

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and *Now*
in 30 Minutes



Episode 35 - Directed

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THE SETTING

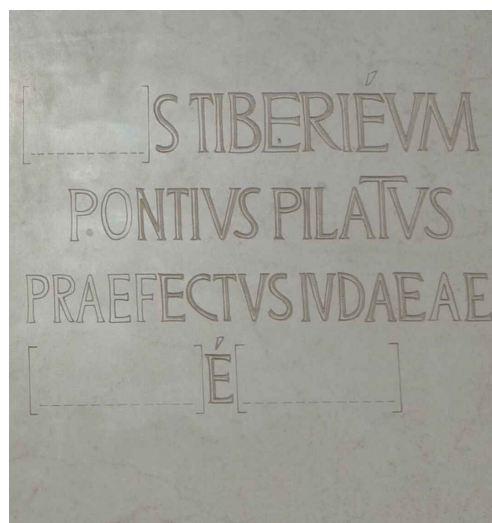


From **Caesarea Maritima**, sitting on the harbour wall where Paul would have landed after his third mission trip on his way to Jerusalem.

For more background information on Caesarea Maritima, please see the guides to episodes 11 and 34.



Looking across to the harbour wall where Paul would have landed



Copy of a dedicatory inscription at

Caesarea Maritima saying “Pontius Pilatus, the prefect of Judea, [erected] a [building dedicated] to [the emperor] Tiberius”- historical proof that Pilate existed.



[Acts 21:10-19](#)



In episode 21, we saw how God wants to guide us as we looked at how he guided Paul through a mix of circumstances, inner conviction and a vision, all of which led him to take the gospel into what we now call Europe. In this episode, we’re going to focus on one particular means of guidance that we have already seen several times in our journey through Acts - the gift of prophecy.

Revelation or confirmation?

Prophecy sometimes reveals something new that we hadn’t considered before, like when the Spirit spoke to Antioch’s leaders about sending Barnabas and Saul on mission ([Acts 13:1-3](#)); but sometimes it simply confirms what we already feel deep in our spirit, as in Acts 21. Paul had stopped off in Tyre and Christians there had already urged him “through the Spirit” not to go on to Jerusalem ([Acts 21:4](#)); now he receives another word telling him more precisely what lies ahead. It came through Agabus, who already had a track record in accurate prophecy ([Acts 11:27-28](#)). So, no doubt Paul would have listened intently.

Affirmation

Two things stand out about his word: it included action to make it more memorable (common with many Old Testament prophets); and it was shared in public not in private. (Be cautious if someone insists on giving you ‘a word’ in private!) This was a word that others could hear and weigh up - something Paul underlines as important to ensure we aren’t led astray (e.g., [1 Cor 14:29](#); [1 Thess 5:19-22](#)). Yet although their response shows that the church affirmed that this was a word from God, Paul interpreted it quite differently to them.

Interpretation

Prophecy needs interpreting; that is, we have to make sense of what it is saying for ourselves. The church interpreted it as a warning that Paul shouldn’t go to Jerusalem because danger lay ahead; but for Paul, it was simply an affirmation of what he knew lay ahead and which he was willing to embrace as God’s plan for him. When the church saw how convinced he was, they stopped trying to persuade him otherwise.

Not all prophecy is directional

By and large it will be just certain Christians - those with the particular gift of prophecy (e.g., [1 Cor 12:10](#)) or who are recognised as prophets (e.g., [1 Cor 12:29](#)) - who will bring directional words. But Paul is also clear that, because all Christians now have the Spirit, they can all prophesy - “for you can all prophesy in turn” he writes ([1 Cor 14:31](#)). What he meant by that, he has already explained: “Everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” ([1 Cor 14:3](#)). So it is a word brought by one Christian to another, directly from God, to strengthen, encourage and comfort them. Paul also says it can be used evangelistically ([1 Cor 14:24-25](#)).

How do I begin?

If you’ve never shared a prophetic word, then the first step is to be open to it and expect it. Then, don’t wait for a white angel on a pink cloud with a gold megaphone; God usually speaks to us through a thought, a Bible verse, a picture, or something we might notice (he often uses the things that interest us or shape our character). So, if you think you have received something, be courageous and share it. If in doubt, step out!

But isn’t the period of prophecy over?

After all, Paul does say that gifts like prophecy and tongues will pass away one day ([1 Cor 13:8-10](#)). But the context he is thinking of is “when completeness [or, perfection] comes” - a reference to the return of Jesus when we won’t need any of the gifts because he himself will be with us. There is certainly no indication that the early church saw that prophecy would pass away one day.



1. Have you ever shared a prophetic word with someone? If not, ask God to help you step out in this. And if you have, but not used it for some time, ask God to help you stir up the gift again.
2. Think back to any key prophetic words that God has brought to your life and reflect on whether you are living out of the good of them.
3. How might being prophetic help the Church to be unstoppable once again?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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