

## Acts 16:6–15

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mycenae, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mycenae, they went down to Troas.

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. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 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, 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. 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. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. In January of 1996, I found myself sitting in the small living room of a pastor who lived in London.

At that time, he had been pastor in his church for some 35 years, and much good had been done.

[ 2 : 1 0 ] When I was with him at that moment, some 500 or 600 businessmen and women would gather on Tuesdays to hear his 22-minute Bible talk over their lunch hour.

400 or so others had formed a Sunday morning congregation, and they had formed a church where in 1961, none had existed.

That was the year of his beginning. On Sunday evenings, there were another 500 or 600 career professionals, mostly single adults, gathering as a congregation as well.

Beyond that, he was hosting a conference annually that some 1,200 or 1,300 pastors from England would attend every June to sharpen their own abilities in handling God's word.

In addition to which, he had started a one-year training course that would invite anyone who wanted a better way of handling the scriptures to get involved in, and there were some 70 or 80 full-time students.

[ 3 : 4 6 ] And so you can imagine me sitting there at the age of 35 next to this 70-year-old who was now on the cusp of retirement and in really what was the full blossom of a life work.

And I only had one question. How did it come about? More particularly, I asked him, what was your plan?

Did you lay it all out on the front side and execute it the way we configure our own business plans today?

This 70-year-old rose from his chair, went to his bookshelves, without saying a word, pulled a biography of Abraham Lincoln off, returned to his chair, fumbled around through the pages for some time, and finally said, ah, yes, here it is.

Quoting Abraham Lincoln, I confess plainly that I never controlled events. Events have always controlled me. He shut the book and said that's how it all happened.

[ 5 : 0 6 ] No grand plan on the front side. No demographic studies to validate his work. No knowledge of the end before the beginning.

Simply events, events unfolded, and in the nature of things, controlled his work under fruition.

It was a very important life lesson for me, and one that I want to pass on to us today. What is it to be led by the Lord?

How do you know God's will for your life? What can you expect, having given yourself to Jesus some 10, 15, 20, 30 years from now?

Now, King David learned the same lesson. He articulates it in Psalm 23. One of our own elders, Doug Rothschild, related to us in a meeting this way, that even the leaders of God's people are led by God.

[ 6 : 26 ] Psalm 23 very famously states, that the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He then leads me besides still waters.

Even the anointed over God's people, the leader was one who was being led by the Lord. Our text today is striking for so many wonderful reasons.

It is famous because from this text, looking back through the lens of history, we see the gospel penetrate into Europe for the first time.

We see this movement of Paul to Philippi, which whether you know it or not, is connected to the advance of the gospel through Europe, and indeed, even into our own time and into our own places.

You see here the gateway of the gospel to the ends of the earth. But what's fascinating to me is that it occurred in the most accidental of ways.

[ 7 : 41 ] Paul had no plan to accomplish what is going to unfold in these next weeks under the theme of what we call his great second missionary journey, this five-city tour that literally will, by implication, change the face of the world in regard to Christianity.

But at the outset, there was no intention for him to get it done. Take a look. Chapter 15, verse 36. It's worth being reminded of how it began.

After some days, Paul said to Barnabas, let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are.

I mean, the trip that we're going to see unfold in the coming weeks was originally intended to take them to places they had already been and a people they already knew.

That was the extent of it. And yet it will become, looking through the lens of history, the most significant three-year period of Paul's life.

[ 9 : 02 ] today, still, the ground reverberates on the truths of this journey. But all he set out to do was to go see somebody he already knew and visit a place he had already been.

Evidently, Paul, like Lincoln, then could say, I confess plainly that convincing events have always controlled me. I have never controlled events.

So here's what you see in verses six through ten. Very clearly, you're going to see what it looks like when you were being led by the Lord.

And then, it's going to move and you're going to see what it looks like as Paul leads Lydia to the Lord. And you're going to see that as one is being led by the Lord and someone is being led to the Lord, that it is underneath and behind both the Lord who is accomplishing all things.

This will be very instructive and I hope helpful for your life. Take a look at verses six through ten. being led by the Lord.

[ 10 : 26 ] Three observations to make. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

That little phrase, having been forbidden. That's the first observation I want you to see. But then, in the next verse, when they had come to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And then, the third observation, it is on the basis of a vision in verse nine and the conversation that ensued as a result of it, verse ten, that they actually launch into new territory unbeknown to them, unplanned, not on their itinerary, and yet that which brings the gospel in large measure to the ends of the earth.

having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit. That's the way the Lord leads sometimes.

Paul had left Antioch. He had moved up through Tarsus, his hometown. He had gone back to Derbe and Lystra and most likely to Pisidia, places of his previous journeys.

[ 11 : 43 ] And from there, it would appear that if he wanted to go to Asia, which it lists in verse six, that he probably would have been heading due course west in an attempt to get to the city of Ephesus.

But he was forbidden. There's a lot of ambiguity in the text. I don't want to preach to the silences, but it says he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit.

We don't know what that may have been. We know that Silas was with him, who was a prophet, and we know that the prophetic voice shifts in Scripture from an Old Testament prophet that proclaims thus saith the Lord to these New Testament prophets whose words must be weighed to determine what is actually of the Lord to really you and me living in a day where the entire prophetic discourse of God is inscripturated in text.

But in that moment, there could have been a word from Silas or others that said, we're not supposed to do that. We're not told. But we know that this is the way the Lord led.

The Lord prevented him. It's the same term that the Ethiopian Enoch used, back in chapter 8, verse 36, when he, having come to Christ, said, is there any reason, is there anything that would prevent me, would I be forbidden from being baptized and seeing that there was water there and no hindrance to it, he was indeed baptized.

[13:13] But he's asking, is there anything that would prevent me from taking the sign of my conversion? Well, here it's the same term. But in this sense, there was something, namely the ministry of the Holy Spirit to that small traveling troop did not permit, prevented in fact, what was their desired intention.

Tell me, have you not seen this in your own life? You arrive at a point where your course is clear. In this sense, they've already run out some 350 miles.

They're going to make a straight line and suddenly all of life detours. Circumstances of life. I remember one young man came to this city to do a one-year degree.

One-year degree, political theory, and then it was going to be gone. 17 years later, he left. So if this is your first year here, watch out.

We might know you better than you think by the time you go. The second word that's there, though, is in that next verse.

[14:27] They attempted to go to Bithynia. In other words, they made a good faith effort having been restricted from moving west to go north.

And as they go north, up in and along that northern Galatia movement, and then to Bithynia above in the Black Sea, evidently they tried to go that way, but even there it says, the spirit of Jesus, what a unique phrase, the spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

You got a plan? You get underway? All of a sudden, everything changes. Accept it into a program? Take a job? Prepare to make a move? Arrive? And everything underneath you gives way. Attempt? Thwarted? Prevented? Hemmed in? Unsure? So then, they really do the only thing they can do.

[15:55] They begin to head west along that upper rim and all the way to Troas. Let me see if I can explain this to you. By the time these verses finish, he's already moved some 800 miles over mountainous terrain.

And he's on a journey that is going to take him at least three years of his life. So they end up in Troas.

And the first of what are these four wonderful we statements in the book of Acts. We'll take a look at them in more depth next time they appear. But in verse 10, suddenly there is this first person, plural, we sought to go into Macedonia.

some indication that perhaps the writer Luke himself, many think, may have been living in Troas and finally joins the journey.

Or he's dealing with some manuscript evidence, Luke is, and hasn't quite squared away all the way he's dovetailed it into his own document. Or perhaps we is just the way we speak sometimes when we're belonging to the movement we're talking of.

[17:07] We all did this even whether we were there or not. There's no clear definitive work but we know that they ended up all the way over in Troas and there Paul received a vision.

Verse 9, you can see it. It's in the night, a night vision. In the Old Testament the night visions were means by which in the Jewish and even Babylonian world people would have thought God was trying to communicate something to them.

So Nebuchadnezzar has visions in the night and he's wondering how he places the importance of them in regard to whether or not God is trying to communicate something to them.

The prophets of old in the scriptures are often spoken of as having a vision namely being brought up into the very presence of God and seeing something and on the basis of seeing something and hearing something they return to the people of God in order to speak something.

And here it is a vision appears to Paul in the night a man a visible manifestation saying come over to Macedonia and help us.

[ 18 : 26 ] Now Troas of course would have been south and Macedonia north and west across the Aegean Sea and on into Europe. And so he's like wow I've been shut down this way been closed off that way 800 miles in not really sure what we're doing anymore no great plan.

And so it looks like they confer because it says they had concluded that God had called them to go and so off they go on the basis of this vision. Let me say just a word Acts 2 had indicated that in this new world the young men and old men would have visions and dreams and there's some indication of fulfillment even of the prophetic discourse of the Hebrew scriptures that when the new age arrived there would be this direct communicative work of God to special people along the way.

I know the question in your mind is do we do we expect to be led by God in this way today? Well we certainly are at a much advantaged position than was Paul in this day.

We have the scriptures I think even Peter will indicate as he knows he's about ready to lay his body aside he references the visionary experience he had at Mount Transfiguration and says to the church going forward after the apostolic age we have something that is even more sure than what I saw happening on the mountain experientially with my own eyes.

I have that written word before us and so from the age in which you and I live we certainly have the advantage of the complete corpus of the scriptures that guide us.

[ 20 : 24 ] Indeed the Holy Spirit speaks through them. Five wonderful words in Hebrews 3 7 therefore as the Holy Spirit says and then he quotes an ancient text from the Bible.

Two wonderful truths about the way the writers of the Old Testament or in the New Testament actually thought we would hear God's voice. therefore as the Holy Spirit says.

In other words the Holy Spirit's voice was equated with the inscripturated word given to the people of God. He didn't say as the Bible says, as the scripture says, as the prophet says, as the psalmist says, he says as the Holy Spirit says.

So if you want to hear from the Holy Spirit it isn't as though you need a dream or a vision. He's communicated through his word.

And the present tense says that God is actively speaking in and through the scriptures to our day through these words originally intended for others written long ago.

[ 21 : 33 ] So with that foundation we can say in regard to how you and I should be led by the Lord we stand firmly on the scriptures. Now does that mean that God could never communicate by way of a vision?

Well I don't want to limit God to anything but I don't want to plant my feet on my own subjective experiential knowledge or reading of all that would happen to me in the night.

Can't do that. And even in the text here it seems like they concluded they conversed and then they set out.

So before I lose the forest for the trees let me say to you don't miss the thrust of this opening paragraph where the takeaway is what it is to be led by the Lord.

Let me put it this way divine clarity on the course of your life is not going to be granted all at once and it certainly will not be revealed to you at the outset.

[ 22 : 43 ] I'm 57 now so I can say it. He doesn't work that way.

Let me put it differently. God prefers you to be in motion by faith and in time and in circumstance in thwarting and in doors opening in years of waiting and walking and prayerful community and conversation your way will be made plain.

I'm so grateful that Nikki opened her prayer today with Proverbs chapter 3. I hadn't spoken with her at all and I was thinking of that very text trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths. There's a faith walk that I'm asking him to confirm along the way and he does not give it to you all at once.

I do not know what the next 30 years of your life will bring but I know that when people get old they tell you this God was faithful.

[ 24 : 17 ] In other words you don't know where you're going. This is what God said to Abraham correct? Go to the land I will show you.

No no I would say if I were Abraham. Let me hear that again. Go where? Go to the land I will show you. Yeah but what land am I going to as I go?

Well go. He prefers you in motion. Moses the same thing. Moses stands before God he goes how will I know that you're with me?

and God says well when you get back here to this mountain with the people you will know that I was with you. Now if I'm Moses I'm saying that's not good enough for me God.

I said how will I know you're with me? It's not fair for you to say you'll know on the back side but that's exactly the way God does it. And I say to you today it's the same way with Ruth.

[ 25 : 27 ] The Moabite woman who stands in the midst of an arid country forlorn in grief at the loss of her husband. No provider no provision no way no way to the future but she casts her weight on the promises of scripture and says to Naomi your God is going to be my God where you go I'm going to go where you sleep I'm going to sleep and she had no idea that when we think of Ruth we think of the one in the lineage of the line of Jesus our Savior mother of mother of mother of God.

How did it happen Ruth? I committed my way to the Lord and when I look in the rear view mirror all that zig zagging along somehow became straight.

Proverbs 16 9 man plans his ways but the Lord directs his steps. This is what it looks like to be led by the Lord.

It means you have to step out in faith and you have to be sensitive to his course change along the way.

And what's amazing is that when you look back you stand amazed at what the Lord has done.

[ 27 : 16 ] God's hand will be upon you but the day to day might look like a fog and it's only in retrospect that we are able to say this was all in accordance with the will of God.

Now if you can get that if you could just get that that's probably enough for the day. But 6 to 10 does give way.

How Paul was led by the Lord gives way in verses 11 to 15 on how Lydia was led to the Lord. And here again the narrative is striking for the fact that Lydia never saw this coming.

Lydia never saw this coming. She never envisioned or could have dreamed of becoming a follower of Jesus into her adult life.

Edith Schaefer writes this. The thing about real life is that important events don't announce themselves.

[ 28 : 58 ] Trumpets don't blow, drums don't beat to let you know you're going to meet the most important person you've ever met or read the most important thing you're ever going to read or have the most important conversation you're ever going to have or spend the most important week you're ever going to spend.

Usually something that is going to change your whole life is a memory before you can stop and be impressed about it. You don't usually have a chance to get excited about that sort of thing ahead of time.

End quote. And that's exactly what happened to Lydia. How did Lydia come to know the Lord? Well, first of all, how did she get to Philippi?

Take a look. Three staccato like phrases there in the text. She was from the city of Thyatira. One, verse 14.

A seller of purple goods, too, and a worshiper of God. Thyatira indicates that she actually wasn't from Philippi or Europe generally.

[ 30 : 16 ] She was from Asia. A seller of purple goods, well, Lydia itself is a region as well as what is called her proper name, and they were famous for purple dyes that were made into fabrics that would have been a nice element of clothing to be worn in the ancient world.

And if you saw someone with a purple scarf, it probably would have indicated a sense of means and, you know, Michigan Avenue like fineness. And she was a seller of this.

Let me put it to you this way. How did she get to Philippi? This was a working woman. She was in sales. And she had a very favorable territory.

Philippi would have been a gateway to all kinds of places. She actually has her family with her, so perhaps she's got two residences. We know this because they end up getting baptized with father. My text reads, all the infants included. That's just to wake up the Baptists who aren't used to listening this long. So here's a woman in sales at a strategic city, a weaver of fabrics, not necessarily a maker of garments, but one who brought the color to life.

[ 32 : 00 ] She has probably a couple of residences, and she's a religiously oriented person where she goes outside the city to pray. That's how she got there.

Now notice, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they show up, and they kind of look like they're looking for a men's group, and they've walked in on the women's group. The fact is here that they go off to this place of prayer, verse 13.

Paul shows up there. On the Sabbath day, it was normally his way of going to the synagogue. And it's possible, the text doesn't indicate it all clearly, but perhaps there weren't even ten Jewish men in Philippi to form a synagogue.

In other words, Paul is in new territory here. Yet there is this kind of religious group going on down by the river, and he goes down there, and he finds a bunch of women to pray, just like the spiritual, down by the river to pray.

That's a happenstance. That's what people like to say is a God thing. God's It's a God thing. Just going about your day, and all of a sudden you're in a meeting, and the Apostle Paul walks in on it.

[ 33 : 23 ] No great plan. She had no idea what was going to happen. How did she come to know the Lord? We'll take a look at the latter part of verse 14.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. The Lord opened her heart. That's how she became a Christian. The word opened here is really fascinating. It's the same word that Luke uses in reference to Jesus' work with those on the road to Emmaus, where he opens their minds to understand the scriptures.

Anyone who's become a Christian here over the last three months in our congregation, and there are three or four of you that I'm aware of, you could very easily stand and testify to the rest of us on this point, couldn't you?

Not only that you're coming to Christ in the last few weeks or months isn't something you could have envisioned happening to you before you arrived in the neighborhood, but you would also testify that it was the Lord that opened your mind to understand that Jesus is the one who through his death offers forgiveness for your sins.

[ 34 : 53 ] This isn't something that's contrived from the front. God's heart. This isn't carried forward by your pastor's use of rhetoric.

This isn't even something that could be ultimately placed at the feet of your friends who are bringing you. The Lord opened her heart.

God's heart. That's what's necessary. That Christianity, which is often considered to be a closed-minded thing, in actual fact, doesn't quite work like that.

Christianity actually opens someone's mind to reconsider whether or not God is active in the world, was active through the work of Jesus the Nazarene, and in what way he was active, and by way of reception.

In fact, this is how anyone then becomes a Christian. Paul is saying something, but the Lord was doing something.

[ 36 : 09 ] And what was the manifestation? Her heart paid attention. Wow, I wish everyone, this is the preacher's longing.

This is the preacher's longing. Can you imagine people actually paying attention? Not to your stories, not to your charisma or not, not to your humor.

I asked Lisa once, how come nobody laughs at my jokes? She says, because your jokes aren't funny. It's true. But somehow the Lord granted her the ability to pay attention.

Elsewhere in Luke, both in chapter 17 and in 21 and also in Acts 20, it almost conveys this notion when it's put in an imperatival sense of beware.

I mean, something's happening. They're actually listening. That's what happened. That's what happened to many of you, even over these last few months. It's what I hope is happening to some of you even now.

[ 37 : 23 ] The strangest thing happened to me. I went to church, and without any fanfare, they stuck our nose in the scriptures, scriptures, and I found myself paying attention.

And I understood what the gospel was, which is what, according to verse 10, Paul had been sent to preach. Namely, that we were in a bad way, and that God, in his mercy, sent his son to, in his death, pay the penalty of our sin, and we could apprehend his work by faith, which then would reunite me to God, which might then, for the first time in my life, help me start figuring out what is God's will for me.

Well, this is God's will for you. This is where it starts. God's will for you is that you would receive the gospel like Lydia and be led to the Lord so that you might learn how to be led by the Lord. It happened to Paul. It happened to me at age 18. I hope for some it happens for you today. Well, it's probably enough for a week. I love her response. After she was baptized in 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.

[ 39 : 09 ] And she persuaded them. Paul spends his whole lifetime trying to persuade people, and here he is persuaded. There may not have been a house for God in Philippi, but after that prayer meeting broke up, there was a Gentile's house wherein God now dwelt at Philippi.

And she's hospitable. Having received in her heart the first manifestation is to take on the sign of that belief and then invite people into her home.

This is the first core member of the church plant in Philippi. Next couple weeks, we'll see.

Come back next week, though, you're going to see that she's not the only working woman in Philippi who is led to the Lord. She's a businesswoman.

Next week, you're going to see a slave girl who is also a working woman. And she's going to miraculously be led to the Lord.

[ 40 : 34 ] And then the guy at the public jail, he's going to get led to the Lord. And then you're going to have a church.

Let me conclude. Do you want to be led by the Lord? Then get in motion and pay prayerful attention to all the changes on the journey which in retrospect will have made your path straight.

Do you need to be led to the Lord? Give your life to Jesus and ask him to get to work. Do you already know the Lord?

Then trust him in all your ways and begin speaking of all that he does so that others may also enter in.

Paul is led by the Lord. Lydia is led to the Lord. And underneath it all, it is the Lord who is doing all the heavy lifting.

[ 42 : 06 ] let's pray. Our heavenly father, we have been looking at this text rather slowly today.

It's taking our time. Now we're going to go to lunch. We thank you for the food we're going to eat.

And I especially thank you for the families and individuals who have prepared it. As they have been hospitable to us, we pray your blessing upon their own home.

And send us to this lunch with joy and with greater trust that you are leading and that you will lead us home.

In Jesus name, amen. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's