Living A Life of Conviction
Acts 21:10-14 (NKJV)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter twenty-one. And let’s read verses 10-14.

Acts 21:10-14 (NKJV)

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.”

Prayer
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Message for THE LORD’S DAY EVENING, September 11, 2016
Christian Hope Church of Christ, Plymouth, North Carolina
by Reggie A. Braziel, Minister
Introduction

Christianity has never been a religion for the faint of heart or the cowardly.

The pages of Church history are filled with story after story of brave Christian men and women who exhibited incredible courage and conviction even in the face of death.

It has been said of these noble martyrs: “They preached the gospel through the shedding of their blood and their gaping wounds.”

Let me share just a few stories of some of our brave Christian brothers and sisters.

POLYCARP

In Revelation 2 we read Christ’s letter to the Church at Smyrna. As Christ notes in His letter, the Church at Smyrna endured horrific persecution.

In the year 162 A.D. a man named POLYCARP, who was a “bishop” or elder in the Church at Smyrna was captured and brought before the Roman Procounsel. The Procousel commanded Polycarp to denounce his faith in Jesus Christ and they would let him go.

Polycarp responded, “Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and never once has He wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Upon his refusal to denounce Christ, the Procounsel ordered that Polycarp be burned at the stake. Eye-witnesses to his execution said, “The flame seemed to form an arch around him and rather than seeing him burn in agony, they described his death as though they saw gold being refined in fire.”
BLANDINA

A second century Christian mother named BLANDINA was captured along with her children. After Blandina blessed each of her children they were taken from her and cruelly tortured right before her eyes.

The soldiers told Blandina if she would denounce her faith in Jesus Christ, they would spare the lives of her children.

After refusing to denounce her LORD, the soldiers took Blandina and wrapped her tightly in a net so as not to escape, and threw her in an arena with a raging bull. After being viciously tossed and gored in the presence of a cheering crowd, Blandina drew her final breath and dismissed her spirit into the loving arms of her Lord.

PERPETUA

Perpetua was a twenty-two year old wife and mother of a young son, and a devout Christian. On March 7th in the year 203 A.D. Perpetua and four other women, including one that had just given birth two days earlier, were sentenced to die for refusing to denounce their faith in Christ.

Following her death, three eye-witnesses told accounts of how Perpetua's father, a pagan came to the prison many times trying to get her to denounce her faith in Christ. And on the day of her execution he came one final time and brought her whole family with him.
Taking Perpetua by the hand, her father said:

“Daughter, have pity on my gray hairs; have pity on your father. Do not give me over to disgrace. Behold your brothers, and your mother, and your aunt, and behold your child who cannot live without you. Do not destroy us all.”

Perpetua comforted her father and said, “In this trial, what GOD determines will take place. We are not in our own keeping, but in God's.” Her family left weeping after saying their final good-byes.

Shortly afterwards, Roman soldiers came to the prison and led Perpetua and the four other women to the arena and released a wild boar......a bear......a leopard ......and a bull , as the crowd cheered each vicious attack upon the women by the wild beasts. When Perpetua was the only one remaining, a soldier drew his sword and ended her life to the thunderous roar of the crowd.

( You can read the inspirational accounts of these and many others in FOXES BOOK OF MARTYRS. )

THE APOSTLE PAUL

But throughout the pages of Church history perhaps no one demonstrated more faith......more courage......and more conviction in the face of danger and death itself than the apostle Paul.

As this 21st chapter of Acts begins, Paul has just completed his third missionary journey. He is now headed back to Jerusalem to present the Church at Jerusalem an offering he had collected from several of the Churches he had visited on his journey. Paul is hoping this offering will help “bridge the gap” between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians so that they might see they are all ONE IN CHRIST.
As Paul was making his way back to Jerusalem he made several stops along the way. And every place Paul stopped, his brothers and sisters-in-Christ tried to discourage him from returning to Jerusalem because they were aware there were those in Jerusalem who would try to kill him if ever set foot inside their city again. But despite their warnings, Paul continued on toward Jerusalem.

And so as we come to our text in verses 10-14, Paul has now arrived in the coastal town of Caesarea. Paul is now only 57 miles from Jerusalem.

While in Caesarea, Paul stays in the home of Philip the evangelist. This is the same Philip we read about in Acts chapter six who was one of the seven men chosen by the apostles to look after the needs of the Greek widows in the Church in Jerusalem who were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

While Paul was staying with Philip, he received a rather unusual visitor.

verse 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Now isn’t the first time Paul had met this prophet named Agabus. In Acts 11 we read that while Paul was in Antioch before he and Barnabas left on their first missionary journey, Agabus came to the Church in Antioch to reveal a message he had received from the Holy Spirit that there was going to be a world-wide famine. And Acts 11:28 tells us this world-wide famine did in fact happen during the reign of Claudius Caesar.
So now this same prophet comes to Philip’s house in Caesarea to see Paul. And once again, Agabus has come with a warning...... a personal warning to Paul himself.

verse 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.’”

When Philip and the others present heard this warning from Agabus they begged and pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

But notice Paul’s response in verse 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.”

Now, if someone came to you and told you “don't go to such and such place, because bad things are going to happen to you if you do” we would probably think twice about going wouldn't we? In fact, we probably wouldn't even have to think twice.......we simply wouldn't go!

Agabus had just told Paul, “Bad things are going to happen to you if you go on to Jerusalem.” Why would Paul deliberately ignore Agabus' warning? Why would Paul deliberately go on to Jerusalem knowing full well he would be beaten, and arrested, and potentially killed?

Some might label Paul “reckless” or “a fool,” but the truth was Paul was a man of unwavering courage and conviction.
APPLICATION

I believe deep down in our hearts all of us would like to have the courage and conviction of a Polycarp......or a Blandina......or a Perpetua......or the apostle Paul.

I believe down deep all of us would like to have enough courage and conviction to take a bold stand for Christ in the presence of our non-Christian family members and friends.

But the question is, “How do we do it?” “How do you and I live a life of conviction?”

When we look at the example of the apostle Paul as well as the examples of those who have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for Christ down through the centuries, we see three common characteristics in each of them.

First of all......

I. Living A Life of Conviction Requires An UNDYING COMMITMENT To Jesus Christ

1. I want you to listen again to Paul's response to Agabus after Agabus warned him of the dangers of going to Jerusalem.

verse 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.”
2. Listen to these other familiar statements of Paul in the New Testament that reveals Paul's **UNDYING COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST**.

**Philippians 1:21 (NKJV)**  
“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

**Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)**  
“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

**II Timothy 4:7,8 (NKJV)**  
“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but to all who have loved His appearing.”

3. Paul's courage and conviction was **born out of his undying commitment to the LORD Jesus Christ**, and the same thing is true of you and me.

Our courage and conviction as Christians **will be equal to our commitment** to the LORD JESUS CHRIST! Our courage and conviction **will NEVER surpass the level of our commitment to Jesus**.

4. You see, the truth is **not everyone who professes to be a Christian is equally committed to Jesus**. There are **different levels of commitment**:

(A) Some have **AN INCOMPLETE COMMITMENT**. In other words, they have never fully surrendered their lives to Christ. They may have been baptized when they were young and they may have been going to Church their whole lives, but they have never fully surrendered their heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.
(B) Some have **AN INSINCERE COMMITMENT.** They are all about “outward appearances.” Rather than being seriously committed to Christ, they work hard at making others think they are seriously committed. They talk like a Christian and act like a Christian when they are with fellow Christians, but it's all an act....it's all a show to mask over the truth that their heart is far, far from God. The Bible has a name for people like this. The Bible calls them “hypocrites.”

Some have **AN INCOMPLETE COMMITMENT......**Some have **AN INSINCERE COMMITMENT,** and then there are some who have........

(C) Some have **AN INCONSISTENT COMMITMENT.** These folks run “hot and cold” spiritually. Today they are committed, but who knows if they will be tomorrow. For awhile they are on “fire” for the Lord, and then they “cool off.” They may be in Church every time the Church doors are open for several months, and next thing you know they disappear for weeks or even months at a time. Their commitment to the LORD is inconsistent!

(D) And then some have **AN INDESTRUCTABLE COMMITMENT.** These believers are totally abandoned to Jesus Christ! They are completely “sold out” to Jesus! They are all in. They can't be diverted.....discouraged.....or distracted from following Jesus.

5. This is the kind of commitment the apostle Paul had that would not deter him from going on to Jerusalem despite the dangers that were facing him.

6. And if you and I are to **LIVE A LIFE OF CONVICTION** we too must have this kind of “indestructable” UNDYING COMMITMENT TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST!
Secondly.....

II. Living A Life of Conviction Requires An UN-ASHAMED LOVE For Jesus Christ

1. When someone is deeply in love with someone else they don’t hide it do they?

-They constantly think about the one they love.
-They can’t have a conversation with someone without talking about the one they love.
-Their whole life is wrapped up in the one they love.

ILLUSTRATION

Our daughter Tammy and her husband Reubin have a huge grassy lot behind their house. Normally Reubin mows the yard in straight lines. But one day last summer Tammy looked outside and noticed Reubin was just kind of “all over the place” with the mower.

At first she didn’t think much about it, but after awhile curiosity got the best of her and she just had to go out and see what Reubin was up to. Imagine her surprise when she looked at the yard and saw that Reubin had mowed the words: “I LOVE TAMMY” in the grass.

(And all the women said, “A-w-w-w-w-wh.”)
2. Is there any doubt that **the love of the apostle Paul's life was Jesus Christ**?

Paul writes in **Philippians 3:7-11 (NKJV)**......

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the **sake of Christ**.

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may **gain Christ**

9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

10 **I want to know Christ**—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming **like him in his death**,

11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

3. In case you weren't keeping track, Paul mentioned the **name of Christ five times in those few short verses**.

Everywhere Paul went he talked about Christ. It didn't matter if he was in **a prison or a palace** .....on a ship or in a synagogue......Paul told others about “the love of his life” the LORD JESUS CHRIST!

THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE OF CONVICTION DO!
4. What is the state of your love for Jesus Christ? I'm not asking you about your doctrinal beliefs......or....how often you read the Bible......or .....how many times a week you go to Church.

I'm asking you, “Do other people know that you are UN–ASHAMEDLY IN LOVE WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?

Living A Life of CONVICTION requires....... An UNDYING COMMITMENT To Jesus Christ and AN UN-ASHAMED LOVE For Jesus Christ.

And thirdly.....

III. Living A Life of Conviction Requires AN UN-WAVERING OBEDIENCE To Christ

1. Paul writes in Philippians 2 how Christ learned obedience through suffering and His death upon the cross.

   The apostle Paul learned obedience in the same way.

2. We are all familiar with Paul's list of things he had suffered because he obeyed the Lord's command to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

   Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. — II Corinthians 11:23-28 (NKJV)
3. Paul had an **UN-WAVERING OBEDIENCE to Christ**! He went anywhere the Lord commanded him to go and did everything the Lord commanded him to do, even if his obedience resulted in great suffering.

4. I believe each and everyone of us needs to ask ourselves this soul-searching question: **“How far am I willing to go in my obedience to the Lord?”**

I heard Dr. Jack Graham say something recently in one of his sermons on the radio. He said, **“God will likely never send most of us to the ends of the earth to share the gospel with someone, but He will send us to the end of the street to share the gospel with a lost relative or friend. Will you obey and go?”**

5. Living a life of conviction requires **AN UN-WAVERING OBEDIENCE TO GOD!**

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Christian author and speaker Tony Campolo tells this touching story of an experience he had during a Junior High week of Church Camp.

One of the boys there that week suffered from what is called spastic paralysis which causes the arms, legs, and face to suddenly draw up and become distorted. The other boys there that week mercilessly mocked the young man as Junior High boys will do.

But one night Tony Campolo asked the young man with spastic paralysis if he would have the nightly dorm devotion before they went to bed. With his body convulsing and jerking uncontrollably, the boy stood up and boldly said, “Jesus loves me and I love Jesus.” The other boys who had been so insensitively cruel to the young man all week were so touched by the young man’s conviction they were moved to tears as they laid their heads on their pillows that night.

In this age when we are witnessing the collapse of America's morals and values, we must have an un-dying commitment to Christ........an un-ashamed love for Christ.....and an un-wavering obedience to Christ.

May the LORD give us the strength and courage to live a life of conviction!