

“Trust and Obey”

Acts 21-22

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I love that song we just heard and sang together. The title is *My King is Known By Love*. There is something about music that moves the soul. I’ve seen it happen time and time again through the years. You can come in this room with a heavy heart or feeling lonely or needing something that is transcendent...gets you out of what you’re in currently at the moment and lifts you and your thoughts and takes you to a different place mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – music can do that!

I’m so grateful for our worship here at Champion Forest. I believe we get to experience here a bit of what I’m talking about. Whatever we sing – whether it’s old or new...whether it’s a hymn or a praise chorus or a choir anthem like we just heard - whatever it is, it’s done with excellence, and it lifts up Jesus!

There’s nothing like worship that is Spirit-filled and exalts the name of Christ. I hope that you have participated in it this morning and like the crowd on that Palm Sunday, that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem...I hope you welcomed Jesus into this place and into your heart with praise and pleas of “Hosanna” – which is an appeal for help...for salvation...for deliverance. It means to “Save Now”.

That’s what the people in Jerusalem were hoping Jesus would do when he came into the city on what would be the final week of physically walking this earth with his disciples.

In my study this week, I was amazed at the similarities that exist between the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem on Passover and the arrival of Paul in Jerusalem on Pentecost. And we’ll talk about some of those similarities in our time together today.

This is where we are in our *FORWARD* series. The title of the message is: **Trust and Obey**

I was just speaking of singing. That’s the title of one of my favorite hymns.

Illus. Phase 2 - I was speaking at what we call our *Phase Two Widows Ministry* earlier this week. This is a ministry that our deacons and many of their wives help put on and serve at each month. They host a dinner for the widows in our church.

It’s a wonderful fellowship and I’m so grateful our men own this ministry like they do. I tell the widows that join us that they are in a club that no one wishes to be in! Many were married and shared a life partner for years and that person is no longer by their side.

Which by the way...makes me so happy that Easter is coming! You do know that’s next week! Just making sure! Easter...or Resurrection Sunday as I like to refer to it is a reminder that even in death there is life! Even when it seems most hopeless, because of the Resurrection of Jesus there is always hope. And because Jesus is alive you will see your loved ones that died “in Christ” again – the resurrection assures this!

This past week at the widow's banquet, I opened it up for questions (I don't know if that was wise or not!) It was GREAT! But someone asked me my favorite hymn. And I was thinking about it and pulled out my "Hymns" playlist and the first one on the list is the title of the message: *Trust and Obey*.

I listened to these lyrics and to me, they are not only the theme of the passage (passages) we are going to look at today, but seem to me they should be the theme of the Christian life.

I want to read these lyrics and I want it to serve as the backdrop against all we talk about today.

**When we walk with the Lord
in the light of his word,
what a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will,
he abides with us still,
and with all who will trust and obey.**

**Not a burden we bear,
not a sorrow we share,
but our toil he doth richly repay;
not a grief or a loss,
not a frown or a cross,
but is blest if we trust and obey.**

**But we never can prove
the delights of his love
until all on the altar we lay;
for the favor he shows,
for the joy he bestows,
are for them who will trust and obey.**

**Then in fellowship sweet
we will sit at his feet,
or we'll walk by his side in the way;
what he says we will do,
where he sends we will go;
never fear, only trust and obey.**

**Trust and obey, for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.**

This was originally written by a presbyterian pastor by the name of John H. Sammis in 1887. Had it been written in Paul's day, I'm certain he would have been singing it to himself as he made his way into Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third missionary journey, and we'll see why I say that by the end of our time together.

Now, I want to break this message up in three sections:

- Section one: We will cover why Paul is headed to Jerusalem and some of what happens there.
- Section two: I am really excited about is something only God could arrange because I'm not smart enough to plan it out. We're going to look at this section and compare the arrival of Paul in Jerusalem and what takes place there to the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday...some AMAZING similarities with one MAJOR difference.
- Section three: This will be our take-away section and spoiler alert here! Don't leave after I say this, but it has something to do with the title of the message and the song I just gave you the lyrics to – Trust and obey.

So, let's get after it. Let me do a broad stroke if I can and cover Paul's journey to Jerusalem and highlight some things that happened there.

Now, if you remember, this was Paul's goal from the get go. On this third missionary journey, he was strengthening churches...spending the majority of his time here in Ephesus (**SHOW MAP**).

However, as he planted churches and checked on churches, he was also gathering an offering from them so that he could take it to Jerusalem and the Jerusalem church could be blessed by these predominately Gentile churches.

Paul was always urging unity in Christ and wanted the Church to be the supreme display of this unity.

We unpacked Acts 20 last week. Paul met with these elders that he had invested his life in from Ephesus and he knew he wasn't going to see them again. And he tells them of his plans to go to Jerusalem and in a bit of foreshadowing...evidently he sensed from the Holy Spirit things were going to be difficult once he arrived there.

Acts 20:22-25 – “And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.”

And they kneel together...and they weep together...and they pray for one another. And Paul heads on to Jerusalem with the goal of being there for Pentecost – this is what Christians would be celebrating – the arrival of the Holy Spirit, but keep in mind for Jewish believers, it was not only Pentecost but the Feast of Weeks.

This was a week-long celebration that Jews from all over the world would come and attend celebrating God's provision in their life. I say this to emphasize that Paul is not the only one headed to Jerusalem. The city is going to be packed with thousands and thousands of people who have made the spiritual pilgrimage!

So, we trace his steps as we have this whole time. He gets on a boat and makes his way to Jerusalem and let me just highlight some things that happen on his way.

First, is he runs into some people that tell him not to go to Jerusalem. The scripture says he makes his way (**SHOW MAP**) from Cos to Rhodes to Patara. He gets on another boat (v. 1-3) that is crossing to the region of Phoenicia. They end up landing at Tyre and it's here that Paul finds some disciples:

Acts 21:4 – “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.”

And look they weren't the only ones saying this! Paul boards a ship from there ultimately makes it down to Caesarea by the sea. He goes into the house of Phillip the evangelist – the last time we read about him was in Acts 8 when he was sharing Jesus with the man from Ethiopia.

Here he is in Caesarea now and the scripture says a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea, stayed with them and listen to his prophecy:

Acts 21:11-15 – “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.’” (Well, welcome to the party, Agabus! Every party has a pooper! I'm sure, Paul was thinking, “who invited this guy?!”) ¹² **When we heard this** (Luke is there...this is a first-person account), **we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **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.”** ¹⁴ **And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.”** ¹⁵ **After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.”**

Now, before proceeding, let's just pause here...feel like we need to address this. Paul said (Acts 20) he feels led by the Spirit (“constrained by the Spirit – it's a word that means “bound by” – tied to”) to get to Jerusalem.

These disciples in Tyre the scripture says, “through the Spirit” were telling Paul NOT to go to Jerusalem. His friends here in Phillip's house heard what awaited him there and they begged him NOT to go. What is Paul to do?

How do we know who is really hearing from the Spirit here because evidently the Spirit is telling Paul one thing and telling these disciples something else!

Should Paul listen to these friends who love him and want the best for him? How do we know God is not using them to give wisdom and counsel to Paul to stay away from Jerusalem?

How do we handle this? What are we supposed to do when we feel like Paul, “constrained by the Spirit”, to do something...to go somewhere...to speak a word to someone, but we have someone else that we know who walks with God sensing a different direction for our lives and sharing with us their thoughts?

Add on top of that friends that love us and we know have our best interests at heart and they give us counsel or advice that is different than what we sense God is leading us to do – this is a TOUGH situation!

So, let me very quickly give you some interpretative rules as you discern the voice of the Spirit of God. We need this because God speaks to us by his Spirit and when he speaks we need to obey, no matter what the cost AND no matter who we upset.

It’s the title of the message...trust and obey. Say it with me: “Trust and obey”.

For us to “trust and obey” we NEED to know with confidence it’s the Spirit of God speaking to us. So how we can discern the Spirit of God’s voice? Let me give you five quick tests.

The scripture tells us in **1 John 4:1** – **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”**

When you sense God speaking before you “trust and obey” test and make sure it’s the Holy Spirit. Here are five tests to help you discern the voice of the Spirit of God.

1. The Peace Test

1 Cor. 14:33 – **“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”**

Whenever God is speaking and asking us to do something, typically there will be a peace within that follows it. It doesn’t mean what he is asking is easy or be without pain or that all the steps to what God is asking you will be laid out plainly in front of us.

What it means though is as you make your decision, like a lake on a smooth day, this is how it will be with your soul...smooth as glass.

When Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure, he spoke to them about the work and role of the Holy Spirit and said in:

John 14:27 – **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”**

God gives peace when we are following him and if there is a voice that is creating chaos, confusion or causing strife with others or sin, that’s not the voice of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Bible Test

Listen, God's Spirit and his Word ALWAYS align. ALWAYS. They will never, ever contradict one another. So, the Bible test goes like this: If you think God, the Spirit is speaking to you about something, whatever it is, the first way to test what is being said is to pick up your Bible and filter what you are hearing through his word.

He will never ask you to sin. He will never ask you to go against what his word clearly teaches. If you think you are hearing from the Lord that you're supposed to embezzle some money to help someone in need or hide something from your spouse so you don't hurt their feelings, just cross reference that with the Bible...you'll see very quickly what you are hearing isn't lining up with scripture.

3. The Godly Counsel Test

The proverbs are full of verses compelling us to surround ourselves with godly counsel and to seek godly wisdom when making a decision.

Prov. 12:15 – “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”

Prov. 11:14 – “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”

Prov. 15:22 – “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”

These are just some! Here are two more!

Prov. 19:20 – “Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”

Prov. 24:6 – “For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

God has put people in our life that know us and love us. We should go to them and seek their counsel. We listen to them and hear their input. It could help us avoid making a wrong decision or a bad decision. And this goes right along with our next test.

4. The Wisdom Test

James 1:5 – “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

The Spirit of God is always going to lead you in the way of wisdom. Now, what he may ask you on the surface may not make sense from an earthly standpoint, but what is wisdom...wisdom begins (Prov. 9:10) with a fear of the Lord.

So, in whatever choice is before us, if at the core, we are NOT simply doing what we think is best or what we want to do personally, but instead we are fearing the Lord...honoring the Lord – IF this is at the core, than chances are HIGHLY likely we are choosing the way of wisdom and listening to the voice of the Spirit.

5. The Faith Test

This is the final test to know whether what you are hearing or sensing is from the Holy Spirit. I don't know how else to say this except to say that the Holy Spirit's native tongue is faith.

Most of us...our native tongue is English. For those in our Spanish service, it's espanol...it's Spanish. If you want to know the native language the Holy Spirit speaks, it's faith.

So, when you think you have heard from him, you can lay it across the backdrop of faith.

- Is what you are hearing getting you out of your comfort zone?
- Is it stretching you?
- Is it something that can only be done if Jesus shows up and helps?

If that's the case, then I'd say lean in, chances are high that it's the voice of the Spirit.

In Paul's case, he sensed he had heard from the Lord. And when the counsel of friends was different than what he heard, he went with God...and the decision was to "Trust and Obey" the Lord!

Sometimes those that love you the most, may not agree with what you sense God is speaking to you...in those times, filter through the other tests and ultimately you have to go with God!

Paul was heading to Jerusalem – this is where he sensed God wanted him...even though his friends were trying to stop him and in his heart, he knew there may be a cost associated with his decision. But again, it was "trust and obey".

Now, we're going to switch gears here and this is where God just blew me away this week because again, I can't make this stuff up!

We've had the preaching schedule planned since January. And on this day (Palm Sunday), we had scheduled to preach this text and I had NO IDEA the similarities that existed between these two events in scripture.

I just want to go down a list and give you seven similarities in Paul going to Jerusalem at Pentecost and Jesus going into Jerusalem at Passover – what we know now as Palm Sunday.

What I'm about to give you is nothing more than an FAQ. To someone who studies the bible, it's just so interesting, I have to point it out. This part of the message will probably be more educational than enlightening, but we HAVE to cover it!

We'll go quickly. Here it is: Seven similarities between Jesus and Paul going to Jerusalem. There may be more than this, but this is a list I came up with and just kind of jumped off the page to me.

1. Both had their mind set on going to Jerusalem

We just read what Paul said. He said, "Y'all are breaking my heart. I'm GOING to Jerusalem even if it means I die. Jesus...he too was set on going to Jerusalem and the difference here is, Jesus KNEW he was going to die!

Luke 9:51 – "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

There was no stopping Jesus. He was going to Jerusalem. Interesting though as we just saw...here is the second similarity:

2. Both were told by friends not to go to Jerusalem

Paul was told by his friends, don't go. Jesus was told by his disciples not to go! Peter actually rebuked the Lord when Jesus told him he was going to Jerusalem and would be put to death.

Matt. 16:21-23 – "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." (May be a good idea...just putting this in your mind, to not rebuke the Lord! He knows a little bit more than us!)²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

3. Both knew they were going to suffer when they arrived in Jerusalem

We've seen this prophesied with Paul. Agabus took off his belt and bound his hands and feet. He said this is going to happen if you go to Jerusalem.

Jesus knew suffering was his fate. He told the disciples over and over again that he was going to Jerusalem and would be delivered over to the authorities and put to death.

Matt. 20:17-19 – "And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

4. Both came to Jerusalem with friends

I think this is interesting. Paul came with several men...we mentioned them by name last week. One is Trophimus who we will read more about in just a moment.

Sopater was with Paul. Aristarchus as well. Tychicus - "tick". He came with friends. And Jesus came with friends. He and all his disciples came to Jerusalem together.

If I had to give a point of application here, I think it's worthy to note that both Jesus and Paul wanted people around...the ministry of presence does wonders when you are struggling or suffering.

I think it's also worthy to note that they had people that wanted to be around them! We saw this last week, in life, friendships matter, and both these men came to Jerusalem with friends. We NEED good friendships in our life.

5. Both were welcomed upon their arrival in Jerusalem

Paul was welcomed by the elders. Look at **Acts 21:17-20a** – **“When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God...”**

The Church in Jerusalem welcomed Paul when he arrived and I assume Paul gave them the offering he collected and then told them all God did and they celebrated together.

As you know, Jesus was welcomed upon his arrival in Jerusalem. The people celebrated and waved palm branches in his honor (i.e. Palm Sunday). And as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, Jesus gets on the back of a donkey and rides the donkey into Jerusalem to the cries of the people.

Luke 19:36-38 – **“And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”**

They were thinking this is the celebrated Messiah we have been waiting on! The people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. They'd soon turn on him and that leads to another similarity between Paul and Jesus.

6. Both experienced conflict in the Temple in Jerusalem

For Paul, it happened because some people accused him of bringing his Gentile friends into the Temple and not keeping them in the courtyard that was set aside specifically for Gentiles.

Now, this didn't actually happen, but some Jews who had made the journey down from Asia and had caused trouble for Paul there, were now causing trouble for him here.

Acts 21:27-31 – “When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,²⁸ crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”²⁹ For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.³⁰ Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.”

Paul here is about to be beaten to death for this uproar caused in the Temple. Jesus experienced conflict in the Temple. On Monday...and this would be a GREAT exercise for you this week!

Illus. Follow the Passion Story this week

On Monday, he creates a stir because he drives the moneychangers and those taking advantage of people trying to offer sacrifices out of the temple...he overturned some tables and drove them out with a whip!

He would teach every day in the Temple on that Passion week— Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. It was on Wednesday the religious leaders had had enough.

Luke 21:37-22:2 – “And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet.³⁸ And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover.² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.”

This leads to the seventh and last similarity and that is:

7. Both were seized and arrested in Jerusalem

Paul upon being dragged out of the temple is about to be beaten to death, but then the Calvary arrives...literally!

Acts 21:31-35 – “And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.³² He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. (Pax Romana – the peace of Rome! No matter what, you kept the peace!) And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.³³ Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done.³⁴ Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.³⁵ And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by

the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd,³⁶ for the mob of the people followed, crying out, “Away with him!”

Sound familiar? Paul is walking literally in the footsteps of Jesus, his Lord. Those “steps” mentioned in (v. 35) - highly likely are the same steps (Atonia Fortress) that Jesus would have walked up when he was arrested and the crowds shouted away with him.

Jesus of course was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and then brought to the House of Caiaphas for his arraignment and mock trial. And here is where the similarities cease.

Because in Acts 22, Paul makes the first of what will be five defenses for his faith as we close out Acts (in the two weeks after Easter). And in each of his defenses, he simply shares the reasons he is a follower of Jesus.

Next week at Easter this is exactly what I am going to share. I am going to share with those that attend four reasons why I am a follower of Jesus. I hope you will be back next week and invite someone to come with you.

Paul gives a defense for this faith...for why he believes Jesus and follows Jesus, and this is where the similarities stop. Paul gives a defense and lives to tell about.

Jesus in Jerusalem, when he was arrested remains silent (he doesn't defend himself at all!). He doesn't say a word.

Isaiah 53:7 – “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Jesus doesn't give a defense, he gives his life! And THIS is the beauty of Jesus going into Jerusalem all those years ago...this is what Palm Sunday is all about. Jesus knew when He went what was before him...and he still went!

He went to the Garden. And if you recall, he prayed...he trusted (not my will, but yours be done)...he obeyed and went to the cross.

And as a result, he secured our salvation AND in doing so left us an example.

1 Pet. 2:21-24 – “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (Trust and obey) ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

How could Paul go to Jerusalem and face what he was to face? He found his example in Jesus going to Jerusalem and facing what he had to face.

Some of you today are headed toward your own Jerusalem if you will! And what awaits you is what awaited Paul...what awaited Jesus:

- Tough times...
- misunderstandings...
- pain....
- trials...

Your Jerusalem may even involve suffering and maybe even death.

How do you face your Jerusalem? They same way Jesus did. The same way Paul did.

You TRUST and OBEY...for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.