

# Introduction

- Good morning, church.
- It has been a long time in the making but it is good to finally be here.
- I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of our 50th anniversary celebration.
- I was also incredibly blessed by the installation service, the involvement of my predecessors, and the trust that you have given me. I pray the Lord gives me the wisdom and direction to serve you well.
- Speaking of direction, allow me to begin with a story.
- A short while before we left South Arica to come to Canada, my family travelled out to the Waterberg, a mountain range in the Limpopo Province.
- The venue we stayed at had 3 overlapping hiking trails,

all plotted out in different colours on a map.

- One afternoon, some of the adults decided to go on a hike.
- When we arrived back, my niece and two nephews were a little sad that they had not joined us and so I proposed that we take a short walk up the red trail, which was the shortest but most challenging hike, featuring a lookout point on the mountain face. As the crow flies, it was only about 1km away. I imagined we could get there and back before sunset.
- My brother, an experienced fireman, gave us two torches, just in case.
- And so we set off. While we were on our way, this troop of irritable baboons came hurtling across the trail, shouting at each other as they went. At this point, we decided that we needed some good walking sticks, since the ground was a little uneven and one of us might slip and fall.
- We reached the lookout point in the glow of the setting sun and took turns seeing who could shout louder than the baboons we had encountered along the way.

- Then we looked at the map, figuring that we were about half way through the trail, that it would take as long to finish as it would to backtrack, and that we would plough ahead.
- We started walking as the sun continued to set.
- Not long after, the trail, which was marked out with arrows painted on rocks, became challenging.
- We reached a point where we could not find a marker. We all searched for a while and eventually found one that was unclear. The colours of the trails overlapped.
- We wondered if we should backtrack or carry on, but now we estimated that we were about two thirds of the way through the trail and it would take longer to go back. We all considered the same information and we all made a judgment call that we needed to continue ahead.
- Before long, we found ourselves hiking a red trail that had been decommissioned, at dusk.
- The kids were having a great time, joking around and stopping to take selfies as we went.
- I, however, was experiencing a growing sense of

trepidation:

- As I looked at the map, I could see that we were off course and were heading deep into the mountain.
- What was once a pathway had now grown over.
- There were massive spiderwebs interlocking every tree, blocking our way.
- I was having to hack my way through bush-veld and spiderwebs and scout for old, weathered trail markers by torch in the growing dark.
- On top of this, I know that there is big game in the park. Earlier that day, I had seen Leopard tracks and had been informed that sometimes, they would get some uninvited guests.
- Also, there are several species of highly venomous snakes that are common to the area:
  - The Spitting Cobra.
  - The Snouted Cobra.
  - The Puff Adder.
  - Boomslang.

- Black Mamba.
- I was panicking because I was the responsible adult and I needed to get these kids home safely.
- The kids, however, were finding me to be especially entertaining. The oldest nephew decided to start playing some songs on his phone, to set the mood. First, it was John Fogerty with “Run through the jungle.” Next it was John Denver with “Country Roads.”
- All the while, they were having a good laugh, while I was singularly focussed on the task at hand.
- In time, we made our way back to camp, well after dark, via a trail that was no longer even on the map.
- This story got me thinking about the way in which we navigate our way through the Christian life.
  - We all have markers.
  - We all have a guidebook.
  - We all have helpful tools to illuminate the path.

- We all have things that threaten to harm and derail us along the way.
- The way in which we navigate the journey is significantly impacted by
  - The lens we are looking through, and
  - The role we are playing in the travelling party.
- This dynamic is evident in the life of Paul as he neared the end of his third missionary journey.
- Today, I would like to pick up the series on Acts and walk briskly through select sections of chapters 19 through 25, providing 3 guiding principles that I believe will be helpful for us as we navigate our way through the next season at SVBC.

## 1. The Spirit is consistent, even when we are not.

- On his 3rd missionary journey, Paul heads north-west through Asia Minor, visiting the churches in Galatia before arriving at his main destination, which was Ephesus. He

stayed here for over 2 years and enjoyed much fruitful ministry there.

- People were giving up their magic arts. This affected the businesses of craftsmen who made a living making shrines of Artemis. This sparked a riot, which would mark Paul's departure.

- However, before this happens, Luke says something significant:

**Acts 19:21 ESV**

<sup>21</sup> Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

- Even though the exact mechanism of the direction that the Spirit provided is not clear, Paul had arrived at a firm, divinely directed determination before leaving Ephesus that he would go to Jerusalem.

- The riot breaks out, Paul travels to Macedonia and Greece. As he was about to set sail for Syria, a plot was made on his life and so he backtracks the way he had come, taking several companions with him.

- Not wanting to be delayed in Ephesus, Paul stops in

Miletus and sends for the Elders in Ephesus to come to him. When they arrive, he says this following:

**Acts 20:22–23 ESV**

<sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

- Not only has Paul already resolved to go to Jerusalem, he now tells the Ephesian Elders that he has been experiencing a sense of constraint. The Greek carries with it the idea of being “bound.”
- He knows that imprisonment and affliction await. He probably had a natural reservation. Yet, the Spirit was overriding his own inclinations, giving him an internal compulsion to go.
- Paul tells them that they will not see his face again — a clue that he was operating on the basis of some very clear information — and charges them to be attentive and faithful overseers of the flock.
- From there, Paul and His party set sail for Syria, landing in Tyre. Luke then says the following:

### **Acts 21:4 ESV**

<sup>4</sup> 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.

- Notice how their recommendations were explicitly tied to the Spirit.
  
- From here, Paul's party travels South, down to Caesarea, where they stay for some time with Philip the Evangelist. While they were there, a prophet by the name of Agabus came down from Judea. Approaching Paul's party, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet and said:

### **Acts 21:11 ESV**

<sup>11</sup> "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.' "

- This is, of course, a Spirit-inspired prophetic utterance by a well-known, credible prophet.
  
- In response to this prophecy, Luke says,

### **Acts 21:12 ESV**

<sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

- Notice that Luke says “we and the people there.”
- This included Phillip, Phillip’s 4 daughters, who themselves were prophetesses, Trophimus, Tychicus, Timothy, Gaius, Secundus, Aristarchus, Sopater, Pyrrhus, Luke, and other unnamed believers.
- What I want you to see is that this was no random gathering. These were Spirit-filled people, some of whom had travelled and ministered with Paul over an extended period of time.
- When Paul would not be persuaded, they conceded, saying, “Let the will of the Lord be done.”
- Do you see the challenge?
  - Before leaving Ephesus, Paul had resolved to go to Jerusalem.
  - Then, in Miletus, he said, “I am going.”
  - Then, the believers in Tyre said, “You should not go.”
  - Then, Agabus said, “You will go.”

- Then, the entire party, including some significant NT characters, said, “Please don’t go!”
  
- Who is confused?
  - It is not the Spirit, since the Spirit is God and God cannot contradict Himself.
  
  - It is also not Paul, because a few chapters later, the Lord Jesus Himself appears to Paul during his incarceration and affirms his course of action, saying, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”
  
  - The confusion, therefore, must be with the others.
  
  - Scholars are of the view that these folk were not receiving a Spirit-directed prohibition against his journey. They were receiving the same Spirit-inspired knowledge of the facts that Paul had received.
  
  - However, because of their concern for Paul, they were filtering that information through their affections and concluding that Paul should not go.

- What is the point?
- We all have access to the same information, the same guidebook, and yet we can arrive at different conclusions, depending on the lenses we use and the roles we play.
- Thankfully, **the Spirit is consistent, even when we are not.**
- Now, this might raise some concerns for us.
  - How do we know anything for sure?
  - If so many Spirit-filled heavy-hitters in the NT got it wrong, what hope do we have?
  - Who can we trust to perceive the guidance of the Lord and interpret it correctly?
- Thankfully, the way the narrative unfolds demonstrates that nothing takes God by surprise.
- This brings me to my next guiding principle.

## 2. The Spirit is a Master Coordinator and will ensure that His purposes prevail.

- As I read the narrative, it seems to me that over the course of the next few chapters, there are multiple role-players who do and say things which, taken in themselves, threatened to undermine Paul's trajectory, but taken together, demonstrates the principle that God is sovereign and coordinates all things — good and bad — for the accomplishment of His purposes.
- Let me show you what I mean.
- When they arrived in Jerusalem, James and the Elders tried to “make a plan,” encouraging Paul to shave his head as part of a Nazarite vow, demonstrating respect for the law of Moses, in the hope that he might be embraced by the Jewish community.
- This plan might have worked, but then along came Jews from Asia — where Paul had just come from — and stirred up the whole crowd to lay hands on him. They seized him and dragged him out of the temple, with the intention of killing him.

- This plan might have worked, but then word came to the Tribune, who took soldiers and ran down to intervene, carrying Paul away to the barracks, because of the violence of the crowd.
- This might have turned out for Paul's good, but then he asked to speak to the people. Of course, Paul could not help but speak about Jesus. This sent them into an uproar. They were shouting, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!"
- The Tribune then ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks and examined by flogging, to find out why these people were so desirous of his blood.
- This plan might have worked for any other person, but Paul objected that he was a Roman citizen and that it was unlawful for them to flog him and to keep him.
- This objection should have worked but instead of releasing him, the Tribune decided to call the Jewish council together and to set Paul before them, so that they might decide his case.
- This plan might have worked, except that the first words out of Paul's mouth aggravated the high priest and he ordered for Paul to be struck in the mouth.

- At this point, Paul noticed that there were both Sadducees and Pharisees in the room and in an attempt to garner some support, he identified as a Pharisee and told them that it was because of his hope for a resurrection that he was on trial.
- This plan almost worked, except that it stirred up such a dissension, a fight broke out. The Tribune feared that Paul would be torn to pieces and so he ordered that he be removed by force and returned to the barracks.
- By this time, the Jews were so sick and tired of Paul that more than 40 of them bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed him. They colluded with the chief priests and elders to approach the Tribune for another council gathering, so that they might ambush and kill him en route.
- This plan might have worked, except that Paul's nephew overheard their scheming and took the news to Paul, who sent him with a Roman centurion to inform the Tribune.
- It is at this point that the Tribune called for two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to take Paul to Felix the Governor in Caesarea.

- And with that, Paul's time in Jerusalem came to a close!
- According to Acts 24:11, a mere 12 days had passed from the point where he had left for Jerusalem until he arrived back in Caesarea.
- If you are like me, you might have asked, what was the point?
  - The trip seemed to bear no fruit!
  - Jerusalem was hostile towards him and he seemed to spend most of his time defending himself.
  - Why all of the jostling over whether or not he should return to Jerusalem and in less than 2 weeks he is in custody, his life is at risk, and he is sent back to Caesarea?
- This, of course, is my point:
  - God used the free movements and actions of all of these role-players — Paul himself, the apostle James, the Elders in Jerusalem, the Jews from Asia, the Tribune, the Jewish Council, 40 would-be assassins, Paul's nephew, a Roman centurion, two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen — to bring Paul to the point where

he wanted him so that his purposes would prevail.

- Now, from our vantage point, the point to which Paul had been brought appears to be rather dire.

- But what we discover is that through these events, and some others that would follow, Paul had opportunity to share the gospel with 2 Roman Governors, Herod Agrippa II (the king) and his sister Bernice, and some of the most prominent men across Syria.

- What is the point?

- **The Spirit is a master coordinator and will ensure that His purposes prevail.**

- Speaking of divine coordination, it would be amiss of me not to share with you some of the ways in which we saw the Lord at work in our move to Canada.

- We know that you were praying and I wanted to share some of these details with you to encourage you and to thank you.

- When things started to become serious with SVBC, Rene let us know that they wanted us to fly out for a candidating week. We discovered that applications for

travel visas to Canada were taking over 500 days. Since we and the call committee were confident that this was of God, we decided to apply for a work visa instead. That process should have taken 3-6 months. It took 1 month.

- Once the visas came through and we had more of a sense of security, we put our townhouse — an investment property — on the market. It sold in 4 days, very close to our asking price.
- When we arrived, we discovered that someone had left a cheque for us with a generous financial gift. Cindy-Lou took us down to the bank to see what could be done with it. Turns out this bank had a newcomers programme and were able to open accounts for us. We walked out of the bank and I said to Bev, “This will prove to be providential.” And it was. If I did not have that account and the funds that were given, I would not have been able to pay the deposit on our rental or arrange for our electricity and gas connections.
- The church met on the Tuesday after our candidating week. I needed an 85% vote. There were some abstentions. The rest voted in favour. To receive a 100% vote is unheard of. I thank you for that trust.
- Soon after I heard the news, I picked up the phone and called a gentleman who helps me with odd jobs around

the house. I told him he needed to bring his team and that we needed to get some fixes done in a week. He asked me what the urgency was. I said the house needed to go to market. He asked me if he could tell his wife, who is an agent. I said sure. The next minute, she arrives with people to view the house. The next day, we had an offer. The property was sold before it went to market, for R200K more than we paid for the house a year ago!

- The agent asked me if I had notified the bank of my intention to sell. I said I had not. She said I needed to call them right away and advise them that I plan to sell because if you do not give them 3 months notice, you may be eligible for early bond cancellation fees. A few weeks after, I received a letter from the bank, citing an early bond cancellation penalty of over R40K. The next sentence was one word, with a full stop: Waived. And that without me asking!

- **The Spirit is a master coordinator and will ensure that his purposes prevail.**

- That being said, we are incredibly grateful to each and every one of you for the generous donations and the part you played in ensuring that we enjoyed a soft landing.

- We have wanted for nothing and feel well-loved and incredibly blessed. Thank you!
- I cannot imagine how incredibly difficult it must be to leave family, friends, and home, and move to a foreign land without the support structure we enjoyed.
- Moving across the world is no small feat!
- This brings me to my final guiding principle.

### 3. The Spirit pursues kingdom over comfort.

- If you were to walk into a Christian bookstore, you would not have to look far to find a cup, a cap, a shirt or a bookmark with Romans 8:28 printed on it

#### **Romans 8:28 NIVUK84**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

- We love this verse. It fills us with a sense of hope and confidence.

- But I fear that we look at the verse through the wrong lens. We look at it and wonder what God is going to do for me, what good things He is going to bestow upon me.
- But this verse does not promise a blessed life of ease.
- The good things that God works to bring to fruition find expression within the framework of His kingdom purposes.
- The King has an agenda, and He, together with the other members of the holy trinity, will work to ensure this agenda is played out in the lives of His people.
- That agenda is that we would know God and make Him known.
- That agenda, as it turns out, can at times be very uncomfortable. Take Paul as an example:
  - After the 12-day whirlwind in Jerusalem, his life hit a sudden stop.
  - The Spirit led him directly into a cell, where he would stay for 2 years, before an arduous, life-threatening journey and further incarceration in Rome.
- **The Spirit pursues kingdom over comfort.**

# Conclusion

- Friends, we have just concluded a massive 50th celebration here at SVBC.
- It was a wonderful time of fellowship and remembrance. I came away encouraged by the goodness of God, the rich heritage of the church, the strong family ties and the loving character of this body.
- At the same time, I believe there is a risk. After an event of this magnitude,
  - We can become complacent, feeling like we have arrived, feeling like we can breathe again.
  - We can plateau, feeling like we can get by on the momentum of that which has gone before.
- But we must move. We must navigate our way into the next season.
- We all have the same data, the same guidebook, and the same interpretive clues. We will all respond differently, depending on our respective lenses and the roles we play.

- Making judgment calls is tricky, but we can be confident that
  - The Spirit is consistent, even when we are not.
  - The Spirit is a master coordinator, coordinating all things for the accomplishment of His purposes.
- But here is the challenge to us all as we move into this next season: Are we prepared to pursue the kingdom over comfort? We have, and I am calling on you to do the same.
- This church has thrived for 50 years — primarily because of God’s goodness and grace — but also because of men and women who were prepared to pursue kingdom over comfort.

## Benediction

### **Hebrews 13:20–21 ESV**

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom

be glory forever and ever. Amen.