

The Holy Spirit will Lead You

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[0 : 00] So here in Acts 16, we see the very beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. And he'd already been on the first one that we saw in Acts 12 and 14, where he went to Cyprus and where he went to parts of Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey.

And he went there along with his friend Barnabas. Now Acts 15 is that famous Jerusalem council where the elders from all across the church had gathered and had agreed that Gentiles do not have to be circumcised to become a part of the church and be saved.

So we see Paul and Barnabas going from Jerusalem all the way to Antioch to give this message that the council had decided on to encourage their brothers there.

And from there, Paul decides to begin this second missionary journey. And he takes with him, as we see, Silas, who is a prophet, to go and encourage the churches that he had planted during his first journey.

Now, before I get into the sermon, please pray with me. Father God, your servants are listening.

And we pray this morning that you may speak to us by your Spirit.

[1 : 22] In the name of Jesus, amen. Now, the apostles had been with Jesus for three years.

And he had come, and we see in the early parts in the Gospels how Jesus had come, and he called them to follow him. And they drop everything that they had. And we see that especially with Peter and Andrew, standing there with his father with a fishing net, dropping everything to come and to follow Jesus.

They came to trust him and listen to him and obeyed him. Because surely he would be the one who would take them where they needed to go.

But then we see in John 14, Jesus telling them something shocking, something remarkable. That he's going to leave them. That he will no longer in a little while be with him.

Now, imagine what that would be like. If you dropped everything that you had to follow someone and for them to leave you. Who would lead you now?

[2 : 28] Who would be the one that you would follow? When we see Jesus say that he's going to send someone else. Another helper, he's going to send his Holy Spirit.

He will be the one to guide them. He will be the one to lead them. He will guide them, Jesus said, into all truth. Because even though that this saying of Jesus is directed primarily to the apostles, it is indeed for all of us, for all believers.

And when we wonder where we should go, where we should be headed, when we ask, how do we know where I can do ministry, where I can minister to others?

What we see this morning is that the Holy Spirit will lead us. It is the Holy Spirit that will lead us. And because of this, first, just two points this morning, we're to go where he leads.

And second, preach where we go. Okay? So we will go where he leads and preach where we go. So first, look with me at verses 6 and 12.

[3 : 38] Again, we see the text saying that Paul and his companions, they traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. They've been kept by the Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

When they came to this border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia. They went down to Troas.

And during the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, come to Macedonia and help us. After Paul saw this vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace. And the next day, we went to Neapolis, traveling to Philippi, a Roman colony in the leading city of that district of Macedonia.

And we stayed there several days. So here we see Paul, Timothy, and Silas having ministered in Derbe and Lystra and now going through this new region in the province of Galatia.

[4 : 46] Now, it seems like they were going, wanting to go west, where we have Colossae and Ephesus. You may be familiar with these churches because of the letter to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

These were two magnificent big cities, main Roman big cities. It made sense for them to go there. There was this large Roman highway called the Via Sebaste that would take them right there. But we see the Holy Spirit hinders them from speaking in Asia where Ephesus and Colossae are located.

Now, we don't know how the Holy Spirit did this. Was it prophecy? Was it an internal leading of the Holy Spirit? Was it illness? We don't know, and we don't really have to know.

Because the point here is that the Holy Spirit is the one who's directing the mission of Paul, Timothy, and Silas. So being hindered, they continue, not west, but they go north as they make it to the border of Mysia.

[5 : 54] And they try to go into this other Roman province, Bithynia, right by the Black Sea. And this, just like their early attempt to go to Ephesus, makes sense. Here's this big city right on the water, strategic, many ports that they could access from there, being connected by the Roman highways.

But the text tells us that the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them. See, Luke is highlighting for us here in the Gospel of Acts that the Holy Spirit here is the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who sent the Spirit. And if you will remember, at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we see Luke writing that in the very first book, in the Gospel according to Acts, in the Gospel of Luke, he dealt with everything that Jesus began to do and teach.

And from this, we can understand that when we come to Acts here, that it is really what Jesus continued to do through his Holy Spirit in the life of the apostles.

See, Jesus is the one who is guiding his apostles in their mission to spread the Gospel in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[7 : 15] So we see them continuing through Mysia to Troas, you know, on the northwestern part there. And while being there, Paul gets this vision, this remarkable vision, and whenever we see visions, we know something important is about to happen.

We last saw this vision in Acts 10, where Peter has this vision when he's at Simon the Tanner's. And this vision tells him that there's nothing that is to be called unclean, or nothing to be called common, that God himself has made clean.

He's declaring that all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, as Angus prayed earlier, you know, just earlier, are part of the church, from every nation and tribe.

Now, Paul's vision here is slightly different, however. In this vision, we see God using an intermediary. He's using a man to come and speak to Paul. And there's a man calling for Paul to come to Macedonia to help them.

Now, often throughout the Bible, when we see a call for help, it is a call for salvation. Come and save us. See, this man is calling for Paul to come and help, to come and save them.

[8 : 32] How? To save them by proclaiming the gospel, by bringing the very words of life to him. Now, Paul then, having seen this vision, shares it with his team.

And they spend the time processing this vision. What does it mean? What is God trying to tell us? So the Holy Spirit is not somehow overriding Paul's mind, forcing him to go to Macedonia.

Instead, by pondering this vision, together with his fellow brothers, they conclude that the Lord is calling them to go to Macedonia to share the good news.

So they get ready. And in God's good providence, he had brought them to Troas, which is not far from Macedonia. They just had to get on a boat and travel for two days, which seems like a long time for us, but just two days to get to Macedonia.

So they get on the boat. And we see here that this is the part where Luke joins the team because the text now goes from saying they to we. So they get on the boat and they stop at this island, Samothrace, between Troas and Macedonia.

[9 : 47] And then they get to Neapolis, this port city. And from there, they get on the highway that takes them to Philippi, just 10 miles west. See, whenever we see Paul's ministry in Acts, what we see him do is seek out the big cities.

You know, he goes to the big ones, like Corinth, like Colossae, like Ephesus, like Rome or Thessalonica, because they're big cities that give Paul the opportunity to plant churches. And now he's gotten to Philippi, where they stayed for some days. See, the Holy Spirit had told them no, not just once, but twice, until finally showing them where he wanted them to go. And some of you may be familiar with a man named William Carey. He's known as the father of modern missions for having gone to India and doing a mighty work there. But before going to India, Carey had an interest actually going somewhere completely different. He had read this book called Voyages Around the World by Captain Cook.

[10 : 55] And he instead wanted to go to Polynesia. He wanted to go and preach the gospel there. But the Lord closed that door to Carey and instead opened the door and his heart to the people in India in which he faithfully went to share the gospel, leaving Polynesia for others.

Now the question for you this morning is what is your plan? Do you have a plan? Have you planted a plan in your mind and your heart ready to pursue it?

Maybe consider Paul or even consider William Carey. You may have a plan that to everyone looks like a great plan. It seems like all the pieces, they fit together.

It seems like going to Ephesus, one of the biggest cities with plenty of people you can reach for the gospel. It seems like a great idea. Going to Polynesia seems like a great idea.

They need the gospel and I have it, so why should I not go? What is your plan? Have you perhaps set your gaze on that city or on that job?

[12 : 11] Ask yourself, where is the Lord leading me? Are we listening to Him? Are we listening to Him, looking for Him to lead us where we ought to go?

Or are we just plotting our own course the way that we want it? Now when we speak of the leading of the Holy Spirit, it's going to take a moment just to think about what does it mean and what does it not mean.

In this text, we don't know how the Holy Spirit led Paul and the others. But from other texts in the scriptures, we see God revealing Himself and His will to His people in many ways.

Think of Saul on the road to Damascus. He's blinded with this magnificent light and he can't see for a few days. Or think of Peter when he is at Simon the Tanner's house and God gives him the vision showing that both Jews and Gentiles are part of the people of God.

Or even at Jesus' baptism, we hear this voice coming out of the heavens saying, this is my beloved Son with you I am well pleased.

[13 : 26] Can and should we expect these kind of things in 2023? I think as we study the scriptures, we see that we should not. We see miracles in scriptures and visions mainly around specific events of great significance.

and we see the visions coming to Joseph in the book of Genesis to warn him of the famine that is coming so he can save the people of God.

Or God speaking to the prophets in the Old Testament and giving them the ability to do miracles like we saw with Elijah at Mount Carmel to demonstrate that those are the prophets of Baal and this is the true prophet.

Or of course the many miracles we see in the New Testament to show and to attest that this message the gospel is true. The author of Hebrews we see say that long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

See in these last days in the days that we're currently in the days between Christ's first coming and second coming we have God's word. We have the things that he spoke to us by his Son is right here in the scriptures.

[15 : 00] So we have God's word not through the various ways of old of visions and words from heaven but we have the words of Jesus in this book but that is not all we have either.

We have more because when Jesus told his disciples that he would leave he said that he would give us a helper. He didn't say he would leave us all alone but he would give us his Holy Spirit who Jesus said will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

See he will convict us when we are tempted he will sear our conscience he will say don't do that when we do the right thing and honor God he will give us a sense of peace.

So there are two sides that we must avoid. On the one hand that we should somehow expect to see the same kind of miraculous events that we see in the New Testament but on the other hand we

have no expectation to be led by God at all to believe that sure there is a sovereign plan there is a plan of God but there is not a sense of where a Christian asks God for guidance and tries to sense his direction and I want for us to avoid both of these because if you follow the first one what may happen is we feel something is wrong with us we may feel that there is something wrong with our faith because we don't see these kind of things and if you follow the second then what we're missing out on is the great blessing that Jesus has given us the guidance of the Holy Spirit so how do we know it is the Holy Spirit that is leading us that is the primary question isn't it well have you ever had a sudden urge to pray for someone perhaps that person was just telling you of an event in their life and suddenly you have this voice inside of you saying pray for this person right now I'm not talking about one of those moments where you feel you may like that maybe you should pray for someone you're not sure but rather you have that push that urge on the inside whenever that happens why don't you ask the person if you can pray with them right there right that time and do it you know I know I've been greatly blessed the times that I have done that or another example you get into a brief conversation with your waiter at a restaurant or someone at the grocery store or perhaps the person who is fixing your car and you feel this sudden urge inside of you not just to talk about the weather but about spiritual things perhaps they said something that is the perfect segue way but we're a little afraid aren't we but the Holy Spirit is urging us to speak will you speak and the final example when we have a big decision to make do we pray about it that could go for the small decisions too but do we not only pray about it but do we actually expect

[18:26] God to answer now don't expect you know words from heaven but do expect the Holy Spirit to grant a sense of peace it is not guaranteed it does not always happen but we should nonetheless seek it out perhaps it's a job in a location that you would never even consider but then suddenly the opportunity arises will you reject it in an instant or will you instead take your time to pray to ponder and to listen so the Holy Spirit will lead us we must go where he leads and second and finally we must preach where we go so look with me at verses 13 and 15 so on the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river we expected to find a place of prayer we sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there and one of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named

Lydia a dealer in purple cloth she was a worshipper of God and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message and when she and the members of her household were baptized she invited us to her home and if you consider me a believer in the Lord she said come and stay at my house and she persuaded us so we see the Holy Spirit leading Paul Timothy Silas many miles as he traveled through Asia Minor modern day Turkey he told them no twice before leading them to the place where he wanted them but why did the Holy Spirit bring them all this way to this very specific place in the world that they may preach the gospel of Jesus Christ see having spent a few days in Philippi the Sabbath day came and they saw this as an opportunity to share the gospel see Paul's custom when he came into a new city whenever he traveled was to first go to the synagogue to share the gospel with the

Jews but we see the Philippi does not have a synagogue so instead he goes outside the city where he supposed there may be a place for the Jews to pray so they went and they began speaking sharing the good news and Luke here is highlighting one woman to us Lydia who is from Thyatira she's a worshipper of God which means she's a Gentile but she's worshipping the Israelite God without having become a Jew herself and Paul preaches the gospel to her and the Lord opens her heart he enables her to hear and to understand the words of eternal life and Luke here is highlighting that even though Paul is the one preaching God is the one who saves her see Paul's preaching was the instrument that God used to save Lydia but ultimately it was God's work on her heart that even made it possible for her to believe and as a result she and her household are baptized being made possible because the

Holy Spirit led Paul and his team to Philippi and they were faithful preaching the good news there now another missionary John Patton arrived in the New Hebrides known today as Vanuatu so he's led there by God to be a missionary because he was eager to go and to share the gospel with the cannibals in the New Hebrides and as he arrived he immediately began the work of ministry he started learning the language he started teaching the Bible and they started translating it into their language see Patton knew that God had led him to the New Hebrides with one main mission to make known the glorious riches of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus see we must make known Christ and his gospel when we follow the guidance of the Holy

Spirit see I think one of the most misquoted citations is this one preach the gospel at all times if necessary use words now while this was never actually said by the person it is normally attributed to the sentiment behind it is somewhat prevalent today the idea that we may preach the gospel by living well that we may preach the gospel by living you know in a holy way according to the grace and truth of the gospel now of course we should we should we should aspire to live that way we should aspire for love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control to be evident in our lives but no one will be saved by looking at your life no one will be saved by looking at our good deeds they may only be saved if we go if we share the good news about [24 : 01] Jesus because the scriptures say how beautiful are the feet those who bring the good news so this morning the question is are your feet beautiful will you be faithful in sharing the good news of Jesus because that's ultimately what we're called to we're called to faithfulness we are we are we see here the Lydia king of faith not because Paul's arguments were so persuasive because the Lord opened her heart but he also did it because Paul was faithful and he spoke the truth see God is the only one who can bring people from death to life I think sometimes we put too much of a burden on ourselves and we say if I don't say exactly the right thing it won't work out if I don't have so many things memorized about the Bible

I can never share the good news I don't know enough but it's interesting how often the person has been a Christian for perhaps six months a year is a greater evangelist than the one who's been one for 20 years or 10 years is not about knowledge but about faithfulness because the Lord is the one who does the work the Holy Spirit will lead you so maybe go where he leads and preach where you go but this morning do we believe that the Holy Spirit will lead us he may use various means be they external circumstances or an inward burden but will we listen and as we hear it will we go where he leads he may take you down a different path perhaps a more difficult path than the one we're currently on to the plan that you thought was great that you thought was well thought through maybe thrown out the window but are we willing to step out like we saw in the reading from Genesis 12 of

Abraham as the Lord called him to leave and to go and will you preach where you go there's there's one thing and one thing only that will change people's hearts and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ so may we share the good news with those people whom the Lord puts in front of us in our lives in our paths but know that only God can open someone's heart only he can make them born again so may we be obedient in the going and the preaching but leave the heart changing in the hands of God of the one who made the heavens and the earth who made that person and who can make them a new creature behold the old has passed and the new has come God will call and summon his people to himself may we just be faithful let us pray father father god it is probably our pride that stops us so often from saying what we need to say for lord are we not fearful of seeming ridiculous or not having the answers to particular questions that so often stops us from sharing the news about

Jesus but lord may we take all those things out of our minds and focus instead on on how you saved us on how you brought us out of darkness into your marvelous light and how you can do so again and again and again lord may we have that confidence may we walk not by sight but indeed by faith lord give us this boldness this hope and this joy for the week to come we pray in Jesus name amen so we will respond to the preaching of God's word by singing hear the call of the kingdom please stand as we sing