

In the preceding passage Paul invited Silas to join him on his second missionary journey. This time instead of sailing west as in the first journey, he went north by land over a Roman road that went over a mountain pass dropping down to the furthest point he had reached in his first journey. Young Timothy was then added to the team. They went through the cities where churches had been established, sharing the decision of the Jerusalem apostles and elders that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. They also shared the suggestions from Jerusalem that Gentile believers were to abstain from every appearance of idolatry, which included eating food sacrificed to idols and immorality (Acts 15:20ⁱ). The churches were strengthened and encouraged.

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. Acts 16:6 I am thankful that Luke describes some of the different ways in which this mission team was led by the Holy Spirit. At times, the Spirit can tell us not to share. That doesn't fit with some people's theology, but that is the case in this passage. Perhaps the hearts of the people in that region were not yet prepared. Or maybe the team would have been killed had they gone there at that time. We don't know for sure. What we do know is the Holy Spirit said, "Don't speak the word in Asia," and they had the sensitivity to the Spirit to receive that message and discernment to know it was from the Lord. Paul will go later to Ephesus, and Peter will go to Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1ⁱⁱ).

We know we are to proclaim the message of the gospel, but under certain circumstances it is not God's timing. There is the need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit if we are to bear fruit that will remain (John 15:16ⁱⁱⁱ). God can tell us "no" just as surely as He can tell us "go." We are his servants and He calls the shots because He knows best (John 15:14^{iv}).

⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Acts 16:7 The Spirit of Jesus is another way to say the Holy Spirit. They are different persons but they are one. Once again, the Spirit intervened and countered their natural inclination. We aren't told exactly what means of communication God used in either of these verses. That was not the important point. The important thing was that God made it clear that they were not to go to those areas at that time. God can speak through a burning bush or the mouth of donkey (Exodus 3:4^v; Numbers 22:30^{vi}). He can give you a check in your spirit and make you uncomfortable (Colossians 3:15^{vii}), or He can give someone a prophetic word that is so clear that they know it is God (1 Corinthians 14:3^{viii}). The lesson from these two verses is that we must be sensitive to God overriding our natural inclinations in whatever way He chooses. He knows how to get our attention. If you think something might be God speaking to you but you aren't sure, just ask Him to make it clearer. I sometimes I ask God to confirm what I thought He was saying to me. I tell Him that He knows how slow I can be at times to get the message, so please have patience with me and show me in a way that makes me clearly know His will, for His will is what I desire to do.

⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. Acts 16:8 Going down out of the mountains they journeyed westward through Mysia to the coastal region of Troas. Paul had not been in this region on the previous trip. When the Spirit wouldn't let him go to the left or the right he just kept moving forward. Then he received the direction he needed from God (Isaiah 30:21^x). Do what God last told you until He tells differently.

⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Acts 16:9 A vision is to supernaturally see something. Being at night it may have been in a dream. Paul could somehow tell this man in his vision was Macedonian and was calling to him for help. God closed two different doors, and when that happens, He usually opens another. When you feel like God has led you to dead ends, just be patient. He is about to open the door that He intended for you to enter.

¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:10 Paul concluded that God was telling the team to go there to preach the gospel. Again, we have unique way that God can direct us. God could have given them a prophecy or sent someone to invite them or any number of other means to communicate His will. He chooses how to influence our thoughts and understanding in the way He sees best. As long as it is not in contradiction to His Word, we go forward in faith and trust God to do what He desires through us.

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, Acts 16:11 They now know which way to go, so they don't hesitate to book passage across to the region of Macedonia. Notice Luke uses the pronoun "we." He must have joined them at Troas and would be an eyewitness for much of the rest of the book of Acts. Some commentators believe Luke was from Philippi as it was a city noted for training physicians. The mention of Samothrace is of no consequence to the account, but as Luke was an eyewitness, he mentions the detail. Then they sailed on northwest to Neapolis, a port just nine miles from Philippi.

¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. Acts 16:12 Finally, they have reached the destination to which God was leading them. They are on the Egnatian Way, which was a Roman road connecting Italy with the eastern provinces. If the gospel is established in a church here, it would affect much of the Roman world by reaching those who traversed this main road. God knows what He is doing and is strategic in getting His message of love to a fallen world.

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. Acts 16:13 The word used for the meeting place sometimes referred to a synagogue^x, but as there were no men present it probably meant a gathering place for Jews and God fearers. They knew if people went there to pray, they

must be spiritually minded people who hopefully would have a hunger to hear the gospel. When they arrived, there were women who had already gathered.

Why is it that women are more likely than men to be at a prayer meeting? Women seem to be more open to spiritual things than men are. Of the ancient inscriptions of the names of God fearers, eighty percent are women. God made that gender to be more receptive and desirous of relationships. While men tend to be loners and self-dependent, women are more relational and interdependent. The tendency of each gender can be either applied in a spiritual way or a carnal way. If women use their openness and desire for relationship to seek after God and fellowship with other believers, they use it in a good way. If men use their independence to stand against the culture and seek to know the truth wherever it leads, they use it in a good way.

What both need to consider is that our nature can be used in wrong way. It can mean women are more open to being misled by those around them, and men can use their independence to refuse to yield to God or desire fellowship. Being aware of these tendencies should caution us to not allow those natural tendencies to keep us from God's best for us.

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. Acts 16:14a Lydia applied her nature to seek fellowship and prayer with those who sought after the one true God. These women heard of the God of Israel and came to this place of prayer to seek Him. When a city did not have a synagogue, those who believed in YHWH would have a simple gathering place to pray. The gates of Philippi had an inscription warning people not to bring unrecognized religion into the city. That may be why they met outside the gates. Lydia was a seller of purple, a very costly dye, and because of its rarity it was a color worn by nobility. The trade of purple was a monopoly connected to the emperor. It was not unusual for Greek women to own a business or even have political roles. The use of her first name indicates she held a high position in that culture. Her husband must have died, for she was in charge of her household.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. Acts 16:14b God opens hearts (Luke 24:45^{xi}). We don't know about the other women. He may have opened their hearts as well. Luke tends to focus on individuals who play a role in the church and the advancement of the gospel. Lydia's response to the message she heard from Paul made her the first European convert.

¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. Acts 16:15 It was convenient that the place of prayer was by a river for baptisms. Jews preferred such locations for ritual immersion. She must have had Paul share the gospel with her household, which would include any children she might have and her household servants. They all apparently received the gospel as they were baptized too. There are several instances of family conversions in Scripture (Acts 16:33^{xii}).

Salvation is often accompanied by visible signs of change. Lydia immediately wanted to host the evangelists. She had the gift of hospitality. It sounds as if Paul and Silas were hesitant to do so, perhaps because she did not have a husband, or perhaps it was because it was a Gentile home which might have discouraged Jews from hearing the message. But Lydia prevailed upon them. She must have said something like the modern phrase, "I insist!" Her home was probably the meeting place for the church of Philippi.

I want to take a moment to focus on the fact that where they met was the place of prayer. The men's group recently watched the message, *House of Prayer*, by Jim Cymbala. He was speaking to a large group of Christian leaders and reminding them of the account of Jesus cleansing the temple and quoting from Isaiah that, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"(Matthew 21:13^{xiii}). He went on to drive home the point by saying that Jesus didn't say that my house shall be called a house of preaching, though we are commanded to preach the gospel (2 Timothy 4:2^{xiv}). Nor did Jesus say my house shall be called a house of singing, though we are commanded to sing praise to God (Psalms 30:4^{xv}). Believers are to make up the spiritual home of the Trinity which is called a house of prayer. Yet, too often prayer is just tacked on at the beginning and end of a worship service. Prayer meetings are poorly attended.

Your elders are praying about what we need to do to shift our emphasis to prayer. We have a God who invites us to come to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Hebrews 4:16^{xvi}). We have not because we ask not (James 4:2^{xvii}). I have tried in the past to have prayer meetings, but when it was often just my wife and me who came, I shifted the effort to have a time of prayer at the end our Bible studies. I don't know if it is the way we went about it, or if I just did not cast the vision for it as well as I should have. If we lack effectiveness it is because we fail to pray. Though we are abundantly blessed and have a great outreach, we feel God has more for us. Pray that your elders might find God's direction to help us who attend here at Wayside to be what God calls his church, a house of prayer.

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." Acts 16:16-17 Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke were on their way to the place of prayer when a slave girl began following them. Now you would think that this would be a good thing. Here is a recognized fortune teller announcing to everyone that these men are telling of the way of salvation. The spirit in her is demonic, and in fact is referred to in the original language as a python spirit, so why would that spirit give such an announcement? One possibility is that the most high god had a different meaning to the Greco-Roman community^{2xviii} as did the word salvation. The other reason I can think of is that in Jewish ears it sounded true, so they put up with it for a while. That caused many people to hear her and the result was going to end up in beating and imprisonment for Paul and Silas. Besides these possibilities, the demon was announcing that they were breaking the town rules of not bringing in an

unrecognized religion. It was a subtle and very clever way of trying to stop them (Genesis 3:1^{xix}).^{3xx}

¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. Acts 16:18 Paul had enough of this demonic spirit and cast it out of the girl. She was free. But Romans considered slaves as property, like a cart or a horse. The owners bought her to make money from the spirit that inhabited her and now their perceived value was gone. Luke used a pun in Greek: The spirit left her and the money left her owners. They became furious and will see that Paul and Silas are imprisoned. That was probably the intent of the evil spirit all along.

Now imagine how discouraging that must have been. They made this long journey believing they had finally reached the place God wanted them to proclaim the gospel, an influential woman and her whole house were saved, but then this python spirit got them in a situation where they will be beaten and thrown in jail. If it was me, I'd be asking God why He allowed that. But not Paul, for he had learned that God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than our own (Isaiah 55:9^{xxi}). He has seen how God can take what man means for evil and use it for His glory. The towns he was chased out of before had ended up with thriving churches. Paul knows the stories of men like Joseph and Moses who faced disappointments but ended up victorious and mighty servants of God. But more than knowing the stories, he believed that what God had done for them applied to his situations as well. That is the leap of faith we often neglect to take.

Next week we will find Paul in Silas singing hymns and praying aloud at midnight and seeing God do way beyond what they could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20^{xxii}). They'll see God is victorious again. That is what has happened in many of the recent tragedies. From hurricanes to earthquakes to mass shootings, our world is full of tragedies and disappointments. In spite of fallen creation and the evil in man's heart, God is in the middle of it all and working in every situation to open hearts. It bears repeating, that **God is more concerned about our eternal good than our temporal happiness.** May God help us learn to trust Him in every situation we encounter. Amen?

Questions

- 1 Why would God tell us not to preach the Word?
- 2 How does God let us know His will?
- 3 How do we know Luke joined them?
- 4 Why was Philippi a great location?
- 5 What did they call the meeting place? Significance?
- 6 Who was Lydia? Why is she important?
- 7 What is the church to be called?
- 8 Why is prayer so essential?
- 9 Why would a demon tell people to listen to evangelists?
- 10 What does God do in terrible situations?

i Acts 15:20 (ESV)

²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

ii 1 Peter 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

iii John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

iv John 15:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

v Exodus 3:4 (ESV)

⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

vi Numbers 22:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No."

vii Colossians 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

viii 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

ix Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

^x *Proseuche* – Sometimes used in the diaspora for a synagogue. Within Israel the term was *sunagoge*.

xi Luke 24:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

xii Acts 16:33 (ESV)

³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

xiii Matthew 21:13 (ESV)

¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

xiv 2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

xv Psalm 30:4 (ESV)

⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.

xvi Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

xvii James 4:2 (ESV)

² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

^{xviii} Theos Hypsistos or Zeus

^{xix} **Genesis 3:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

^{xx} Judaism was recognized by Rome but antisemitism was common throughout the empire. The fact that the meeting place was outside the city may indicate that Philippi, with many retired Roman soldiers, were not tolerant of Jews.

^{xxi} **Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

^{xxii} **Ephesians 3:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,