

## Scripture Reading:

**Acts 20:36** “And when [Paul] had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, **38** sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”

**Acts 21:1** “Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. **2** And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. **3** When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. **4** And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. **5** When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. **6** When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. **7** And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais [PO-tell-a-ma-is], greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. **8** On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. **9** Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. **10** And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **11** When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " **12** Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." **14** So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." **15** And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. **16** Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge. **17** And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

## "Knowing God's Will"

Well, once again my wife's theory about time speeding up as you grow older is proving true for this year!

- It is hard to believe that we are down to the final two weeks of ordinary or normal time in the Church calendar for 2011!

So in two weeks, as has been our practice, Theron & Mike will give our Advent messages from this pulpit and I will be blessed with the opportunity to serve elsewhere in the worship service.

After almost a hundred sermons from the Gospel of Luke and now my 82<sup>nd</sup> from the Book of Acts we are approaching the final events in Luke's orderly account written for his friend Theophilus.

Paul has set his face to go to Jerusalem as Jesus did in the Gospel of Luke. The Holy Spirit has revealed to Paul that he will have much trouble during this visit, but Paul is determined to be there by Pentecost and to help bring the gifts collected & to encourage the Saints.

- His hope is to be able to go on from there to visit Rome and to preach the Gospel in Spain.

We don't know if Paul ever made it to Spain, but Luke will finish the story of Acts, the story of the Holy Spirit filling the earth with the Kingdom of God with Paul in Rome preaching the Gospel to all the world with no one hindering him!

So in these final two weeks of ordinary time this year, my plan is to bring us to where Paul arrives in Jerusalem.

- As we do so, I want to focus on two very important issues for our day as we continue to serve the Holy Spirit as He brings glory to the Son!

This week we will consider how it is that we are to know and understand the will of God for our lives. And next week, Lord willing, how we are to exhibit the patience of the Kingdom in our lives.

After the emotional farewell with the Ephesian elders, Luke gives us more details of the journey to Jerusalem. I included the map in the order of worship again today so we could see the progress of this journey. After sailing on smaller ships with short journeys near the coast the party now boards a larger ship at Patara that will eventually bring them to Caesarea.

- This ship has to unload a major cargo in Tyre and thus they have time to visit the Saints of that city:

Acts 21:4 “And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. 5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. 6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.”

Once again we see Paul warned about danger ahead and I want to combine that with what Agabus will do in Caesarea, but we cannot pass over the beautiful picture that we see with the Church community here in Tyre. This young church was likely started by the Saints who scattered after the death of Stephen or even by Paul himself as he journeyed to Tarsus after his conversion. As was his practice, Paul spends time with the Saints and instructs them. When it is time for him to leave the entire church turns out with all the women and children to send Paul and his companions off to Jerusalem.

- They all kneel together in prayer on the beach and they board the ship to continue the journey.

Paul takes time again to minister to the Saints at Ptolemais [PO-tell-a-ma-is] which is the next stop on the journey.

- After spending a day with these Saints, they journey on to Caesarea where they are just a few days journey from Jerusalem.

There is time before Pentecost so they again stay and minister to the Saints. In Tyre the quick reference to the women and children brings a smile to our face and much comfort because we love our covenant children and strive to be a family centered church!

- Here at Caesarea we come to another quick reference that is not quite as easy to deal with!

The traveling Saints stay with Phillip who is now referred to as an evangelist. Phillip was one of the seven chosen by the Saints in Jerusalem to care for the widows before they were scattered after the death of Stephen. We saw Phillip’s evangelistic heart with the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch and after that he journeyed up the coast and settled here at Caesarea where he has now been for about twenty years.

- In verse 9, Luke tells us that this faithful man had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses.

- So what are we supposed to do with this information?

May I suggest two things:

- 1) First, we must not make more out of the verse than we are given.

This is ALL the information that we have about these daughters and what they did as prophetesses.

- 2) BUT, we must not ignore that fact that Luke included this information!

**I think we have a pretty good balance here at Church of the King, but there are certainly some quarters of the family friendly churches where women are not held in the same high regard as the Scriptures have for them!**

- **The Bible does not contradict itself!**
- **So yes we must honor and obey Paul's instructions that the leaders of the Church are to be men and that women must respect the headship of their husbands.**
- **However, this does NOT mean that women are unimportant or that we never need to listen to them!**

**The Spirit of God certainly recognizes this here by giving these daughters the ability to be prophetesses.**

**This brings us to the other prophet who comes to visit Paul and his companions there at Caesarea and the main point that I want to dwell on this morning... Agabus who we first met back in chapter eleven comes to Paul with another prophesy for him regarding this visit.**

- **This is now the third time, at least, that Paul has been warned about what lies ahead in Jerusalem.**

**With Agabus, we see a presentation that reminds us of the Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel or Jeremiah or Isaiah.**

- **Agabus takes Paul's belt and ties himself up to illustrate how Paul will be bound in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles!**

**This drama is so moving that even Luke and the other companions now join in pleading with Paul to NOT go to Jerusalem. At verse 13, "Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping & breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."**

**Paul is moved emotionally by what they are saying, but he is unmoved in his determination to go to Jerusalem and to even die there if necessary!**

- **So is Paul just being stubborn or is he following the guidance that the Spirit has given him?**
- **Are the others just afraid of what could happen to Paul or is the Spirit telling them to keep him away from Jerusalem?**

**Now we know the end of the story and that Paul's arrest and imprisonment was exactly how Jesus planned to take him to Rome... BUT we must remember that they did not have all that information!**

**Thus this is an ideal place to consider the question that we all face in our journey as disciples of Jesus:**

- **How do we know what the Lord's will is for our lives?**

**Let's begin with the situation that we are faced with here in our text:**

**Yes, the Apostle Paul was convinced that the Spirit of God was directing him to go to Jerusalem and he would not be deterred.**

- **This was not because Paul was stubborn, but rather because he was convinced by the Spirit.**

**We know this because not many months before we saw how Paul was determined to address the angry crowd in Ephesus, but he was dissuaded by those who had wiser counsel.**

- **So were the others who warned Paul of danger listening to demons or not understanding what the Spirit was saying to them?**

**Luke makes it pretty clear that it was the Spirit that revealed Paul's trials to them and we know that the Spirit does not contradict Himself.**

- **So how do we reconcile this difference?**

**His message to Paul was that he must go to Jerusalem as part of His plan to fill the earth with the Kingdom of God.**

- **At the same time the Spirit was revealing to others the trials and troubles that Paul would have when he arrived in Jerusalem.**

**He was not sharing this information with them to stop Paul from making this important journey but so that they, and Paul, would be better prepared for what lay ahead.**

**Again, we have the benefit of knowing that after Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, the Romans would bring him back here to Caesarea for about two years!**

- **This very same city where all of these warnings come to a head with the dramatic actions by the Prophet Agabus!**

**So as we strive to know God's will in our lives this account can give us some important guidance and also lead to an honest question that is often asked.**

**First the question: How are we supposed to know God's will the way they did when we don't have prophets and prophetesses running around telling us what is about to happen or putting on dramatic demonstrations? That is a fair question and I will tell you that there have been many down through Church history who have insisted that we do need such continuing revelation to know God's will.**

- **This has led to great abuse with Church authority like with see with the Roman Catholic Church or Eastern Orthodox.**

**It has also led to great abuses in protestant churches looking for modern prophets and miracles to help lead the way. Now while I do not believe that we must argue that the Spirit's use of such things has ceased altogether, it is certainly easy to see that they are now very rare rather than very common.**

**There are some very good reasons why this dramatic change has occurred:**

**Today, as spirit-filled believers who are in Christ...**

- **We have weekly worship services where we hear the Word of God proclaimed to us.**
- **We have access to the very throne of God to present our prayers and petitions.**
- **And we have the promise that Jesus is with us as we remember His sacrifice at this Table each week.**

**IF we are faithful in attending worship, this will naturally lead to lives where we hunger for God's Word, where we seek answers from God in prayer and where we expect God to be with us until the end of the age just as Jesus promised in the Great Commission.**

**With the ability to hold the completed canon of the Scriptures in our hands, with access to the throne of Grace in prayer and with Jesus with us day by day as He promised...**

- **We should see that we now have a greater ability to know the will of God than those there in the early days of the Church!**
- **We should not long to return to the infancy of the Church but rather to learn to live in the maturity of the Church where God has placed us!**

**Having answered that honest question, we are ready to return to the example that these Saints can be for us today...**

- **Especially the Apostle Paul.**

**Paul knew what the Lord's will was for him at that time and his determination helps all the others as well:**

- **14 "So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done.""**

**Luke here reveals two very important character traits that we need in the Christian life: Courage & submission.**

- **Paul stood by the courage of his convictions!**
- **And those whose hearts were broken by the thought of what he was about to face were in the end willing to submit to the will of God.**

**This should remind us that the second petition in the Lord's prayer should often be on our lips:**

- **Thy will be done!**

**Remembering to often add what Jesus prayed in the garden, "nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done!"**

- **So let me close with a few practical considerations for how this does and does NOT work today!**

**First we cannot be presumptuous! [give the example of random verses]**

**Next it should be clear that we are not to simply be selfish. [Prayer of Jebez craze or refrigerator magnets as examples here]**

**Instead, we need to focus on those three places where God reveals His will:**

- **First and certainly foremost, we look to God's Word**

**As Paul would later tell young Timothy in his second letter: "You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

- **I think we can all agree that being thoroughly equipped would include knowing the will of God.**

**There are two primary reasons that people fail to discern God's will from the Scriptures:**

- **First, they simply do NOT know the Bible well.**

**This is a lifetime journey and God will always continue to reveal His will, IF we are faithful to search for His will.**

- **And second, they are simply NOT willing to accept what the Bible says!**

**I would argue that this starts right with the Book of Beginnings! If we don't believe in the power of God's creative works in the first week of history then it is a quick journey downhill from there. Why trust anything else?**

- **So we must know the Bible and we must believe & trust the Bible!**

**The next place that God will reveal His will is on our knees in prayer, and yes at times we need to be on our knees! Not because it shows that we are really begging this time, but rather because it demonstrates that we see God as who the Bible reveals Him to be!**

**We must not come to God in prayer telling Him what we think His will is for our lives or with just another list of things that we need to be happy. If you have not been faithful in your prayers, simply begin with the prayer that Jesus told us to pray and work on believing that it is a good prayer and then to honestly pray it!**

- **The final place that we receive guidance from the Lord is through other members of His Body, the Church.**

**I mentioned the blessing of having the Word preached each week, but knowing God's will also includes seeking Godly wisdom from other Saints.**

**The Bible talks about iron sharpening iron as men share with each other and Paul tells us that the older women are to instruct the younger women.**

- **If we are faithful in these three important areas, we will come to better understand what the will of God is for our lives!**

**We will come to know it simply at times and as we mature we will come to have more and more discernment to be able to recognize the will of God in more complex situations.**

**Consider the Book of Proverbs as a good example:**

- **This book is given as a means to instruct a young man so he can grow up and serve as a wise King.**

**Thus there are some simple things to follow at the beginning and more difficult things later in the book where more maturity is expected. In the early chapters the young man is told, among other things that he should seek God first, that he should flee from sexual sins and that he should not steal.**

**So as a young person faces the various temptations that will come along, it is pretty simple to know what the Lord's will is in those situations.**

**When some teacher or expert says that science and reason are much more important than faith, the young person does not need a masters degree in theology to know the right answer!**

**When some beautiful young woman who he knows is not a Christian, shows an interest and stirs up those old hormones, it is a simple and yet very difficult decision to do the right thing:**

- **Do you follow your hormones or do you follow the Lord?**

**Or when the clerk at the store makes a mistake and gives you too much change, it is very tempting to just keep quiet, but we clearly know His will is that we NOT steal what is not our own.**

- **IF we are faithful in all of these little things then we will mature in the Christian life and see the blessings and challenges that we find later in the Book of Proverbs!**

**If we have been faithful we will be a wise person ready for tougher challenges, and if we have been selfish, then we become a fool. In the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter Solomon gives what appears to be contradictory commands about how to deal with fools that we will meet in this world**

- **As such I have always considered it one of the best examples of what it means to have discernment as a mature Christian: Not unlike our lesson from Acts.**

**Proverbs 26:4 gives us this command:**

**“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.”**

**But then in verse 5 we have this:**

**“Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.”**

**So, the Lord brings a fool into my life this week [other than the one that I often see in the mirror]. This fool spouts off some foolishness and the question can be rightly asked, Should I answer this fool or not:**

- **What is the Lord's will?**

**The reality is that there will be times when it is the Lord's will that I answer the fool so that he does not become hopelessly proud.**

**There will also be times where I must not answer this fool, lest I be like him!**

- **So how do I know which is right?**

**IF I have been a faithful student of God's Word, IF I have spent much time before the throne of grace, and if I have had the benefit of Godly wisdom and instruction from others through the years, which I have heeded...**

- **Then I will be able to discern which type of fool I am facing this week and how to respond.**
- **This same principle applies with all of the situations where we find ourselves asking, "what is the Lord's will!"**

**And I will close with just one last lesson and warning:**

- **True maturity moves from the simple to the complex [as Proverbs does].**
- **Rebellion or foolishness wants to ignore the complex and make the simple complicated.**

**First fools & rebels will have little use for the challenge to be more mature: They just want to keep things simple and this shows up in doctrine and life.**

**Secondly and more importantly, they take what should be simple and try to make it very complex:**

**For example, their thinking about the simple commands in the early part of Proverbs goes something like this: Yes, we should seek God first, but surely there are other places that we can look to for wisdom and guidance. Yes, we should stay away from ungodly women, but surely there is a place for men and women to just be friends and I will make sure that I share the Gospel with her at some point.**

**Then when they are head over heels in "love" they will argue that they are sure she will change and become a Christian some day. And even with something as simple as Thou Shalt not Steal, they manage to find all sorts of excuses for taking what is clearly not theirs.**

- **So I hope you can begin to see that knowing the will of God is both simple and complex.**

**The young kids who play with that big box of Legos back there can build some amazing things by following a few simple rules. The ones who just throw them around create only get messes.**

**When some of them grow up they may be engineers who build great buildings or dams or bridges and while the rules are much more complex, the principle of simple obedience is still very important!**

- **Learning to discern the Lord's will is a life-time adventure and I know that I have only scratched the surface this morning.**
- **As we come to the end of ordinary time for this year, Lord willing we have been reminded again of the Words of our Lord Jesus: IF you love me keep my commandments!**

**Then, and only then, will we be truly walking in the will of God!**

### **Communion Meditation: Psalm 32:**

**"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.**

**2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

**[Psalmist talks of proper confession and submission]**

**8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you. 10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. 11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"**