



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 21:1–17

“Applying Divine Principles: Part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Turning in our Scripture reading to Acts chapter 21, verse 1 through verse 17, and our subject for today is “Applying Divine Principles” and this is the first of two studies on Acts chapter 21, the Lord willing. In the 1st verse, now, having completed his account of Paul’s ministry to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Luke continues with:

“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara. And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, (that means, simply, seen Cyprus) we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.”

One of the things that underlines the authenticity of the record of the early church is some of this unexpected realism that one finds. Now, at Ephesus, when Paul left Ephesus, and they

kneeled down and prayed together, they all “wept sore and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him.”

Now, we see an expression of appreciate here in Tyre, but we do not see the same type of emotional expression that you found at Ephesus, for the simple reason that at Ephesus, the apostle had spent several years of ministry, he spent over three, for that matter. While at Tyre, this was much briefer and, consequently, Luke expresses it in words that set forth the appreciation of the believers for Paul, but the emotional involvement is not as one found at Ephesus.

“And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist.

This is Philip the deacon; Philip the evangelist and deacon, who preached in Sumaria and where that evangelistic preaching was so successful. This is also the Philip the evangelist who was called away to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch, and now, for many years he has been in Caesarea, it seems.

“Which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

By the way, you will notice from these statements that it would be almost impossible for anything like this to happen in the meetings of the churches today, because in the meetings of the churches today, generally speaking, evangelical churches do not have a meeting in which there is freedom for gifted men to expression themselves. Most of our meetings are very well organized and

structured, and one man usually speaks and that's it. And that's one of the reasons we've been saying over and over again, I have to say it over and over again because some people find it difficult really to accept it, that's one of the reasons we have a meeting in which we have freedom to exercise spiritual gifts. That's why, at the Lord's Table, it is possible for men to rise and express in vocal a way their gift of exhortation or teaching or whatever their particular gift may be. Now, you can see, in the early church, that's the way they met and that's why men like Agabus have the freedom to rise in the meeting and prophesy. So we read here then in verse 12.

“And when we heard (well, verse 11) and when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’ And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done. And after those days we took up our carriages, (that means baggage) and went up to Jerusalem.’ There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.”

Now, it's likely that this statement “brought with them Mnason” is probably to be rendered, though the order rendering is possible, it's probably that it should be rendered, “bringing us to one Mnason.” That is, it seems probably the Mnason dwelt in the city of Jerusalem, a Hellenistic Jew, probably, and it is with him that the apostle and his company will be saying. And, verse 17, concludes with:

“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee that we are able to gather on the Lord’s Day, such as this, and to read the Scriptures and ponder them, reflecting upon their teaching, and with one another expressing our thoughts of praise and worship, as the Word of God is studied. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the enlightenment that comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And, Father, we pray that today, as the Word is proclaimed, not simply here but elsewhere that the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry of salvation through his suffering shall be lifted up, and that there may be many who come to him, acknowledging their sin and guilt and condemnation, and finding in him release from the burden of their guilt. And, Lord, if there are some in this audience, who do not know the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, O God, unfold to them what Christ has done, what they are before Thee naturally, their great need of him. And, Lord, if it be Thy will, bring them to rest upon him for time and for eternity.

We pray for Believers Chapel and its ministry, for its elders and for its members and friends, and the visitors who are in the audience today, we especially, Lord, pray Thy blessing upon each of these to the end that Thy will may be accomplished in their lives. We thank Thee for the Chapel’s ministry; we ask Thy continued blessing upon it. Supply the needs that exist, and at the same time, give fruitfulness to the propagation of the Word of God over the radio, through printed page, through the Bible classes, through the tape ministry and those who work in it. Lord, we are grateful and thankful for the past, we look forward to the future. We pray for the sick and ill, and for those Lord who are troubled and disturbed in various ways, we commit them all to Thee. We thank Thee that we can turn to Thee and know that Thou dost care. Be with us through the remainder of this service, we pray.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

[Message] We are told that in preaching the Word of God, it is most proper to preach in expository fashion. If you are around preachers, and around them very often, you will find them speaking of preaching as being properly expository preaching. But then you will [see] that it's very difficult to find any consensus among preachers as to what expository preaching really is. In fact, it's very interesting that different types of sermons may be called expository preaching. And so what generally happens is that expository preaching is the kind of preaching that we practice.

Now, when we think of expository preaching in Believers Chapel, we generally think of preaching that is expository in the sense that we follow consecutively the exposition of particular books. Now, expository preaching may be expository preaching if a simple passage is taken, and the thought of that passage is followed, with emphasis upon the primary aim of the author of the paragraph. That could be called expository preaching properly, too. But expository preaching is the kind of preaching normally—at least in certain circles that follows consecutively through a particular body of material. One of the things that is difficult about expository preaching, among other things, is the fact that that means that you must also handle the uninteresting or seemingly uninteresting passages as well as those that contain strikingly interesting material.

Now, the way to avoid this is not to preach expository in that sense. That is, to select passages throughout the Bible that have special, outstanding phraseology and teaching that's very impressive. And that's the kind of is generally followed in evangelical churches. That is, striking passages are taken and those passages are preached. And one of the bad things about that is that you can do that for a number of years and never really teach a book of the Bible. Because there are that many interesting passages in the Word of God. And so you can stay in one place for six or eight years, and then when you are finished go to another place; and you're never really forced to preach through the Scriptures in a consecutive orderly fashion.

Well, we've tried to do that differently in Believers Chapel, but one of the drawbacks is that we do come to chapters that no one, probably no one, would ordinarily choose as a text to preach upon. I don't remember ever having heard anyone preach on Acts chapter 21, that is, except me.

[Laughter] Now, I have heard myself preach on this, although, I confess, I don't always hear everything that I say. But I have heard myself do this simply because we were preaching through the book of Acts.

That's one of the problems of expository preaching, but it's also one of the good things because those who listen over a lengthy period of time are or become acquainted with whole bodies of material. And the result is a better understanding of the Word of God. In final analysis, it seems to me, that the point of preaching is not to preach to the problems of a particular congregation; but rather to preach the Word of God so that they may, that is, you, in our case, you may become knowledgeable in the Scriptures and thus able to apply the Scriptures yourself to your problems. In other words, to bring you to a certain maturity in the understanding of the Word of God.

We never reach full maturity. I certainly have not. But, nevertheless, the ability to take the Scriptures, read them, understand them, make application by the Spirit's guidance to our own questions and problems, is to me a point of maturity. And that's what we should do. I should not, as a preacher, it seems, look out over my congregation and say, “Brother Smith is having such-and-such a problem, I'll preach to him today about that particular problem.” There may be some benefit in that, but it seems to me the other is much more useful. But then that means you have to preach these passages, such as Acts chapter 21.

I remember having a conversation with Wesley Philips, who was about 10 years or so ago, was the Pastor of the Grace Bible Church of Washington, Illinois. A young preacher, in his early thirties, and I was holding some meetings in his church and we were sitting around the breakfast table one morning and he was very enthusiastic over expository preaching. And he was saying, “I preach on passages that I wouldn't touch in a thousand years, except by practicing expository preaching.” And then he happened to add in the conversation, “This Sunday morning I'm preaching on, ‘Should I get married.’” That sounds as if he had picked a text; but, what he was doing was preaching through 1 Corinthians, and he had arrived at the 7th chapter, in which Paul discusses certain things concerning marriage. His wife, Jean, interrupted at that point, as she was serving and

said, “Should you get married, Honey?” and we all had a little laugh. But it illustrated the fact that there are passages in the Word of God that deserve our attention, but we pass over them because they are not as striking as John 3:16, or John 1, or great passages with obviously great significance, beautifully worded. Preaching is very difficult and preaching expository is also very, very difficult.

Everything in Acts, from Acts chapter 21 on, moves toward Rome, via Jerusalem. Paul is on his way toward Rome, but he feels that he must go through Jerusalem. One of the reasons Paul felt that was because he had with him a gift for the poor saints at Jerusalem. You read the epistles and you see that the apostle was very concerned to be able to take this gift, to the saints in Jerusalem, to express the union of spiritual belief with the church in Jerusalem. Because, after all, Paul had become the minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, and it was meaningful for him to establish the truth in this symbolic way; that the whole church is one church. And if the church from other places can send this gift, through the apostle and his friends to the church in Jerusalem, which was poor and in need, it would express the unity of the one body of Christ. It meant a great deal to Paul, and that was one of the things that caused him to go to Jerusalem, in spite of these warnings and admonitions of what might happen to him when he got there.

Now, he had also been told by the Lord that he was going there. He had purposed in the Spirit to go there. That is, the Holy Spirit had given him, he felt, guidance that he should go to Jerusalem. So he's on his way. But bondage is one of the key words that comes up, over and over again. The apostle is having difficulty, and he is going to enter into bondage, and the bondage is the bondage of faithfulness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the principle ethical interests of this passage, lies in a very common Christian problem: The interplay of obedience and of Christian guidance. So we're going to look at it as a geographical statement on the part of Luke, but stop here and there and make a few practical applications.

So now, Paul is making his journey from Miletus back to Jerusalem, and there are certain stages in it. And the first one is described by Luke in the first six verses as from Miletus to Tyre. The

address at Miletus, which he gave to the elders, marked the end of Paul’s program of missionary work. He’ll be a missionary to the end of his days, but he’s not engaging in programs, such as the three great missionary journeys. We read, then, in chapter 21 in verse 3. “Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria and landed at Tyre.” And the in the 4th verse, in the first clause, “And finding disciples.” That’s a very interesting expression, in the original text, because it suggests that the apostle found them by searching. The word is an intensive word, and I suggest that that is probably the force lying back of it. Tyre was quite a sizeable city and so when the apostle landed there, he wanted to find the believers there. And, evidently, he’d not been there too often in the past. So he found them by searching. In other words, one of the first things that he did was to say, “Where are the Christians?” And he wanted to meet them.

Henry Ward Beecher was one of the great preachers of his day, and he once declared that “Paul was devoid of artistic sense. That he traveled through these cities of Asia, packed with things of beauty and artistic merit and value, and never by a line referred to any of those things.” Now, that is true. It’s startling in one sense. In fact, you can just imagine, the apostle is not the typical tourist, who arrives in town, after he is settled into his hotel, he goes down and he wants to speak to the concierge or something like this or some person who has charge of sightseeing in the city, and makes arrangements to get on a bus the next day and see the sights of the city. The apostle, so far as we know, was not interested in that at all. So far as we know, Beecher is right. He was devoid of artistic sense. That is, nothing is said in Scriptures about his interest in things like that. These were some magnificent cities and some magnificent sights. Many of you, today, have gone to that land. You’ve gone, also, to the Aegean Sea. You’ve traveled to some of these islands. They are beautiful islands, and worthy of a great deal of description.

And, yet, Paul says nothing about them and, in fact, Luke says very little about them, too. So Beecher does make a point, but what he reasons from this is false. It’s not so far as we know that Paul had no artistic sense; he just put things in his list of priorities. And so far as Paul was concerned, there was one thing that was important, and that was the work of the Lord. And so far as Paul was

concerned, he was interested in the things that God had told him that he was to do. There was no scenery to Paul. There was no geography to Paul. There was nothing but lost humanity, and the redeeming grace of the cross of Christ, and he felt this burden upon him to make known that gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to men who are lost. This was the thing that pressed upon his spirit and upon his soul.

I do not feel that the apostle was devoid of any sense of culture or art. He probably had an outstanding sense of that. He had been brought up in such a way as to have just that very thing. But when it comes to priorities, the things of the interest of the Lord God are first with the apostle.

Now, of course, I have no idea of the spiritual condition of the one hundred and thirty-one people who so tragically lost their life here, a few days ago, in Dallas. But I can assure you that proper priorities in our life is never more appreciated than moments of just such tragedies. The great tragedy is the fact that so many people face the ultimate experience of life, death, and have never made provision for their relationship to the Lord God. To enter into the presence of the Triune God unprepared, is the worst of all experiences. And though a person may have had a most successful and significant kind of life, judged by human standards, how worthless, how foolish it all appears in the light of eternity.

The apostle had a deep burden. He speaks of it as a kind of dispensation that was given to him, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And let me say to us, who are Christians, this same kind of thing, this same kind of burden, has been laid upon us by the Lord God. And we are the ones, when we enter the presence of the Lord, shall feel most ashamed that we have not taken advantage of the opportunities that God has given us.

Paul found the disciples and he found, of course, that the word was not good, so far as he was concerned. Because we read, in the 4th verse, “We tarried there seven days, who said to Paul, through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.” There were evidently some prophets at the church at Tyre, and these prophets spoke. That’s evidently, what is meant by saying to Paul “through the Spirit.” They warned him, and they said, “If you go up to Jerusalem, you are going to be

bound. You are going to have difficulty. You’re going to suffer.” Now, I’m sure that Paul said, “But the Lord has already impressed upon me that I must suffer. In fact, when I was interrupted on the Damascus Road, he told me, through others, how many things I should suffer for his sake. And, furthermore, when I was recently in Ephesus, he laid a burden upon my heart that I should go to Jerusalem.” And they were warning him, “Don’t go up to Jerusalem because you’re going to come into difficulty.” Well, now, perhaps one of the commentators is right when he says, “These Christians may not have been so well informed on the finer points of predestination and, therefore, they thought that by warning the apostle they could influence him in such a way that he would not follow what he felt had been his guidance to that point.” Well, the apostle felt he had a word from God and while he appreciate, no doubt, these warning and admonitions, he still felt that he must go. So from Tyre, he moves to Ptolemais; the ship, evidently, going down the coast.

In verse 7 we read, “And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais,” and, notice, “And saluted the brethren.” That is, he found the brethren and greeted them, and he abode with them one day. The ship must have stayed briefly in the harbor at Ptolemais and then on down the coast. And, verse 8, “And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and there we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist.”

Now, here we have a very interesting encounter, from Ptolemais to Caesarea, and Paul’s stay at Caesarea is marked by some very interesting things.

I want you to notice, first of all, that Philip is called, not Philip the deacon, as you might expect, he is said to be one of the seven and, thus, he was one of the original deacons or ministers chosen there by the people under the apostle’s direction in Acts chapter 6, but he’s called, Philip the evangelist. Now, Philip is very important in the ongoing ministry of the book of Acts because he was the original pioneer beyond Judaism. Remember, in the early days of the Christian church, the ministry of the gospel was confined to Jerusalem, and largely confined to Jerusalem. I should say “largely” because that was evidently the intent of God. But then the apostle Paul, who then was Saul,

persecuted the church so strongly that the church was scattered from Jerusalem. And then went out, except the apostles.

Now, Luke having said that then launches into a description in Acts chapter 8 of the ministry of Philip, one of the deacons. Remember, he went down to Samaria, and there was a remarkable turning to the Lord there, and then he was called away from that remarkable turning to the Lord, to minister to the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip the evangelist: The original pioneer beyond Judaism and forced out, humanly speaking, by the persecution led by Saul, the Jewish Pharisee. So here, coming into the house of Philip the evangelist, the original pioneer beyond Judaism, meets the greatest pioneer beyond Judaism, the Apostle Paul. God’s great ecumenicity brought about by the fact that these two men have the same Lord at the present time.

Now, I’d like to say just a further word about Philip. Philip had a brief and brilliant career, according to the Word of God. I mean by that that he’s the chief figure in Acts chapter 8, and then, suddenly, he disappears from Luke’s record. He was uncalled, so far as we know, uncommissioned, so far as we know, unordained, so far as we know. And, yet, he is the first of those who went out beyond Judaism to preach the gospel to Gentiles. Think about it. Uncalled, that is, in an official way, uncommissioned, in an official way; unordained, in an official way and, yet, fruitful in preaching the Word of God.

Now, you can learn a lot about that from the Bible. You can learn, of course, first of all, that there isn’t any such thing as ordination to the gospel ministry. There is no such thing in the Scripture about a person becoming a preacher, through an ordination ceremony. Dr. Ironside used to say, “It’s just laying empty hands on empty heads.” That when we have ordination ceremonies, fundamentally, where we preach is the guidance of God, through the Holy Spirit and God puts burdens upon the hearts of individuals and gives them spiritual gifts. And we are responsible to exercise those gifts. We don’t wait, if we’ve been called by God or given the sense by God that we are to teach or preach or evangelize. We don’t wait for men to put their hands upon our heads. We preach. And, if you will look at the history of the Christian church, you will see that that is true. John Calvin was not

ordained. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was not ordained. The long list of unordained men would take us the rest of the day. But these men have been given a burden by the Lord God, and they preached and Philip was one of them. Then, he passed into obscurity, after those remarkable early incidents, described by Luke. Evidently, a very contented, faithful, diligent man, for about twenty years, we’ve heard nothing about him. Perhaps, he’s the one who was responsible for the building up of the church in Caesarea. We don’t know however that that is true.

Yet, in the final analysis, Philip is not obscure after all, for down through the nineteen hundred years, anyone opening up the New Testament reads about Philip the deacon, a man full of the Holy Spirit, according to Luke, according to Acts chapter 6, and Luke’s words there. And then an evangelist, inscribed in the Word of God, by the term evangelist, one who preached the good news. You couldn’t have a more glorious recognition of faithful ministry than that.

Now, he also had four daughters; very interesting, these daughters. It’s not unusual to have four daughters. There are many men who have four daughters. Some of them have more than four, for that matter. He had four daughters, four unmarried daughters, well, that’s a little more unique to have four unmarried daughters. But, most of all, these women were prophetesses. Notice, “Four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.” Now, isn’t it a strange thing that when the apostle came to Caesarea, stayed in the house of Philip, met with the believers there, among whom were these four daughters of prominent Philip, and, yet, it’s not through them that God spoke to the Apostle Paul. A prophet comes down from Jerusalem, enters into the meeting, by the name of Agabus, and it is from Agabus that the warning comes, “Don’t go up to Jerusalem.”

Now, I know that we live in days in which it is very difficult to say anything about the relationship of men and women that prevents you from entering into controversy. We live in controversial days. I recognize that there are differences of opinion that exist today that does not mean that one or both are right. We must follow what the Word of God teaches. I think it’s of striking interest, but we must remember that this is an argument from silence. But, nevertheless, there are certain things about the New Testament that are rather interesting.

David Aune has written a very interesting book, it's a very large book, it's called, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, a very significant book. In this book, Professor Aune makes this point, “On the basis of the evidence, in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, it appears that prophets are those who prophesied were active only within the framework of Christian worship.” In other words, so far as we know in the New Testament, the exercise of prophecy took place within the context of Christian worship. Now, he doesn't mean by that, that it was impossible to prophesy outside of Christian worship. He just says, in the New Testament, the instances of the use of the prophetic gift are within the context of Christian worship, that is, in the meetings of the church. Well, if that is true, and Professor Aune has done perhaps the most significant, certainly the most detailed study of this question, then perhaps, the reason why Agabus is called down from Jerusalem to Caesarea to give the prophesy in the meeting of the church is for the simple reason that while Philip's daughters did a fruitful work of prophesying outside the meeting, they did not prophesy in the meeting. In other words, they carried on their ministry outside the meetings. There's nothing wrong with that. Everything good about it. “And, in their case, they did prophesy, but not in the meetings. For Paul had said, “I suffer not a woman to teach,” he also said that the women should keep silence in the churches. This is not because women are not equal to men; we men, we know that's not true. And, as a matter of fact, we know not only of women who are the equal of men, but women who far exceed them in many talents and gifts, including teaching of the Word. We all, if you've had any experience at all, know that that is true. It's all a matter of the divine order, and that, I think, is preserved here.

And these women prophesied. They had an effective ministry. They are mentioned by Luke. They are inscribed in the Word of God as prophetesses. But they, themselves, were subject to the Spirit, and did not prophesy in the context of the Christian worship. In that context, Agabus did. And he warned Paul. He was one who had already given prophecy previously, in Acts chapter 11. We have a prophecy concerning a famine, and it came to pass. He was a good prophet.

Now, in the New Testament, we have some exhortations about prophecy that are very significant. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said, “Quench not the spirit, despise not prophesyings, prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.” Notice that, “Quench not the spirit.” What does that mean? Well, it’s given in the context of the Christian worship. It means, the gifted men should have freedom to minister their gift. Many of our church services today are instances of quenching the spirit. In fact, if our church, this church or any church, never has a meeting of all the body in which there is freedom to exercise gifts, the church is quenching the spirit. What that means in the context is, clearly, “Quench not the manifestation of the spirit.” That’s evident because the next line is, “Despise not prophesyings.” But then, Paul adds, “Prophets are not always right. In fact, there are some who are false prophets. We’ve been studying Baalim and the prophecies of this great false prophet. He was great because four magnificent messianic prophecies came out of his mouth. But, later on, he revealed his true colors by what he did with reference to the children of Israel. But, at any rate, prophets may prophesy falsely as well as truly. That’s why Paul says, “Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.”

So in the church then, Agabus came and he prophesied. Now, we need to remember that prophets not only predicted but they proclaimed the Word of God. That is, they not only spoke of the future, but they spoke of the present, as well. The characteristic thing about prophecy is that it is direct revelation, revelation not interpretation, revelation, truth revealed by God, whether concerning the present for the future. That is prophecy.

Was Paul wrong then to go up to Jerusalem? When Agabus came, he took Paul’s girdle in the standard and in the image of Old Testament prophets, who frequently acted out their prophecy. He took Paul’s girdle and he bound his own hands and his feet, and he said, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” But Paul still went. Was Paul right or was Paul wrong?

Well, personally, I think in this instance, though Paul is a man like anyone else, and he certainly can be wrong, that he was right. Prophets are subject to apostles, we are told, in

1 Corinthians chapter 12, in verse 28, by the order there and the express use of the ordinal numbers. And that includes even those prophets and apostles, particularly, set out in the Word of God. But now, in the case of the five apostles, recently, called apostles by the man from Tulsa, Oklahoma, that does not pertain to them at all. Prophets are subject to apostles. Church prophets are not always true prophets, we’ve said.

Incidentally, in the early church, the practices of the early church were very much in accord with what happens in Believers Chapel. In fact, to tell you the truth, I think if someone came from the latter part of the first century and the first part of the second century and entered into our meetings, he’d be surprised by some things, what he’d be surprised about, probably, was that we have a ministry of the Word service on Sunday morning, but he’d not be surprised by the Sunday evening service; for the Sunday evening service he would be, would feel very much at home there because they observe the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, and they observed it in the context of freedom for the ministry of spiritual gifts.

The Didache was a document written in the first part of the second century, within thirty or forty years of the completion of the New Testament. It’s the earliest account we have of the meetings of the church, outside of the New Testament. In the Didache, there is a section describing the way certain things should be done in the churches or are done.

Now, this is a paragraph from the 11th chapter of the Didache. It’s not a long paragraph, but I want you to notice a couple of things, and you’ll see how relevant this is. Now, in the Didache, incidentally, *diadache* means simply “the teaching,” and, unfortunately, we don’t know the author of it. It’s a kind of a church manual, explaining in the first part of it about church, about how a person should behave himself in Christianity and then, also, matters concerning the conduct of the church meetings and other things. “And, concerning the apostles and prophets, act thus according to the ordinance of the gospel, let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But let him not stay more than one day, or, if need be, a second as well. But if he stay three days, he’s a false

prophet.” That’s very interesting, isn’t it? We have some words about strangers who come and stay longer than three days. Well, this is what the Didache says.

Now, notice the next statement. “And when an apostle goes forth,” incidentally, an apostle here is probably a person sent forth from a church for a specific task. “When an apostle goes forth, let him accept nothing but bread, till he reaches nights lodging. But if he ask for money, he’s a false prophet.” So here are the two things. He shouldn’t stay more than three days, otherwise he’s a false prophet. And, secondly, he shouldn’t ask for money. So one can see that the church understood, even in those days, that not all who claimed to be prophets were true prophets.

So the apostle heard, with I’m sure a great deal of endurance and patience, the prophesies of these various individuals, who kept warning him, “You’re going to enter into trouble if you go to Jerusalem. Please do not go.” But he had already been given a conviction in his inner man that he should go. Actually, the people misinterpreted the Spirit’s counsel. They, finally, acquiesced, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.” Their motive, of course, was love for Paul. But Paul’s motive was love for God, for the guidance that he had given him, and for the people of God, and for those who were to enter in among the people of God, through the preaching of the Word. What Paul was experiencing was simply admonition that when he got to Jerusalem, he could expect some very difficult times. And that, of course, is exactly what happened. Paul was properly warned, but he felt that he, nevertheless, must go.

Like Luther, who was warned by Spalatin, “Do not go up to Worms; because if you go up to Worms, trouble will come.” Luther said, “Though devils be as many and worms be as tiles upon the roofs, yet thither will I go.” And we are grateful not simply that Luther went to Worms, and for the magnificent testimony that he gave there, but also we are thankful for the Apostle Paul going to Jerusalem for the magnificent testimony that he gives there and on to Rome itself.

Now, finally, in verse 15 through 17, we read of an old disciple. This is a favorite passage of mine. I used to like this even when I wasn’t old. But I, particularly, like it now. Notice the description that is given of Mnason, an ancient disciple. The word that is used is the word from which we get

archaic. So it really is the word that means something like “a disciple from the beginning.” I assume that probably what is meant by this is that this man has been a disciple from the beginning of the church in Jerusalem, maybe from Pentecost. It’s possible he even had known the Lord in the flesh. O the loveliness of still cleaving to the Lord. He’s known Calvary, perhaps. He’s known the resurrection days perhaps. He’s known the days of Pentecost. And any one knows, who gets to be an old person that as the years go by, one’s friends pass on.

I have friends, very close friends of mine, people who were in my wedding, for example, who are now no longer here on this earth. I can remember my father saying, “I don’t have many friends left.” He was in his eighties then. And he said, “My friends are largely gone.”

Now, here is an ancient disciple. He’s had the experience of all of these things; and yet, there is one person that has remained close to him, and he has remained faithful to him. And that, of course, is the Lord himself. What dedication. And I’m delighted to read about a Mnason, an ancient disciple.

When I think of dedication, I think of that story of the Southern prisoner of war, who in his prison kept irritating his captors by referring to the battle of Chickamauga, one of the few battles that the Southerners won, except for those that Stonewall Jackson was general in. And he kept reminding his captors of Chickamauga, where the Southern Rebels had won. Finally, they became so exasperated with him that they took him to General Grant, who heard the story. And then he said to the young fellow, “Either you pledge allegiance to the flag of the USA or I’ll assign you to the worst prison we have and keep you in solitary confinement.” So the Southern soldier thought for a few moments, and then he said he would pledge allegiance to the flag and so he did. And as he was leaving the General’s presence, he said, “General, would you allow me just one sentence?” And the General said, “Yes.” He said, “General, those rebels sure whipped us at Chickamauga, didn’t they?” [Laughter] Well, that’s faithfulness and dedication to a cause.

Mnason, an ancient disciple, and I would gather that not only do we have here an ancient disciple, but we have one who was open to new ideas because, remember, the Jewish people in

Jerusalem had a difficult time with the Apostle Paul, because of Paul’s call to take the gospel to the Gentiles and to take it to the Gentiles apart from any reference to the practice of the Jewish rite of circumcision. But here is an old disciple, who is cleaving to the Lord, open enough to listen to the apostle, and find that in the apostle’s teaching, God is speaking, an ancient disciple. You know, in a Christian church, we often hear people say, “What we need are young people in the church.” We do. We need young people because of the future of the church. We need young people in Believers Chapel because of the future of Believers Chapel, but we also need those ancient disciples, too.

We all know that, usually, it’s the older disciples who pay the bills of the carrying on of the gospel, who have been by God graced with the gathering of financial resources so that they are able to carry on the work. We could not carry on our work, were it not for the ancient disciples in Believers Chapel. We want the young. We want to see them grow up and grow and become fruitful in the Lord’s work, and if it be his will, fruitful in other ways, too. But we are grateful for those whose dedication to the Lord is firm and has continued down through the years. They have cleaved to the Lord. No preacher, no genius, no apostle was Mnason, but a disciple. The world may despise, but the Word of God gives him a glorious epitaph. A disciple.

May I tell you just in a few sentences what I’m speaking about. There was a woman, a few years back, that I came to know. She was an elderly woman, older than I am, and always will, of course. She had lost her son. And then, afterwards, she had become a believer. And she became a believer and she began to grow in grace, and then she lost her husband. And deciding that having lost her family, she ought to be doing something, she then went back to Southern Methodist University, got a degree in a specialized subject, did a magnificent job of witnessing, serving on the campus, a woman in her sixties. And then after a very lengthy illness, went home to be with the Lord. She left a large sum of money to Dallas Theological Seminary and a large sum of money to Believers Chapel, a faithful disciple of the Lord. Many people never knew who she was or anything about her. She sat in our meetings, faithfully committed to the Lord. I am sure that God has recognized in a marvelous way, the faithfulness that he gave to this remarkable lady. That, it seems to me, is the greatest

encomium, encomium; that we could possibly have, a word of our faithful discipleship to the Lord.
May the Lord help us as Christians to be that.

If, of course, you have never believed in Christ, you are not a disciple. You need to come to him and rest in him in his finished work for your salvation that you might enter into the life that is life indeed. If you are here today, and you have never believed in Christ, we invite you: right where you, in your seat in the pew, to bow your head to the Lord God and say to him personally, “I know I’m a sinner. I know I’m lost. I know I’m headed to a Christ-less eternity. If I had been in that plane, I would be bound for eternal judgment. I see that Christ, according to the Scriptures, has died for sinners. I’m a sinner. Lord? Save my soul?”

May God help you, by his grace, to come to him for the forgiveness of your sins; and, having become a disciple, may God help you to cleave to the Lord till the end of your days.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks and praise for the accounts of the Word of God, which have so many practical significances for us. Lord, we thank Thee for Mnason, for Paul, for Agabus, for Luke, for Philip, for his daughters, all of these faithful individuals who have given us a testimony. Help us, Lord, to be faithful as they were.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.