

Acts 21:1-15

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[0 : 0 0] to Kos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Ptara. And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had come inside of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit, they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 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.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived in Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. On the next day, we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

[1 : 1 8] When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, Let the will of God, let the will of the Lord be done. After these days, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Nason of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we should lodge. Many of the great stories that have captured people's imagination for centuries are focused around a long and dangerous journey.

Whether it's Homer's *Odyssey*, we're counting Odysseus' ten-year journey home after the fall of Troy, or whether it's John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, relating Christian and his wife's dangerous journey from the land of destruction to the celestial city, or Lord of the Rings, the hobbit's travels from the peaceful land of the Shire to the dark kingdom of Mordor, and finally back again.

Or even many video games, whether it's good old Super Mario Brothers racing through the eight worlds of the Mushroom Kingdom, evading attackers in order to save Princess Toadstool, or some of the more recent role-playing games where you take on the character, the role of a character in a story.

[2 : 4 7] Right, there's something about a long and dangerous journey that captures our human experience. Partly, I think, it's because we hope our lives are going somewhere, not just running around in circles.

We hope that our travels will finally bring us to somewhere that we can call home. And yet we know that the journey of our lives can often be painful, lonely, and uncertain.

Well, the Bible is also full of stories of dangerous journeys. Abraham called to leave his homeland and travel hundreds of miles to he knew not where at first.

The people of Israel, in their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness between being brought out of slavery in Egypt and entering into the promised land, and then a journey into exile, exile, and seeking to come back again.

Or in the New Testament, the New Testament talks about the life of Christians as a life of strangers and exiles on earth looking for a homeland. Again, like Abraham and like the people of Israel in the wilderness.

[3 : 48] And Jesus Christ himself said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Jesus was very straightforward. That the journey that he was calling his followers to would be hard and painful.

And yet he said it would, in the end, lead to eternal life in the kingdom of God. But he said along the way there will be many hardships. This morning we're looking at the book of Acts, which relates many journeys, but we're looking at one of Paul's journeys in particular here, his journey to Jerusalem.

We're going to look at this in three parts. First, the journey to which God calls us. Second, the warnings that we may encounter along the way. And third, the fellowship that sustains us. So first, the journey to which God calls us.

If you go back to chapter, flip back a page to chapter 19, verse 21. Chapter 19, verse 21 is the beginning of the last major section of Acts.

There are six major sections of Acts. They each end with a summary statement of the word of God prevailing and increasing. That's chapter 19, verse 20. Chapter 19, verse 21 introduces this new section, saying after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying after I've been there, I must also see Rome.

[5 : 12] And so this sort of sets the agenda for the rest of the book, the next two chapters to get him to Jerusalem, and then later on he'll get to Rome. And the last two chapters have sort of alternated back and forth between some stops along the way and then some records of Paul's travels.

And maybe you've been wondering, there's all these places that Luke mentions along the way. Chapter 20, verses 1 through 6, he mentions several places that he went through, Macedonia and Greece, which is Achaia.

Then there's a brief interlude stopping at Troas, which we looked at a few weeks ago with Eutychus. Chapter 20, verse 13 through 16, the travel resumes again. And chapter 20, verse 16, he mentions again, he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Last week he stopped at Miletus, spoke to the Ephesian elders, prayed with them, they had a tearful parting, and then here again he goes on, beginning of chapter 21.

More stops along the way, Kos, Rhodes, Batara, and then setting sail across the Mediterranean for 500 miles all the way to Tyre, which is on the sort of northwest coast of Israel, Palestine area.

[6 : 30] So, then there's three more landing places, Tyre, Ptolemae, Caesarea, and finally, verse 15, they go up to Jerusalem. Now you might say, why all this detail?

You know, why all these places? You can sort of trace them on a map if you've got a map in the back of your Bible. I didn't think to put a map in the bulletin until yesterday, and it's too late for us to print bulletin inserts on Saturday, so sorry about that.

We'll do that maybe next week. But if you have a map in the back of your Bible that you can sort of trace Paul's route, or go online, you can find good maps online. Anyway, but why is Luke drawing attention to all this?

Well, partly because he was traveling with Paul on this leg of the journey. That's why he speaks of we instead of they. But the other reason is he tells the story in a way that you can almost feel the tension building, right?

It's like in the Lord of the Rings, as Frodo and Sam and Gollum journey down together through the dead marshes near Minas Morgul, up the stairs of Siroth Ungol, into Mordor, as they slowly and surely approach Mount Doom.

[7 : 37] You see, going to Jerusalem wasn't like going home for Paul. Many years ago, some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem had plotted to kill Paul, and so Paul had to run away and escape.

Later on, even some of the Christians in Jerusalem seem to have had some disagreements with Paul, or at least some misunderstandings. So there was some history, some mistrust, some ongoing danger.

And further, you know, Paul's long-term focus was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was to be the apostle to the ends of the earth. And so you might wonder, why is he going hundreds of miles back east when, if you read the letter to the Romans, he says, I really want to get all the way to Spain, because I haven't been there yet, and people haven't heard about Jesus there yet.

And that's what God's called me to do, is to be an apostle. You might say, why is he doing this?

Taking this long detour to go back to Jerusalem, where there's all this potential trouble waiting for

him.

Well, Luke doesn't tell us right here in the book of Acts. He does tell us in chapter 24, verse 17, Paul says, I came to Jerusalem to bring alms, that is to sort of give charitable gifts to my nation and to present offerings.

[8 : 52] But Paul talks much more extensively in his other letters about the purpose of this journey to Jerusalem. And he basically explains that there were two purposes intertwined together.

First, he was bringing a generous financial gift that he had collected from the churches in Macedonia and Greece to the poverty-stricken and persecution-weary believers in Jerusalem. That's one reason why he wasn't traveling alone. He was traveling with quite a large team of people to bring this large gift that he had spent quite a bit of time going around to the churches and saying, we need to send them some help, and collecting it, and finally, he's going to bring it.

And then by doing that, second purpose, he was promoting and embodying the unity of the church across racial barriers, ethnic barriers, geographical barriers, language barriers.

You see, the gospel Paul proclaimed was a message of grace and peace. A message of grace, God's undeserved favor, freely poured out on undeserving sinners.

[10 : 04] Jesus said, or Paul said, the Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become eternally rich. We deserve God's judgment, but instead God, who is rich in mercy, poured out his grace and calls us into his kingdom.

So it's a message of grace, but it's also a message of peace. Paul says in Ephesians, Jesus Christ himself is our peace. And through his death on the cross, he has made peace between humanity and God and peace between different groups of people who are united in Christ.

And at the foot of the cross, we can be reconciled with God and with one another. And that's the message that Paul preached, grace and peace. That's what he began almost all his letters with, grace and peace to you.

But he didn't just talk about grace and peace. This journey to Jerusalem was an expression of grace and peace. It was an expression of grace, generosity from among fellow believers, generosity in particular to the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea who were suffering.

And so Paul said, you know, he said to these churches in Macedonia and Greece, he said, you know, this is the gospel that we believe, that God has poured out his grace upon us. And God has let us, we're aware of these brothers and sisters who are suffering and need help.

[11 : 29] And so let's share that. Let's extend that generosity. Let's not just talk about grace. Let's actually be a generous, giving people. And also let's be a peace-pursuing people.

You know, probably the biggest divide, or at least potential divide in the early church was between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had received God's promises centuries ago and it sort of had a long heritage.

The scriptures came through them. The Gentiles had been sort of coming into the church, into God's people in large numbers. And there were tensions. And Paul said, no, we must seek to promote peace.

Christ has made peace between us and God. And so we need to be peacemakers. And even though this is a costly, hard, long journey, it's worth it for the sake of grace and peace. And this is the same gospel that we proclaim.

And so I think the challenge, one challenge from Paul's journey, is that we would not only proclaim the gospel of grace and peace, but also live it out as Paul did. Just two weeks ago, we heard from our brother Hanum Asad, who came and preached the word and shared about some about our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East.

[12 : 46] And we've supported him and his family in our annual budget for a few years now. But you know, what would it look like for us to be sacrificially generous as a congregation to our brothers and sisters who are refugees fleeing from ISIS, who are in places where they're struggling to feed their families and there's 50% unemployment, so it's not so easy to get a job, right?

What would it look like to be sacrificially generous, you know, toward his ministry or toward other believers? To be generous maybe beyond what we've done before.

Or right here at home, right in New Haven, what would it look like for us to demonstrate the peace and unity of the gospel by joining together with other gospel-believing churches in this region?

Now, we have an opportunity to do that through I Heart New Haven Day in August, right? That's a one-day service project where different churches are joining together to bear witness to Christ

together and to serve our city.

So I want to encourage you, make that a priority. It's an opportunity to serve alongside our brothers and sisters from different churches in town and to express and embody grace and peace.

[14:03] Or on a more personal level, what about pursuing grace or pursuing peace and truth with another Christian who is a difficult person to get along with, right?

Some of us are, I mean, we got to be honest, some of us are difficult people to get along with, right? Or at least we can be at times, right? What would it look like to extend grace by, you know, not just sort of, by pursuing a relationship, by praying for someone, by reaching out to them, by acknowledging if you've been at fault, by maybe having a hard conversation, maybe extending mercy.

It's hard. These things aren't easy, but these are costly expressions of grace and peace that can be motivated by what Christ has done for us. So that's why Paul's going to Jerusalem, right?

It's a journey of grace and peace. Second, the warnings that we face along the way. Paul receives two warnings. Verse 4, through the Spirit, they, that is the Christians in Tyre, were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

And then verses 10 and 11 in Caesarea. Agabus, the prophet, comes down from Judea. He takes Paul's belt, binds his own feet and hands and says, thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

[15:31] When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Now, this is interesting. You might be asking, what's going on here? Was Paul sort of foolishly disregarding the Holy Spirit's warning and other believers' advice and running, charging ahead into trouble for no good reason?

Sometimes Christians do that. They get an idea in their head and they don't want to listen to anybody else who questions them or tells them to go a different way. But that's not what happened here.

Luke clearly wants us to understand that Paul was genuinely being led by the Holy Spirit. Chapter 19, verse 21 says he resolved in the Spirit to go on to Jerusalem. Chapter 20, verse 22, Paul says, I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit.

And Paul wasn't being naive and unaware of the dangers. He was well aware of the dangers. 20, 23, he says, the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city, imprisonment and afflictions await me. So Paul wasn't sort of foolishly charging ahead against the wiser advice of his friends. In other places and at other times, Paul took his friends' advice to preserve his own physical safety.

[16:45] Several times in Thessalonica and Berea, there were riots and his friends took initiative and sent him out of town. And in Ephesus, two of Paul's colleagues, Aristarchus and Secundus, I think, got arrested and got dragged into the public theater.

And Paul wanted to go in with them and stand with them and defend them and not leave them alone. And his friends strongly urged him not to go in there because they said the lonely makes things worse.

They'll be even madder at you. And Paul listened to them. And he didn't go in. He listened to the advice of his friends. Paul wasn't just a stubborn guy who didn't want to listen to anybody else. So then you might say, well, okay, well, how can Paul be led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and then these two other groups of believers somehow through the Spirit seem to be urging him not to go?

Well, let's look more closely. Look first at verse 11. Look at what Agabus says. What Agabus says is basically you're going to be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles.

[17:54] And then verse 12, when we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. So there's a distinction here between an insight given by the Holy Spirit of upcoming danger and a human assessment and response turn and run the other way.

Paul agreed with the insight of upcoming danger. He was already well aware of that. But Paul responded to this insight in a very different way. In Romans 15, he actually specifically asked for prayer for his journey to Jerusalem.

You know, he was concerned about it. He was clearly seeing, you know, this is dangerous. I need to be asking my brothers and sisters for prayer. Romans 15, 30 to 33, he prayed that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem would be acceptable to the saints.

Okay, so that's verse 11. Now, what about verse 4? Through the Spirit, they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Now, this is a much more compact sentence.

It doesn't give us as much detail as we see in verse 11 and 12. It's also a bit of an unusual expression. It's not the normal way that Luke introduces someone who is speaking a word of prophecy or speaking by the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 17] Usually, he'll say something like, like Zachariah, who was, Zachariah was filled with the Spirit and prophesied. So and so. Or Peter and John, filled with the Spirit, stood up and spoke with great boldness about the gospel.

So it's a bit of an unusual expression. So I think in the context of this chapter, it seemed like a similar thing was going on. So through the Spirit, these believers had an insight into upcoming danger.

But then it says they were telling Paul not to go. They responded to that insight by telling him not to go. And if you look down at verse 5 and 6, it seems like these believers eventually reconciled themselves to Paul's decision, even though it wasn't what they warned him to do.

They, right, when Paul was leaving, they didn't say, Paul, you are sinning. We cannot support this journey. No, they went down to the beach with their whole families.

They prayed and hugged and said farewell. Well, so it seems like they warned them. They had an insight from the Holy Spirit. They responded by warning him not to go.

[20 : 30] But then they reconciled themselves to Paul's decision of being compelled by the Spirit to go on to Jerusalem. And they didn't seem to believe that Paul was disobeying God by not following their advice.

Now, what do we learn from Paul's response to these well-intentioned warnings from Spirit-filled believers? Let me say three things. So first, sometimes the Holy Spirit gives special insight to believers.

Okay? Here it's an insight into upcoming danger. At other times in Acts, the Holy Spirit gave insight into someone's spiritual condition, Paul with the magician Elymas in Acts 13, or insight into a spiritual need or opportunity as when Paul was directed to go to Macedonia in Acts 16.

So sometimes the Holy Spirit gives special insight. It seems like sometimes the New Testament calls that prophecy. Agabus appears here, and in Acts 11, he also warned about an upcoming famine.

And the believers responded to that warning by sending relief to the brothers and sisters there. Now, prophecy isn't only insights into the future.

[21 : 43] Paul defines prophecy more generally in 1 Corinthians as speaking to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and comfort. At other times, it seems like the Spirit gave people insight in the form of dreams or visions, such as Acts 16.

Okay? So the Holy Spirit may give special insight to believers. And, you know, Christians disagree on this, but it seems to me that there is no reason why we should categorically deny that the Holy Spirit may give such insight to believers today as he did here.

So the Holy Spirit may give special insight to believers. On the other hand, second, it's possible for believers to mix genuine insights from the Holy Spirit with erroneous human assumptions and conclusions.

Now, that seems to be what was happening with these two groups of people. They had a genuine insight given by the Holy Spirit, danger in Jerusalem, and their response was, run away. And Paul's response was actually the better response in this case.

There's only one place where the Holy Spirit has revealed himself through human spokespersons without human error. And that is in the scriptures themselves, which are our final authority in faith and practice.

[23 : 03] Now, there are other useful insights that the Lord gives to his people through a variety of means. But those can be mixed with our own human assumptions and conclusions.

And even sometimes our interpretations of scripture can also be mixed with our human assumptions and conclusions. So we need to be aware of that. So, Holy Spirit can give special insight to believers.

Believers can mix true insights with our own human and sometimes erroneous assumptions and conclusions. Third, therefore, prophecies or any word of advice or warning or even encouragement from a fellow believer must be carefully evaluated and discerned.

And this is what the New Testament directs us to do with words of prophecy. 1 Corinthians 14 says, let two or three prophets speak. Let the others weigh what is said. 1 Thessalonians 5, 19, don't quench the spirit.

Don't despise prophecies. Don't rule them out, I think. But test everything. Hold fast what is good and abstain from every form of evil. So, let me apply that a bit.

[24 : 15] Some of you may have the gift of prophecy. In fact, I've talked to a few of you who I think the Lord may at times give you special insight perhaps into future dangers or future opportunities or even into people's hearts.

Now, that can be a genuine and very useful gift from God to strengthen and comfort and warn his people. But be very careful because it can also be terribly misused and result in great harm.

So, recognize that the Holy Spirit may give you genuine insights, but also recognize that you alone may not see the whole picture.

And so, submit your insights to the discernment of godly leaders and of the Christian community as a whole. And that will be a way that you can use your gift to build up the body in a good way.

On the other hand, if you're on the receiving end of a word of prophecy or, let's say, a word of warning or a word of strong advice from a fellow believer, take it seriously.

[25 : 26] Consider if there are important insights that you should take to heart, but test it against God's word.

Someone else's advice, even someone else's warning, is not an absolute prohibition unless it is clearly rooted in God's word.

Okay? And that's really the danger that happens is when people take a word of prophecy where someone says, the Lord is telling me to tell you this, and they take it as an absolute word from God instead of doing what the Bible says, which is test and discern.

And that's where it can cause all kinds of problems. Okay? But when it's tested and discerned, then it's a way that we can all be built up and benefit from the different insights that the Lord gives to us as a body.

And discern together how we can go ahead and be faithful to the Lord. All right. So, the journey. God calls us to a journey to demonstrate grace and peace.

[26 : 33] This is how we deal with warnings along the way, with discernment. Third, the fellowship that sustains us. All right? This was a hard journey. And especially for Paul.

I mean, think of it. You know, twice along the way. You have some of his, at the end, it's his closest friends. You know, Luke said, not just the people there, but we and the people there. These people who have been traveling with him all along are saying, please, don't continue.

Don't go on to Jerusalem. How did Paul have strength to keep going on this long journey? Well, John Stott wrote, what fortified Paul in his journey.

There's going to be two parts to this answer. This is the first part. What fortified Paul in his journey was the Christian fellowship, which he and his travel companions experienced in every port. Part of how Paul was strengthened was by the fellowship and hospitality that was extended to him by the believers in Christ.

So just look briefly at each of the cities that he visits. Tyre, verse 4. It says, Paul and his companions sought out the disciples. That means they didn't, presumably it means they didn't, they had to look for them.

[27 : 46] Okay? They didn't know where they met. Maybe they didn't even know if there were some disciples there. But they had to look for them. And they found them and they stayed for seven days.

But at the end of just one week, it said all of them, excuse me, with their wives and their children, their whole families, they went out of the city, down to the beach, and prayed and said farewell.

Now, that's pretty amazing. Have you ever been somewhere for one week and developed such a close bond with the other Christians there that they have brought their whole family to say farewell to you? That's pretty amazing.

Right? And that's the kind of community and hospitality that strengthened Paul and his companions in their journey is this hospitality and the love, the deep love that was shown from these believers.

Ptolemais, we greeted the brothers and sisters, stayed with them for one day. Again, that word greeted doesn't mean they shook hands for 30 seconds. It means welcoming hospitality. It says we stayed with them. Even though they were there for just one day, they stayed presumably in

someone's home.

[28 : 55] Caesarea, longer stay. They stayed with Philip, the evangelist, for many days. Now, if you remember from the beginning of back in January when we started this series in Acts in chapter 8, Philip was recognized as one of the first Greek-speaking deacons in the church in Jerusalem.

And later on, he led the first Christian mission to the Samaritans in the cities of Samaria. And then the Spirit of God took him to the middle of the desert where he met the Ethiopian eunuch and shared the gospel with him and then carried him up to Caesarea.

Had a, you know, a plane flight before planes, it seems like, where he settled down. But here he is, 20 years later, Philip and his family, he's got four daughters now, and they open their home to Paul and his friends for an extended period of time.

Luke also mentions that Philip's four unmarried daughters prophesied. Luke gives all kinds of just interesting, colorful comments. But just on this one for a minute, back in the day, women normally got married at the age of 16.

Imagine that. So verse 9 could mean one of two things. It could mean Philip's daughters had not yet reached marriageable age, that they were less than 16, and yet already the Holy Spirit was working in them so powerfully that they were prophesying, that is, giving some kind of a message of encouragement and comfort and building up to fellow believers, right?

[30 : 34] The Holy Spirit was already working powerfully in them, and they were like 12. Or it could mean that they were old enough to get married, but for whatever reason, perhaps lack of suitable Christian males in Caesarea, or perhaps a particular sense of calling to serve the Lord as a single person, they hadn't got married.

But they were using their singleness fruitfully by serving in the church, by speaking words of encouragement and edification to other believers. And, you know, this is just an amazing picture of the Holy Spirit working in a whole family from one generation to another, and working through people, specifically unmarried women or perhaps young girls, who would not have been expected to play a significant role in their society.

But God uses them to be a blessing to the believers in Caesarea and to Paul and his companions as they come through. All right, finally, Nathan of Cyprus, verse 16, also opens his home to them. So what do we take from this? One of the ways that God sustains us through difficult journeys is by providing us with sweet fellowship with brothers and sisters along the way, even if it's only a short period of time.

And for this church in particular, let me encourage those of you who are not visiting, this is part of the mission that God has called us to, is, you know, we often have people, every week we have people who are visiting here for the first time, often here, maybe here for just a week, maybe here for a conference, maybe here for a summer, maybe here for a month to do a medical rotation, maybe here for a year or two, and then off to somewhere else.

[32 : 17] And this is part of the mission that God has called us to as a church, is to invest in people and extend welcoming hospitality to people who are here, maybe just for a short time, but to have those sweet bonds of being brothers and sisters in Christ, and then to send them off.

Around this time of year, the church office tends to get requests for housing from a few different groups of people. Sometimes it's visiting missionaries here for a short time, sometimes it's incoming grad students and young professionals looking for roommates, maybe it's some of you who are still looking for roommates.

So let me just encourage you all, whether you're a single guy who can offer your couch for someone to crash on, or a group of women who are looking for other roommates, or if you can take in even someone who's on the edge of being homeless, or has maybe some other particular challenges, the ministry of hospitality is significant.

It can look a whole bunch of different ways, but it's part of how the gospel goes forward, and how grace and peace are extended. So let me just encourage you all, whether it's taking someone into your home, or taking someone out to lunch after church, or just greeting people warmly when they walk in the door, let's continue to seek to be a hospitable church.

And if you can offer your home, let the church office know, and we can connect you with appropriate needs. So there's fellowship with other believers, but Paul's also sustained at an even deeper level by fellowship with the Lord Jesus himself.

[33 : 56] And this is where we'll conclude. You see, Paul's journey, Paul was going up to Jerusalem. But you know, Paul wasn't the first one to go up to Jerusalem on a long and painful and

dangerous journey.

And Luke deliberately shows how Paul in going to Jerusalem was following the pattern of the Lord Jesus himself. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a suffering servant, someone who listened to God's word and who willingly endured suffering for God's sake.

Isaiah 50, the servant is speaking, and the servants, or Isaiah is speaking about this servant. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious.

I did not turn back. I gave my back to those who strike, my cheeks to those who pull out my beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting, but the Lord God helps me.

Therefore, I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. Earlier, we read from Luke 9, where it says Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

[35 : 07] And later on, Jesus said to his disciples, we're going up to Jerusalem, and everything that's written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and mocked and shamefully treated and flogged and killed, and on the third day he'll rise.

You see, Jesus faced all kinds of opposition from well-meaning disciples, from determined opponents, even from the devil himself, and yet he persevered all the way up to Jerusalem and all the way up the hill of Calvary to the cross.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, Father, not my will, but yours be done. See, that's what gave Paul the courage to go to Jerusalem more than anything else, more than all the fellowship he had along the way.

He knew he had fellowship with Jesus Christ, who had gone before him. And Paul could say in verse 13, I'm ready not just to be thrown in prison, but to die in Jerusalem for the Lord, for the name of the Lord Jesus, because he knew that Jesus had gone before him and done just that, and that Jesus had done what no one else could ever do, to die for our sins, to accomplish our salvation through his death and resurrection.

And so Paul persevered, and that's the greatest comfort of all. If God's called you to a long and painful and dangerous journey, if he's called you to take hard steps to extend grace and generosity to people in need, or to promote peace, and be a peacemaker in a troubled world, Jesus Christ has gone before you, and he has paved the way, and he is standing at the end of the race and saying, come, and he is our advocate, and he is our king, and he is our savior, and he has sent us his Holy Spirit to be with us every step of the way.

[37 : 13] And he's gone before us, and we're called to suffer with him, but we're also promised that there will be glory. And as we seek to follow him, the good news of the gospel will go out to the ends of the earth.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for the faithfulness of your Son, Jesus Christ, who perfectly and unwaveringly obeyed you, who set his face like flint, who went to the cross to pay the price for us.

We thank you for the courage that you gave Paul to follow in the footsteps of his Savior as he went up to Jerusalem to deliver this gift and to demonstrate the unity of the church.

We pray that you would empower us by your Spirit. Lord, whatever you call us to, we pray that we would embrace that calling with trust in you.

We pray that you would give us discernment individually and as a community to consider the insights that your Spirit may give us through a variety of means and yet to discern them wisely and to test everything against your Word.

[38 : 52] Lord, we pray that you'd make us as well a hospitable church. Lord, that loves one another as brothers and sisters. no matter where we come from, no matter where we're going, but because we're united at the foot of the cross.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.