It, there wouldn't be a quarrel if Paul decided to go somewhere else because of what he's faced, right?

[3 : 29] These are odds that come across as impossible. But you know what? What's impossible with Paul, what's impossible with us is only possible with Christ in God.

No, but this is a mission underway. Luke gives his readers a description in chapter 21. He gives a description, a detailed description of Paul, as you'll see, as you see.

Not because Paul has such a busy travel plan and he was so good at, you know, scheduling his vacation time. No, no, he, it was, it was not just a, because Paul was so successful in missional work, but because Paul's focus and his goal are meant to point us to just how, just how much God deserves the glory within our missional work.

If he's worth anything, he's worth everything. This is not a God who just takes a slice, he takes the whole loaf, right? What makes God's mission different from ours is that it's him that gets the glory. It's him that takes center stage. It should be primarily about him. That's what sets God's mission apart from every other mission you'll see in the world.

[4 : 50] That, that, that not, not only is the mission primarily about God, but the believers are primarily about the one who has set them out on mission. Believers don't just follow blindly on this mission, but it's by faith that their eyes are even open to even follow Christ to the end.

A mission already at work. I think one of the gravest mistakes that a mission, a mission worker could actually make is to think that they themselves are bringing something new to the people group that they're bringing the gospel to.

That, you know what, I need to, I need to, I, if they don't, if I don't go, they won't know. No, no, no, here's the thing. And God already is at work. Creation itself testifies to the truth, the conviction of their hearts.

He's adding you as an agent to advertise what he's already put out. Mission underway. It's not a new mission. From eternity past, this proto-evangelion, this, this God was at work doing missional work before you were even thought of.

A mission underway, which is set forward in the text by Paul in three ways, I would say. Everybody say three ways. Hey, we go. You ready? Are you ready?

[6 : 04] All right. All right. One through six. Verse one through six. Paul is undeterred. This mission underway means that Paul will be undeterred. I like that because Paul is committed.

He's, he, he, he's undeterred from the mission to Jerusalem. And why is that? Why would Paul be undeterred? Because Paul has a higher purpose to Jerusalem. It's, it's based on simply the call of God.

Nowadays, we're still trying to figure out, is this God at all? Paul is convinced thoroughly. Oh, it's the call of God. I will not be deterred.

In spite of these other places, he could have visited. In spite of other places, he, he could have went. He's determined to make the trip to Jerusalem. And we notice in the first six verses here, as Luke records the journey and the listing of the, of the ports and the stopping points, all together, the third missionary journey would make up about 10 spots that Paul had to hit on the way to Jerusalem.

Even, even back in chapter 20, verse 22, you see it there. It says, and now behold, I am going to Jerusalem. And I like that word constrained by the Holy Spirit, knowing what will happen to me.

[7 : 18] Can you, can you imagine that? I'm constrained by the Holy Spirit, knowing that as he says, affliction and imprisonment await me. I don't know many people knowing that's awaiting them will actually take that street, let alone a missional journey.

You'll notice that Paul didn't stay in any of these places long. Bow, bow, bow. Right? Just kept going. Being constrained by the Holy Spirit kept them from being deterred by even the traction he might have had as he was in one place.

Hey man, this is really good. You should stay a day. I actually got to go. I mean, it's not a good business plan, is it? You know, you get some momentum and then you're just up and gone because you're constrained by the Holy Spirit.

The term in verse one, look, look at verse one. The term parted indicates that Paul's separation from his friends at the end of chapter 20 is like a tearing away, which Luke is describing here. It's the cause for their weeping. Put in layman's terms, he's breaking up. It's the tearing away. He's taking his heart away from there to continue where God has placed his heart initially.

[8 : 38] His point here is that in no way is Paul undeterred in his undeterred attitude easy. It's not an easy task for Paul to just say, let me go over here.

No, this is a tearing away. That's how it feels because he loves these folks. He's constrained by the Spirit, but because he loves, he has to go and do what must be done.

You know, a lot of times we think of doing missional work as being in a place because you love. No, no, no. Paul's saying, no, I go because I love. I have to leave because I love. Namely, the word of God at work.

Mission underway. His point is that Paul had to go. In fact, it would have to be the moving of the Holy Spirit that would actually take Paul away from those that he loved.

You see it there. Luke's mention of these port cities again shows the importance of Paul's journey again. He's passing through Kos, which is a district where there's a medical school there.

[9 : 46] A couple of scholars have noted about this place, Kos. I can imagine Luke being with him being like, oh, snap, we got to stop there. You know, and I can imagine Luke being like, man, we should probably stay a little day.

I just want to talk to some of the professors. You know what I'm saying? My old comrades. You know, and Paul's like, no, we got to get. And then he says he goes to Rhodes or the Isle of Rhodes being known for their Jewish community.

So even though they have some camaraderie here, he's like, no, I still got to keep going. If these important places are significant to Paul or maybe even Luke, who is with Paul and others, and they choose not to stay long, there has to be a really good reason.

The reason being it is the will of God at work to be preached in all these places that God would send his people. And we see this hastening towards Jerusalem, even in verse three.

Check it out. As Paul and his crew merely pass by Cyprus. You remember Cyprus, right? It's the same place that Paul and Barnabas are set aside by the Holy Spirit to go preach to.

[10:58] It's the same place that Barnabas and Mark disagree with Paul and they head off to. They know folks there.

There's converts there. There's some stock there. And yet Paul's like, no, we can't stop. We got to keep going. Probably keep it at port side. They make their way. Spotting Cyprus, no detours, no sightseeing.

And even though he spends seven days in a place called Tyre, meeting with disciples according to verse four, and despite hearing from those who are even led by the Spirit, as Luke details, and warning him not to go to Jerusalem, we get verse five.

Look at verse five. When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey. And they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city and kneeling down on the beach.

We prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship and they returned home. You got to understand that Luke is depicting this scene full of emotion.

[12:12] He's depicting a scene full of emotion. I mean, you can imagine friends and family members coming to the beach, and they're about to see their loved ones head off to possibly imprisonment, maybe even death.

And you can imagine us walking to Promontory Point and saying, let's pray. Let's just pray on the beach for these missionaries that are heading off to this dangerous place. And they kneel down and pray.

A few things we learn in these six verses. First of all, an undeterred mission will involve emotion. He's not just robotic. It involves emotion. I'll say it like this.

It involves every fiber of who you are, the core of who you are. Right? It might involve some tears, but it definitely involves the emotion, just like we've seen in the previous chapter, the weeping of the people when he's leaving Miletus.

Now again, the emotion that Luke captures here lets readers know that God's mission will require the very core of who you are. Our emotions, our will, and even our mind to be in line with the mission of God.

[13:23] But likewise, number two, emotions are always governed by the word of God, never the other way around. Someone once said, our will is the tail of the dog of our desire.

Our will is just the tail of the dog of our desire, meaning whatever you desire, your tail is going to follow. So, So, if Paul is willing to allow his emotions to deter him away from the call of God, we would have to question if he truly desires to be on mission for God.

But he's not deterred. And I would pray that for us, that we would not be deterred from the mission, that we would not let our emotions override what Scripture has to say, that we won't even allow loved ones who love us dearly to say, wait, you're on the south side of Chicago?

Wait, wait, wait, where are you are? Where are you again? Even our, even if you're a new university student, allow the work of this community to bring you even more in to the mission that is already underway by the will of God.

Listen, we have a death date. We're not going to be here forever. And God's word will reign and last. So, welcome to the mission that's underway.

[14:54] Lastly, Luke teaches us here that Paul's haste towards Jerusalem, his emotion in check with the will of God and his love for disciples, most likely even those he hasn't met, are all meant to resemble and remind us of Christ's journey to the cross, to Jerusalem, as he would stand before wicked judges.

And he himself, despite the tears of his family, despite the warnings of his friends, would stay undeterred because, oh, there's a mission at work, namely bearing the sin of the world.

I was talking to a group of kids yesterday, and I like to say on one of my sets that, hey, it's my sins alone are enough to beat Christ down. Now add each and every one of us just in this room alone.

Yet Christ is undeterred. Luke is narratively kind of using Paul's journey as resembling what Christ has already done underway, meaning he has already gone to the cross.

He's our big brother. He's our representative. So Paul, I mean, he's just kind of what we would call swagger jacking. I mean, he's more so just following suit.

[16:05] If Christ did it, why shouldn't I do it? Christ went to the cross despising the shame. And yet Paul gets the opportunity to resemble something like that.

Oh, yeah, that's a mission undeterred, an act that would save sinners. That's what Christ did. This is a mission that is undeterred by friends and family or emotion, but is led by the spirit, is carried about by Paul and his crew aboard the ship.

And the next we see in verse 7 through 14, Paul is unpersuaded. He's undeterred, but then he's unpersuaded. Along with being undeterred, it would seem that Paul's unpersuasiveness would take place in Tyre as people come warning him about Jerusalem.

Verse 7 through 14, Paul arrives some 25 miles even south of Tyre in a place called Ptolemaeus. Paul only spends a day in Ptolemaeus greeting the Christians after spending seven days in Tyre before heading to Caesarea and meeting and standing and staying in the house of an old friend, a man named Philip the evangelist.

He stays in his house. And the author, Luke, mentions that Philip, this Philip who preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, had four unmarried virgin daughters who would prophesy.

[17:27] Verse 9. But right away, we're also met with a prophet by the name of Agabus. He's not new to our text. He was mentioned before as he would prophesy a famine earlier in Acts.

He comes again with some bad, seemingly bad news for Paul. Take a look at verse 11. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and his hands and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit. This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns the belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Agabus uses the belt tying as a depiction of the tension between the Jewish leaders and what Paul is doing.

And he was also saying that even going to Jerusalem would be a catalyst for his imprisonment in Rome. The belt is meant to echo the Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel.

Agabus doesn't mention death and doesn't try to say that the spirit is saying not to go like the brothers in Tyre exactly. But he is emphasizing to Paul exactly what awaits him. We have been met with prophecies before.

[18:42] This entire time in the book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that the prophetic words here were important to the early church. And we see Luke's brief mention of even Philip's daughters who prophesied.

The briefness of this act of these four women prophesying serves to show that even indeed women were proclaimators of the word of God.

They weren't left out. That it wasn't just up to Philip, but Philip was in charge of preaching to his family too. So these women are prophesying and by faith.

Luke is also hearkening back to Acts 2.17 where Peter's sermon mentions Joel chapter 2 when he says, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and sons and daughters will prophesy.

This emphasis of the office of prophecy is seemingly given to Agabus as a public prophet. And while the four are most likely prophesying in a more private setting, yet the main idea that we see in this text and why Luke would even mention this prophecy and these women prophesying is that in every town that Paul visited, the spirit was speaking to the believers about what is happening.

[20:08] Can we say that about us? I mean, even amongst our own brothers, it's a shame if, you know, somebody finds out you're a believer. I didn't know you were a believer. Yeah, man, been the whole time.

I mean, you're snapping, you know. Whether it was public or private, the message was the same. The ministry of Paul was evident wherever he went.

The believers knew it. And while some of them would interpret the prophecies or the leading of the spirit to tell Paul, don't go, the idea was that God was saying what would happen, not necessarily not to go.

Looking at Agabus' prophecy in verse 11, there's the emphasis to Paul and the others. It's so strong that the believers in Caesarea, including Luke in verse 11, just like the believers in Tired Together, try to stand up to persuade Paul not to go in verse 12.

They all stand up and say, look, man, don't go. Come on, man, you heard him. We good. Like, they'll take care of themselves. In fact, I've read even a few notes of different writers who have said that, hey, I mean, Paul might have been out of pocket to try to head to Jerusalem.

[21 : 29] In fact, that was his punishment for heading to Jerusalem. Well, the idea here is that Paul's conviction of the word being led by the spirit of God would not let impending death persuade him otherwise.

He's unpersuaded. The glory of God was at stake. Do we think like that? I know it's language that we don't necessarily say on the job. The glory of God is at stake. But do we live our lives as if that's true?

A friend of mine in a rap song is depicting an urban missionary on mission and being, in a sense, kidnapped by some guys who don't like the mission.

And he says it like this, the beating getting more intense in every step that he goes. They whipped him, punched him, and kicked him, and slapped him, and ripped that boy at his clothes.

They laughing at him. They spitting at him. They kicking at him. Dogs barking at him. A week ago, he was sitting up playing with his kids, wife, and family all around in the comfort of a crib. Last thing he remembered was packing for a missions trip.

[22 : 45] Later on, his killer walked up to him and looked him in the eye. He said, aren't you going to beg for your life? He said, no, I signed up to die.

That's Paul's response in verse 13. It's the same. Check it out. Look at it. Then Paul answered, what are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be in prison, but even to die in Jerusalem.

For the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul's words here are simple. Stop allowing your emotions to get in the way of the will of God. We are witnessing the reminder of Christ through even Ananias' words to Paul in chapter 9, verse 16, when he's telling him, look, man, he's setting you aside for a specific mission.

For I will show you how much you will suffer for my namesake is what Jesus says to Paul. Stop weeping to persuade me away from what God wants for me.

Yes, weep, but don't weep to persuade me away. We used to sing a song back in the day, for your glory, I'll do anything, or I like another one. What God has for me, it is for me.

[24 : 06] And a lot of times we were singing and thinking about what God will bless us with, but what if it has to do with what God will take from you? Paul, as Luke has already put it, will suffer for the name of Christ.

It is these words here that are echoing Christ in the garden. As he says, not my will, but your will will be done.

But we get to the last two verses here as Paul is undeterred and he's unpersuaded.

We see a people who are unrelenting. In the final words here, we get to see what leads to the unrelenting actions of not only Paul, but the body of Christ as a whole.

In verse 15, we see Luke's emphasis. That's what I would call his emphasis. The meaning of we got ready. Meaning, oh no, we're about, we're doing this.

[25 : 16] Most likely packed up their horses and it was a few days journey. No, we got ready. And then, and the next he says, we went up. Luke is not wasting words here, which is the same idea even back in verse five, as he says, and we departed and went on our journey.

Despite what's going on, we packed up and went there. Despite what the news said, we had to go. Despite what our family was saying, no, we will stay where we need to be for the glory of God.

By comparison, both verse five and 15 have emphasis that for the name of Christ, Paul and his companions are called, as the rap group, the outcast would have said, to get up, get out, and get something for the glory of God.

And then he says in verse 16, to the house of Nason. The nature of Paul's mission meant that the body of Christ would respond by being on mission.

Meaning Christian hospitality. Christian hospitality would set the precedent for gospel work, gospel witness, gospel mission.

[26 : 34] And it wasn't missions by any means necessary. It was submitted to the authority of Christ. It's not, I go because I'm the only one that can go.

It's not by any means, so I just take any message. It's a thorough understanding of who Christ is and what is happening and what the spirit is doing. So we have to go. We're persuaded to go.

This is the difference in American idea of God, gold, and glory or manifest destiny. It's a mission because it requires you to lose some stuff.

Not necessarily gain worldly possessions, Luke 9, 23. It's losing your life because you find it in Christ. Our history books are filled with people who are willing to sacrifice everything and everyone else for the sake of accomplishing their will.

I mean, most of the entrepreneurs you see, it's like they did all this stuff. They started this, and I had to move from this person, this partner. And yet the mission of Christ is simple. Give it up for my sake.

[27 : 44] I got you. I got you. In Christ, the idea of glorifying God is about giving even over your ideas and sacrificing even your space, your comfort, your privilege, to ensure that the mission of God is fulfilled.

It's quiet in here, by the way. Amen? Amen. Amen. We don't like that because we're selfish, and that's just how it is. But Paul is showing that it's going to take putting your life on the line.

I'm pretty sure someone like Nathan in verse 16 knows full well what he's getting himself into by even having these missionaries step foot in their house, putting his kids possibly and his wife in danger, his neighbors in danger, right?

The mission underway will be testified by a body who is undeterred, a body who is unpersuaded and unrelenting, who has an attitude of conviction of the gospel.

Paul's relationship with even those who are in attendance at Pentecost once again points us to the fact that the spirit of God is at work, that the pursuit of the will of God is ultimately God's choice, God's blueprint, God's imprint, and God's fine print.

[29 : 08] To relent from any part of God's mission is to deny God altogether. To relent from any part of God's mission is to deny God altogether, to deter away.

Luke's emphasis of Paul's commitment is actually built up to help someone like a theophilist or a Holy Trinity Church on the south side of Chicago understand that it is a work that a believer is called to.

That lining up with verse 13 isn't unique to just Paul, but to everyone who names the name of Christ.

Look at verse 13 one more time. Then Paul answered, what are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart, for I am ready not only to be in prison, but even to die.

Do we line up with that? For Paul, he's ready to be in prison, he's ready to die. And sure, not every circumstance requires the extreme, but I guess what I'm pointing to is the willingness, the heart.

[30 : 21] Because isn't that what Christ looks at? In fact, you can go on missions and still not have a heart for missions. Consider Christ as I come to a landing.

Consider Christ as he's rejected by the Samaritans in Luke 9.51. And yet he says, in Luke's narrative, he says, When the days drew near after he was rejected, When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

You just got rejected and you're still going to go try to go where they're going to kill you? Or consider even, as Christ tells his disciples, for the third time, mind you, in Luke 18, verse 31 through 33, And talking to the twelve, he said to them, See, we are going to Jerusalem.

And everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him.

On the third day, he will rise. Or how about even the parable of the ten servants? Luke 19. As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell the parable because he was near to Jerusalem.

[31 : 44] And because they supposed that the kingdom would come, the kingdom of God would appear immediately. And he goes on to tell the story about the parable, about the ten servants. And then he ends the parable by saying, And when he said these things, he went ahead to Jerusalem.

Jesus was clear about his journey. Oh, no. I got ahead there despite what's happening around me. And our encouragement today is to submit our lives to a mission that is already accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Do you know that it's already accomplished through Christ? As he makes his appeal by any way he wants through his people. Hearing that Christ would put his children purposefully in the line of danger might baffle some of us in here.

Might baffle the world. And I can understand how it's not the strongest selling point to come to faith. But for the sake of the mission underway, ladies and gentlemen, Scripture is clear that those who believe and also entrust their hearts and lives and all things to Christ can also rely on the providence of God.

That he will resurrect you. That you get the inheritance. That you will live. That it's not just for no reason that you're living through what you're living through.

[33 : 07] You're not giving your family for no reason. You're not giving your circumstance, your territory. But he's determined the time and place and the allotment of every season that you will go through so that he can get the glory.

So that whether in sorrow and joy, believers knowing what lies ahead can say, Thy will be done. Deo valente. Deo valente. And here we see the end of this missionary journey by Paul. This third missionary journey as he's undeterred. Unpersuaded.

Unrelenting. In missions. In the face of danger. But standing under the will of God. For the glory of God. Because he loves God.

You'll have to come back next week to hear what happens when he gets to Jerusalem. But for now, go in peace as we sing, Jesus, I have my cross, I have taken.

[34 : 09] As we take up our cross daily and follow him, do it under submission to the will of God. Let us pray. Lord, as the psalmist says, For your glory I will do anything just to behold you as our king.

I pray that that would be the song of our heart. As this could seem like a lofty task, Paul and the crew, but it's not.

It's mere mortals doing the impossible because we serve an awesome God who leads us to mission, leads us to the work that is already accomplished, already underway.

So, Lord, draw our hearts to want to want to know the will of God in Christ's name. Please stand as we sing, Jesus, I may, my cross I have taken.

Please stand as if you sing. Please stand as if you sing.