

Acts 16: 6-15; “The Spirit Leading in Missions”, Sermon #60 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 27th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

We are living in a day where many Christian people do not understand how the Holy Spirit leads them into greater usefulness in service to Christ. Either they believe that their own thoughts and desires are the leading of the Spirit, and they say things like – The Lord led me to say this, or the Lord led me to do that; they want to make every impulse of their thoughts the leading of God. Or else they may be a Christian who takes a very skeptical view of the Spirit’s leading because so many have abused it, and so they don’t really believe in it at all. They say that they are content to believe and do what the Word of God says, and that is how they conceive of the Holy Spirit’s leading.

I believe that these verses that I just read to you will help us to better understand the leading of the Holy Spirit in terms of our church’s work in relation to missions, and our own personal service to Christ. 1st of all – I want to speak to you about the Spirit as the One who sometimes forbids Christians taking the gospel to certain places at certain times. 2nd – I want to speak to you about the vision which the Spirit gave to Paul, and the kind of vision that we are to expect to receive in our day, here. And 3rd – I want to speak to you about the Spirit’s leading Paul to a particular woman, whose heart, He the Spirit, would open in relation to Paul’s preaching. I hope that by means of this message, that we will come to better views of the work of missions and our witness to Christ, both as individuals and as a church.

1st of all – I want to speak to you about the Spirit as the Person of the Godhead who sometimes forbids Christians taking the gospel to certain places at certain times.

Verses 6-8 say – “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.” “So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.” Now, when you read this, it probably seems somewhat strange to you, seeing that the Lord Jesus Himself in the Great Commission said that all Christians are to go and make disciples of all nations. And in Mark chapter 16, verse 16, He said to – “Preach the gospel to every creature. Why then, we should ask, would the Holy Spirit forbid Paul and Silas and Timothy to preach the word in Asia? And when they tried to go into Bithynia, the Spirit did not permit them to go there either.

It seems that there must have been a reason for His forbidding them. And yet, the reason is not given, either to them, or to us. Let us see if we can come to a right understanding of these things. First of all, we must remember that all missionary endeavor begins, continues, and is concluded according to the purpose, the will, and the providential ordering of God, and that it was, and is, the specific work of the Person of the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. Verse 7 calls Him, the Spirit of Jesus there. In Acts chapter 1, verse 4, we are told that the Lord Jesus was assembled together with His apostles, and at that time, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, He said, you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

What this baptism with the Holy Spirit would mean for the early Church would be that the apostles and many other Christians, on the Day of Pentecost, would receive power to be Christ’s witnesses, and according to the purpose of God, they would also see tangible results in relation to their preaching. The proof of this was the power that Peter was given to preach effectually to his Jewish hearers on the Day of Pentecost. As we read Acts chapter 2, we see that the Holy Spirit providentially brought to pass, through the means of Peter’s preaching, all of the results which took place that day; the 3,000 souls that were added to the church in Jerusalem.

We see the same kind of sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit taking place in the ministry of the apostle Paul. It was the Holy Spirit who said to those Christian leaders who were gathered to pray and to fast, at the church at Antioch in Acts 13, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." He was going to superintend this blessed work of missions from beginning to end. He would providentially order all things for them to accomplish their mission. And so, in verse 4 of that same chapter says – "So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus." Why did they go there first? Because it was the Lord, the Holy Spirit who was leading them into this work, and it was He who would lead them there. They would go there because He would what He was intending to do; to bring to pass all of the purpose and will of the Triune God in terms of those who were being saved. And He would work also through Paul and those with him to establish the churches.

The reason that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia was not that this region was under God's curse, or that they were unworthy to have the gospel preached to them. Rather, it was that at that particular time, the Holy Spirit, in connection with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, had a particular purpose in saving certain people in Philippi, a Roman colony, that He would direct them on to that place, at that time. He, as the Spirit of Jesus, being sent by the Father and the Son, and yet equal with them in Substance and Essence in the Godhead, would have a church formed there from the persons who He would sovereignly save.

It should be understood by us that His purpose in salvation was very specific then, just as it is today. And His good purpose would not be thwarted because He would not permit them to preach the word in Asia when He knew that the time was ripe for His elect to be saved in Philippi. To show you that this was so, we need to observe that in Acts 18: 23 that Paul at the end of this 2nd Missionary Journey, after he had spent some time in Caesarea, and had gone up and greeted the church there, he went down to Antioch . And after he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

Therefore, we need to draw some righteous conclusions concerning verses 6-8. The Holy Spirit knows the work that He is about, in the salvation of people in all areas of the world. He knew the work that He was about then, and He knows the work that He is about now. He wanted Paul and Silas and Timothy to spearhead the gospel into Philippi at that time, because it fulfilled His purpose in salvation to do so. There is exact timing in the salvation of every person who the Lord will save. We can further observe that Paul having already run into much controversy and struggle against the Jews and false teachers in Galatia and the surrounding areas, and the Holy Spirit thought that it would be better for Paul and those with him not to extensively go through those regions at that time, but to go on to where Christ had not been heard.

Let us understand that the Holy Spirit does not speak in an audible voice telling missionaries and preachers where they go, and not go, in our times. In the times of the early Church, this direct revelation from God was necessary to the fulfillment of the purposes of God in the spread of the gospel. But God the Holy Spirit is still very much as active in directing missionary men and preachers to the places that He would have them to be, to accomplish the work to which they are called. In our day, this is accomplished by the Holy Spirit's sovereign working of Providence in relation to His purpose; taking into consideration the most certain work which He would have the missionary accomplish and the missionary's own desires in relation to whole matter as well.

We have seen this worked out in the lives of several missionaries that we support and pray for, who have been in a certain place in the foreign field for some years, all of them, doing the work that God has called them to. But then, suddenly things begin to change. Perhaps it is the

missionary's health. Perhaps it is people who oppose their work; those in government or, those in business who see their profit is affected by the missionary speaking against their sins or their conceptions of how the people he is ministering to, should be treated. They may drive him out of the country, or the missionary may have to leave because of these providential circumstances. But the Spirit can, and He most definitely will, accomplish His purpose in where He would have His called man to be, and where he shall minister to those in need, the gospel and the word of God.

This is why the missionary should not be discouraged if God sovereignly and apparently seems to hinder his work; that He does not permit him to succeed in doing all that he wants to do and accomplish in a certain place that he believes that he has been called to. If he is persecuted in one place, or driven out from another; if his plans of preaching in a certain place are thwarted, it does not mean that the Lord is against him, or that He is against those people who he would minister to. If that man will pray and wait upon the Lord, the Lord will lead him on to another place where he can minister, and He (the Lord, the Spirit) will call people, through that same missionary, to this great salvation in that different place, and those whom God has appointed to eternal life shall come to Christ.

2nd – I want to speak to you about the vision which the Spirit gave to Paul, and the kind of vision that we are to expect to receive in our day, here.

Verses 9 and 10 – “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.” “A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” If it is not plain enough that God the Holy Spirit did not permit them to preach the gospel in Asia, He makes it even plainer that He wanted these missionaries to go to Philippi. He does so by means of a vision that he gave to Paul in the night, at the very time that they needed to know His will and be directed where they should go.

Does this happen in our days? No, it does not in this revelatory way of the Holy Spirit giving them visions and ordinary Christians receiving them. Apart from the Day of Pentecost the visions that are recorded for us in the book of Acts, were all given to an apostle at a strategic and significant time in relation to his personal ministry of the gospel and the advance of Christ's kingdom in that day. So in Acts chapter 10 we find that Peter was given a vision of a great sheet being lowered down out of heaven in which there were all kinds of creeping, crawling animals, and he heard a voice say – “Rise Peter, kill and eat.” This was a vision which spoke to him of his going to preach to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius the Centurion. In this vision, the Holy Spirit was instructing him to have no misgivings about going with the men who had been sent to his house to seek him so that they could bring him back to Cornelius and preach to them the gospel.

This was how the Spirit accomplished His sovereign purposes in that day in directing Christ's apostles where to go and preach. The Holy Spirit has sovereign purposes now, as well, with relation to the salvation of people, and He does guide missionaries and preachers in relation to the places that they will go. How does he do this? Well, I think that the way that this vision which Paul received is worded, will help us to see the principles that God the Holy Spirit would guide us by and with, as a minister and as a church in our seeking to support missionary endeavor. In verse 9 it says that, “a man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’”.

I want you to notice that this vision relates to things which should impact a missionary's thoughts as he thinks of where he should go, and to whom he should preach and minister, and also those who would support him financially and with their prayers. It is the voice of a man asking for help. It is the voice of a man of a particular Province which lay further West of Asia; even Macedonia, where the gospel had never been preached before. We can see that this was a

principle of truth which Paul often applied to himself personally, but it has application for us as well. Turn with me over to Romans chapter 15, verses 18-21 – “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient – in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” “And so I have made it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.”

So here was something that guided Paul’s choice of where he should go to preach, in this particular vision that he received. The people of Macedonia had a great need, and their need was spiritual. It was that they would have the gospel preached to them, that they might hear of Christ and His great salvation for sinners. The Holy Spirit gave Paul this specific vision of a Macedonian man making this appeal; of a man who stood and pleaded with Paul to come to them. He was a representative man in the vision. He was a man who represented that whole Province, that whole geographic region, that stood in need. Paul recognized this in dress and in his language. He was representative of a good many people who the Holy Spirit wanted Paul to preach to.

Even so, today, even though we do not see visions, we can work according to this great principle. The mission who we send or support must have the burden of seeing Christ accomplish things by his words and his deeds, through him, to make them obedient to the gospel and the word of God. The place where he should go should be a needy place as it relates to spiritual things. His greatest desire should be to help them. And the people who support that missionary should see to it that this is their greatest desire as well; to bring spiritual help of instruction in the Bible, but also the willingness to help him seek for greater and deeper commitment to discipleship; to teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded us. This is their greatest need ultimately, to be able to know the commandments of God and to do them.

3rd – I want to speak to you about the Spirit’s leading Paul to a particular woman, whose heart, He the Spirit would open, in relation to Paul’s preaching.

Verses 11-15 – “Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony.” “And we were staying in that city for some days.” “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.” “Now a certain woman name Lydia heard us.” “She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God.” “The opened her heart to heed (or to respond) to the things spoken by Paul.” “And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’” “So she persuaded us.”

I want you to see from these verses that it was no accident that in sailing from Troas that the ship ran a straight course to Samothrace, or that the next day the apostle Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke, who wrote these words, came to Neapolis and from there to Philippi. The Holy Spirit was in all of this orchestrating this in His providence. They were staying in that city for some days because the Holy Spirit wanted Paul and his companions to get to know where prayer was customarily made, outside of the city near a river. Evidently there was no Jewish synagogue in that city, but this is where those who were Jewish met on the Sabbath day. And so Paul went to that place, being led by the Holy Spirit.

It was no accident, either, that a woman named Lydia was there. The Lord had led her there too. She was a business woman from Thyatira who had move to Philippi to sell purple fabrics which she made. She was a believer in God, one who worshipped Him. She had her “household” with her; probably those men and women who helped her in the work, perhaps even a few

relatives. She was a believer in God, one who worshipped Him. She who would come to worship God, there in that place, knew that in her heart she believed in Him. She knew that there was a God, and she knew that He was great and glorious, and therefore must be worshiped and adored, sought and prayed to. She had heard enough of God's holy law in the Ten Commandments to know this. She knew that she loved Him for all that He had done for her personally in blessing her in so many ways. She knew that she wanted to know Him better, and so she came to this place of prayer to seek Him, that she might find Him; that she would really know Him and personally understand that her sins were all forgiven and that would be able to glorify Him with her life.

The Spirit had been striving with her in her heart to bring her to this place where she thought these thoughts. He was leading her to the place that day where she hear for the first time, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia, pleading with him for help, and when he gets to this prayer meeting, there are only a few women gathered. But let no one despise the day of small things. Great things often begin with small beginnings with God, and in this case very great things were going to take place. Verse 13 says that the four men sat down there and they spoke to the women who were there; each in turn having some word of instruction.

But it was when Paul spoke that the Holy Spirit moved in Lydia's heart. It says that, "the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. Faith, saving faith, comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. A person like Lydia may have believed in God, but she had not savingly believed in God, through Christ, until Paul preached the gospel to her. That is, he preached who Christ was, the Son of God, who was sent by the Father into this world, to live a perfect life on behalf of sinners, and He then suffered and died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead. She heard that all people who would believe in Him and receive Him as their Savior would be declared righteous by His perfect righteousness and cleansed of all sin by His precious blood.

As she listened to Paul, his words were accompanied with saving power. The gospel did not come in word only, but it came in the power of Holy Spirit's working, and it came with much assurance that what Paul was saying was absolutely true. She knew that she must let Paul's words which were God's words, into her heart. She knew that she must welcome the living risen Christ into her heart to take charge of her life. The Holy Spirit opened her heart, and Christ Himself came in. In other words, He caused her to be born again to a living hope through the His resurrection from the dead.

Let us all observe that by nature, all hearts are shut and barred to the truth before the Lord, until the Holy Spirit comes, and opens the heart. He does a mighty spiritual work in this regard, of raising that person from the dead spiritually speaking. As I come to the close of this message I would like to ask you this question: Has the Lord opened your heart to respond to the things which Christ alone can bring? Only He Himself can bring salvation through and by the power of His Spirit. Have you been born again? Have you heeded the truth of the gospel? Have you responded to the gospel message in faith? Has the door which has been closed since your birth been set open so that Christ can come in? If so, you can rejoice forevermore.

There is are two appropriate responses which you can make to what Christ does when He comes into your life. The first is to be baptized. To be baptized is to make public profession of your faith before the church and its witnesses. It is to publicly declare what Christ has done in saving you, and what your experience was that brought you to that point. It is your identification publicly with the Lord Jesus, showing forth your union with Him in His death and resurrection. It shows forth your willingness to serve Him in newness of spirit. This is what Lydia did, immediately, and her whole household evidently believed as well, along with her. For they were were also baptized.

What a glorious day this was! What a glorious beginning was made in that place that day by those who had come to evangelize them. This was the Holy Spirit doing all this. He had providentially led them all to that place. The other appropriate response which you can make to what Christ does when He comes into your life, is to begin to show forth your faith in Him by doing good works. Lydia realized that these men had come to town and they had no place to really stay; none that is where they could have fellowship with other Christians and be shown Christian hospitality. She knew that she could do this. And she knew that she should do this. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." The apostle Paul and those with him were all persuaded, and so we see that her faith led immediately to good works.

This is always the proper order: Faith in Christ, and then this leads us to do works, not to obtain salvation, but because we are thankful to God and to Christ for all that has been given to us in our salvation. Let us rejoice that salvation is a free gift, and rejoice also that as Christians we now have the power to do good works; works which will show forth our faith, and hope and love towards our Lord Jesus Christ.