Directed by the Holy Spirit

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[0:00] Good morning. It's great to see everybody here, but actually for me it's just...

! From that very first song, the reminder, he came near.! I was just reminded that actually we were far off.
We were distant from God. We were lost in our sins, dead to him, the relationship broken, and he came near.
He came from the very throne room of God. Jesus, the Son of God, God himself came to this planet to die on a cross that we, his creation, could be restored into a relationship with him.
And we've just been singing, he's holy. He's so wonderful. He's... You run out of words, or I do.
[1:11] This incredible God that died for us. And as we continue through the book of Acts, I mean, it's often written in the Bible as being the Acts of the Apostles, but actually it is the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

It's God himself at work in men and women and the sharing of the gospel, the church being born in those early years after Jesus had died, been resurrected, and raised to life.
And as we continue looking at the Apostle Paul, we realise that here is a man who was all in for Jesus.
He started all out for Jesus. He was opposed to the church in such a way that he had people killed because of this new belief, because of Jesus.
He went to imprison and bring down because he thought it wasn't of God. But then Jesus appeared to him and Paul was all in for Jesus.
[2:33] And we'll see a little bit more of that this morning as we work through the chapters 21 and 22. So, thank you, Sandy.

So, as I said, we're continuing looking at the Book of Acts. And as I've mentioned, realistically, this is all about what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of men, women, and children in these early years.
And this morning, again, you'll see the Holy Spirit at work in these two chapters. Okay.
So, I know it's a little small, but this is basically the eastern end of the Mediterranean. And if you were here the last time I spoke, I showed this picture as well.
This is Paul's second missionary journey. And it starts over on the right at Antioch, heads up all the way over into, through modern-day Turkey, and into Greece, in Athens, and Thessalonica.
[3:46] And when Tim preached a couple of weeks ago, Paul had returned to Miletus, which is there, just on the left-hand side of your screen.

And while he's at Miletus, he's in a bit of a hurry. He wants to get back to Jerusalem, but he calls for the elders from the church at Ephesus.
He preached all night. A young man fell out the window, died, and is raised to life again. And then, as we progress into chapter 21, we're going to be looking at the remainder of this journey, which goes from Miletus.
It goes through a little island called Kos, which isn't on there. The island of Rhodes, then Pitara, carries on across the Mediterranean Sea.
just south of Cyprus. And then, over to Tyre, Ptolemy, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, which, again, on the far right there.
[4:56] So this is the journey that Paul is going on. So he's gone out from Jerusalem. He's been spreading the gospel. He's been strengthening the churches.

And now he is returning again. back to Jerusalem. But before we kick off in chapter 21, I just want to return to a couple of verses in chapter 20.

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And they're verses 22 and 23. On the screen it says, And now, and so this is Paul speaking, And now, compelled by the Spirit, so there, the Holy Spirit is speaking to Paul, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.
I only know that in every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. So as I said earlier, Paul is all in for Jesus.
He's been directed by the Holy Spirit. And Paul is heading back to Jerusalem as directed by the Holy Spirit.
[6:08] It says clearly, he's uncertain of what's ahead, just that there is prison and hardships. And most of us, if we were told that there's prison and hardships over there, we'd be going that way.

But Paul is being led by the Spirit. He is being obedient to this calling. The Holy Spirit has placed upon his life. He is all in for Jesus.
And so just picking up from these two verses, I wanted to pick out three things, really, that Paul is doing. So firstly, as I've said, he is listening for the Spirit's leading.
So this is what Paul's life is all about now. He is listening. As we've read through previous chapters, we've seen the Holy Spirit said, don't go there, go here, stop, speak to them.
And Paul has been obedient. So here is a man who is clearly listening and hearing from the Holy Spirit. He is constantly looking for guidance.
[7:16] And I guess the question pops straight up here. What about me? What about you? Are you, each day, Holy Spirit, where are you leading me?

Who am I speaking to? What should I be doing today? There should be a proactive side to our lives where we are seeking God's leading each and every day.
Secondly then, having heard that there was hardship and prison, he was still obedient. He's obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit regardless of the consequences, not even knowing what was coming up, only that he had heard and was directed by the Spirit and so he was going.
Again, I ask myself that question. What about me? Am I willing to do whatever he asks? And then thirdly, he was going not knowing.
The Holy Spirit had given him a little bit of information, but not all of it. This reminds us a bit of Abraham in the Old Testament where God says, get up, leave your family and go to a land that I'm going to give you.
[8:48] Abraham went because he was told to go, but he didn't know. He didn't know where he was going. He didn't know what was coming up. He went, going, not knowing. And are we comfortable with that?

Do we want to know everything? Well, if I go, what's happening then? And what's happening with that? And what about this? Are we comfortable? We're probably not, but are we willing to go not knowing?
For those of you who have been around for a little time now, you'll know that Andrew and Emma are actually going to be leaving us at some point next year.
And they've said they are going not knowing. In fact, they, just like Paul, have listened for the leading of the Spirit.
They are being obedient and they are going not knowing. Okay, so let's dive straight in then to our chapters starting at chapter 21, verse 1.
[9:58] So, if you recall the map, Paul and his companions are at Miletus. And so we read from verse 1.

After we had torn ourselves away from them, that is the Ephesian elders, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Koz. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Petara.
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. We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days.
Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. So as we read these few verses we appear to have a contradiction.
[11:09] So on the one hand Paul is saying I am compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. On the other as we read the end of verse 4 the church in Tyre is apparently urging Paul through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem.

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A contradiction or is it? If we take the position Paul is correct Paul is right that the Holy Spirit is indeed leading him to Jerusalem to imprisonment to hardship and beyond then therefore the church in Tyre must be wrong.
So what's going on here? I would suggest the Holy Spirit is clearly preparing churches for what lay ahead.
Paul has stated that in every city the Holy Spirit is saying I'm going to Jerusalem and there's going to be hardship and there's going to be imprisonment.
And Paul was if not a father of this particular church he was certainly someone that was respected depended on and so the Holy Spirit here is warning and saying actually he's leaving he's actually been saying in previous chapters I may never see you again.
[12:46] So there's a sense of preparation from the Holy Spirit here saying Paul is going. So the Holy Spirit is confirming through the church that Paul is going but there is a weighing and interpretation required by each church as to what the Holy Spirit means by that and clearly they have interpreted incorrectly what the Holy Spirit is saying.

So the Holy Spirit said Paul is going there's going to be hardship and imprisonment and they've gone oh well that's wrong then obviously. And so that brings us to our next point the importance of correct prophetic interpretation.
they interpreted suffering and imprisonment as something that needed to be avoided potentially just as we would if it was something given to us I'm going that way not going that way but this wasn't the Holy Spirit's intention he was revealing what was required of Paul you see it was all about the gospel it was all about Jesus it was all about the church being built and the kingdom coming and this is why Paul had to go and suffer so it is essential we interpret prophecy correctly and that's especially if it is to do with suffering or maybe a significant move relocation different job getting married and also important to interpret correctly where there is a disagreement amongst different believers over what a prophecy means so we are called to not only listen and be directed by the Holy
Spirit but to interpret what he is saying to us and what it actually means for us so continuing our journey then in verse 5 when it was time to leave we left and continued on our way all of them including wives and children accompanied us out of the city and there on the beach we knelt to pray after saying goodbye to each other we went aboard the ship and they returned home we continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemy so this is continuing down the coastline now where we greeted the brothers and sisters 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 Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles okay next point the Holy Spirit often builds on previous prophecies so Paul here is getting a little bit more clarity so he's been told there's going to be hardship and imprisonment now Agabus this prophet has come and he's demonstrated as it were with Paul's belt that Paul is going to be chained both hands and feet so the Holy Spirit is adding I'd like to say to Paul's misery but actually he's just bringing more to the story of what
[17:00] Paul can expect and often God will give further instruction so we start off with I want you to go over there and then when we get there God will add a little bit more and maybe give us a bit more direction so there can be a building sometimes a prophecy sometimes it requires trusting God and stepping out in faith and then he reveals more so we don't necessarily expect to have the whole picture when God is sharing with us maybe something he's calling us to do okay moving on verse 12 when we heard this and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up 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 okay next point we won't always like the leading of the Holy Spirit but it is his will that's to be done his will will be done so his companions actions might seem correct well they didn't want Paul to go and suffer but clearly they were wrong they didn't want suffering but God did that was part of his plan and here we say if what they're saying is not from God that is if his companions are not speaking through the Holy Spirit then they are potentially speaking via the

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enemy he is putting words in their mouth and it reminds us of when
Jesus and Peter are or Jesus has asked the disciples who do people say I am and Peter pipes up you are the Son of God which is correct which is speaking through the Holy Spirit and Jesus commends him and then Jesus said and the Son of God that is myself is going to die on a cross and Peter says no no no far be it from you Lord and then Jesus rebukes him and says get behind me Satan so Satan can sometimes piggyback in on the prophetic Peter had shared from the Holy Spirit and then he straight away the enemy comes in and uses him as well so we need to be careful that when the prophetic is being shared that we continue to God and receive from him not from the enemy many of us will be called to things to places to actions we don't like or don't want to do can we and do we say his will be done verse 15 after this we started on our way up to
Jerusalem some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Nason where we were to stay he was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples when we arrived at Jerusalem the brothers and sisters received us warmly the next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James and all the elders!
were present so this is the early church notice that it is James and the elders there doesn't appear to be any of the early apostles there Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry and there so Paul is just giving testimony of all the good things that God has done within the church the building of the church the coming of his kingdom and this therefore is building the faith of the early church and glorifies God and when they heard this they praised God then they said to Paul you see brother how many thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law so this is the Jerusalem church and as you would expect it is full of Jews and although these Jews are now Christians they are still they still have their cultures and their laws and the temples and clearly they are following them very strictly so verse 21 they have been informed that you teach all the
[22:09] Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs Now this is clearly not true they have been misinformed Paul had not turned away from his culture in fact he had Timothy circumcised he went to the synagogues so this was misinformation verse 22 what shall we do they will certainly hear that you have come so do what we tell you there are four men with us who have made a vow take these men join in their purification rights and pay their expenses so they can have their head shaved then everyone will know that there is no truth in these reports about you but you yourself are living in obedience to the law so just Paul hadn't disregarded the laws and culture of his upbringing he was still willing to go along with this but what

Paul believed was that although he had not disregarded them they were no longer relevant to his relationship with God because the relationship was restored through Jesus Christ grace alone but that didn't stop him from continuing to be part of his culture as for the Gentile believers we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrifice to idols from blood from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality so for the Gentiles that is the non Jews the laws and cultures were not being imposed upon them the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them when the seven days were nearly over some
Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple they stirred up the whole crowd and seized him shouting fellow Israelites help us this is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people so there is some truth in this in a way because Paul has said that it is by grace it's not through works which is what the Jews believed that their relationship with God was through the sacrifices in the temple following rules and regulations so there's some truth in this statement but not the entire truth so everyone everywhere against our people and our law in this place and besides he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city of Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple which was untrue the whole city was aroused and the people came running from all directions!
So you get the idea here that what the Holy Spirit was going to happen is definitely happening seizing Paul they dragged him from the temple and immediately the gates were shut while they were trying to kill him news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar he at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd when the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers they stopped beating Paul the commander

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came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains so that is he would be chained hand and feet just as Agabus had prophesied so our next point hardship and the sharing of the gospel often go hand in hand Paul had already endured a lot of hardship there'd been beatings there'd been imprisonment there'd been shipwrecks there'd been stoning there'd been more than one of most of those things as well so he had endured a lot already for the gospel but for Paul the kingdom and God's glory trumped it all regardless of the suffering he was for Christ he was for the kingdom he was for the gospel how do you feel how do I feel about suffering for the gospel we don't get much of it in this country but there are plenty of countries around the world where Christians do indeed suffer for the gospel we may have some hardships some abuse some sickness some poverty but how do we view his leading versus our comforts is there a delicate balance going on there or is it like Paul I'm all in for
[27:31] Christ continuing then he asked so this is the commander speaking then he asked who he was and what he had done some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks when Paul reached the steps the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers the crowd that followed kept shouting get rid of him as the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks he asked the commander may I say something to you do you speak Greek he replied aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago I don't know why you'd lead 4,000 terrorists out into the wilderness but it's a bit weird Paul answered I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia a citizen of no ordinary city please let me speak to the people after receiving the commander's permission

Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd when they were all silent he said to them in Aramaic brothers and fathers listen now to my defense when they heard him speak to them in Aramaic they became very quiet so clearly the crowd had just been stirred up most of them haven't got a clue what's going on they think this is some foreigner but suddenly he's actually a Jew so they're very quiet then Paul said I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today I persecuted the followers of this way to their death arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison as the high priest and all the council can themselves testify I even obtained letters from them to their associates in
Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished about about noon as I came near Damascus suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me Saul Saul why do you persecute me who are you Lord I asked I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting he replies my companions!
saw the light but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to you may remember Ananias earlier on in the book of Acts where God has said go and find Saul and Ananias is like but he's the one that wants to kill her us and God says go so there's an obedience there but actually as we read through this Ananias not only did what he was told he prayed for Paul to receive his sight he stood beside me and said brother Saul receive your sight and at that very moment
I was able to see him then he said and this is the really incredible bit he said the God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard what a declaration that is so not only is he come to speak to this man who was had come to Damascus to destroy the church but actually then Ananias is prophesying over him that you are going to see the righteous one and hear his words and you will be his witness to all people wow what an incredible prophecy and now what are you waiting for get up be baptized and wash your sins away calling on his name when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me quick he said leave Jerusalem immediately because the people here will not accept your testimony about me
[32:07] Lord I replied these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you and when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him then the Lord said to me go I will send you far away to the Gentiles Gentiles so starting to come to the end now another point God's salvation is to all mankind even the ones we try and avoid Paul as a Jew would have made every attempt to avoid the Gentiles the non-Jews the Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean they despised them they were to be avoided they weren't part of God's plan they weren't

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God's people and yet God sent Paul to them with the message of salvation and so are we willing to leave aside our prejudices for his kingdom maybe it's to the uncouth neighbour the neighbour we try and avoid in the street maybe it's the family member we haven't spoken to for over 20 years the gospel is for all and we are the ones to take it are we willing to go to those that we would generally choose to avoid time's getting on so I'm going to draw this to a close

I was going to read through but it carries on with Paul being the crowd looking to still kill him Paul's taken away by the soldiers and they want to flog him and Paul pipes up is it legal to flog a Roman citizen which is a bit scary for the soldiers because they weren't allowed to it wasn't legal and so there's a bit of a discussion going on here but it's interesting that if we go back to Acts 16 in Philippi Paul was flogged and imprisoned and then he says he was a Roman citizen but in the midst of all of that the jailer and all his family are saved and so in this case he declares he is a citizen
I'm going to have to flick through to find my last point which is this don't suffer when you don't have to be guided by the Holy Spirit in this suffering for the gospel may appear godly but only if God is calling you to it because then will there be fruit nothing will be gained by another beating for Paul it would seem so the Holy Spirit guided Paul to avoid it we are called to suffer for the gospel for his kingdom to come for his glory but we are not called to suffer just because we are Christians we can resist the devil and his schemes so just to recap Paul was listening for the Spirit's leading he was obedient to his leading he was going not knowing there is an importance of correct prophetic interpretation the Holy Spirit often builds on previous prophecies we won't always like the leading of the Holy
Spirit but his will be done hardship and the sharing of the gospel often go hand in hand God's salvation is to all mankind even the ones we try and avoid and don't suffer when you don't have to be guided by the Holy Spirit could I have the band up please thank you

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