

Sermon Title: The Gospel Goes To Greece
Scripture Text: Acts 16:6-18 (Acts #38)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-7-24

Today we come to a bit of a new threshold—not really a turning point, but a new era in the Book of Acts. We get to see the beginning of the Gospel reaching into Europe by the working of God through the Apostle Paul and his team. Now, this is not the *very first* that the Gospel has gone into Europe, but it is the beginning of the systematic spread of the Gospel *to Gentiles* in Europe.

We don't know how, exactly, it was accomplished; we are not given any names. But we *do* know that when the Holy Spirit first came upon the believers gathered in Jerusalem, people were there from many parts of the Roman Empire, including places in Western Europe and in Africa. Back in Chapter 2 of Acts, remember the list of the dialects and the languages that were native to those people who were visiting on that Day of Pentecost? In Chapter 2, Verses 9 through 11, we read that there were "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

I just mention that to answer a question that you won't have thought of yet in the Book of Acts, but to head it off: It was apparently through some of those who were converted in Jerusalem in the very early days of the Church—they went back home as, now, Jewish believers in Christ, and they founded a church, even in Rome--planted after they returned home. Paul knew about the church in Rome, and he actually wrote his most theological letter to that church: the Book of Romans, of course. And he desired to visit Rome (Rom. 1:10). He wanted to strengthen the believers there; he wanted to be involved with them. But it took a while for that to happen. It was after he made three missionary journeys—each time getting a little bit farther, but never getting to Rome. We will eventually get to that in the Book of Acts, but we are going to see that when Paul visits Rome, it is not because he planned a trip there, it's because he was taken there as a prisoner.

And *now*, unlike those first Jewish believers going home and leading their friends and contacts to Christ, now we have the focus on the Gentiles. The Second Missionary Journey has begun. This time, the team is led by Paul and his new right-hand man: Silas. They had already added Timothy, as we are going to see in a moment. The journey began in what had become Paul's anchor church—his home church—in the city of Antioch in Syria.

We concluded with this last time, and I want to read it so we will have a seamless onramp to our passage today. If you back up to Chapter 15, Verse 41—"And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily" (15:41-6:5).

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You might need to review or remember about "the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem." That alludes back to Chapter 15: The Jerusalem Council, where they nailed down for sure that the Gospel was "by grace" alone "through faith" alone (Eph. 2:8) in Christ alone (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12), and then they came up with some guidelines for how Jews and Gentiles could merge together into one "Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; cf. Jn. 10:16; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:11-16; 3:6; Col. 1:18, 24), and respect one another despite their *very* different backgrounds, and they could be united in their new life "in Christ" (Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11). That is what those "decrees" were all about.

Before Paul and Silas took off on *this* trip, remember: Barnabas, who had been with Paul on the first trip, took his nephew John Mark—whom Paul did not want to take with him because John had bailed on them on the first trip—they had headed off to do exactly the same thing in the opposite direction. They went and visited new believers on the island of Cyprus; that was the route that Paul and Barnabas took the first time—a logical place to go, because that is where Barnabas was from. So they were doing the very same thing, but it is the ministry of Paul which is the one focused on by the Book of Acts, from Chapter 13 to the end.

So, Paul and Silas took the shortest route from Antioch to the places where Paul and Barnabas had gotten to last on their First Missionary Journey, before they turned around and retraced their steps. Priority Number 1 was to go back where they had been, strengthen those new believers—and of course, wherever they went, they preached the Gospel. And as it had been steadily in Jerusalem, "the Lord was adding to their number day by day" (Acts 2:47).

I would like you to notice that the distance traveled on this Second Missionary Journey was about four times as much as the previous one. We know the previous one took about a year and a half. On this one, we are going to see that in the midst of this, he is actually going to stop in one place for *three years*, so this was a *very* significant project that they undertook.

They had already added Timothy to the team. They took advantage of his hybrid Jewish/Gentile heritage and his Roman citizenship, which will become significant in a little while.

And God directed Paul to lead *this* team in a very specific direction, and that begins our passage for today. We are going to pick it up at 16:6 and go through Verse 18.

Number 1: God Guides To Greece (vss. 6-12)
Number 2: The Lord Lures Lydia (vss. 13-15)
Number 3: The Devil Distracts (vss. 16-18)

And of course, I would come up with three different alliterations when Scott Basolo is out of town! So, be sure and let him know when he is back that I'm coming along—though I'll never catch up with him.

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The way God led this team unfolded to them in stages. They knew they wanted to visit the churches that had been founded on the previous journey, so there it was: Priority Number 1. 16:6—"They passed through the Phrygian"—that doesn't mean cold; it's a place called "Phrygia"—and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."

Now, that is *delightfully cryptic*. Do you realize: That tells you *exactly* what God did, and it tells you *exactly nothing* about how He did it! What earthly factors did God use to "forbid" them to go into "Asia"?

"Asia" was a very logical place to go. "Asia" is the name of an important Roman province. And if you were to overlay a modern map over the Biblical map, you would see that what is called "Asia" then is, essentially, the country of "Turkey" now. Several cities in Asia are eventually going to become the home of prominent churches: "Ephesus," "Smyrna," "Philadelphia," "Laodicea," "Colossae," "Heirapolis," "Sardis," "Pergamum," "Thyatira" (Col. 1:2; 4:3; Rev. 1:11).

So, you might wonder why God did not allow Paul and Silas to just go up from where they were, and then take a little left and go into "Asia," and go to those cities. But the only answer that we know is correct is that we *don't know* why. Clearly, it was not the time of God's choosing (see Gal. 1:15-16).

But we are going to see later: Rather than just heading up there and then dropping down into Asia, they made a great big circle and came around, and it would be in the city of Ephesus—the leading city of the province of Asia—where Paul would spend three whole years. It was God's plan for the Gospel to penetrate the province of Asia by radiating outward from Ephesus to all of those other cities.

So, they came from the southeast. They were not allowed to head west, so they turned north. Verses 7 and 8—"and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas." You're getting all these names, right? The next plan that the team pursued was: "Well, we can't go west. Let's go up into 'Bithynia' to the north of Galatia." But that, too, was prevented by God, so they kind of got squeezed "down to Troas," where they were up against the northeastern shore of the Aegean Sea. While they were in "Troas," God showed Paul exactly what was to be their next move. This time, it was not a matter of *preventing* them from going someplace; it was a very strong hint, exactly where to go. Verse 9—"A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' "

Just a little point of trivia: This is the second of six times recorded in Acts when Paul received a "vision." Remember, that was a different era: That was the era of the Apostles (Acts 1:21-26; 1 Cor. 9:1). The New Testament was not completed yet. Special "revelation" was still going on (Gal. 1:12). It does not happen today, but it was happening then. God had an appointment for Paul and Silas and Timothy in Philippi, though they did not yet know what that appointment was.

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And by the way: This little first part of this Second Missionary Journey illustrates a spiritual principle that you and I need to apply. You have your plans—you *should* have you plans: "The mind of man plans his way, *but the Lord directs his steps*" (Prov. 16:9). When your plans don't work out, keep your feet moving. Keep being faithful. Keep moving forward. Trust God to guide you. The things that He prevents you from doing—I don't know; your car broke down, you got sick, you lost your job, you lost your funding for the plan—whatever it is that prevents you from doing something, *that* is as much a part of God's care for you as is His *leading* you, and the things that are the obvious successes. He is *always* in control (Ps. 103:19; Eph. 1:11).

Well, in this case, the next step was decisive. So, they are in "Troas" now, just on the northeast tip of the Aegean Sea. And we are told in Verse 10—"When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." So, "immediately"—sounds like we are in the Gospel of Mark; Mark's favorite word—"immediately" they made arrangements to go to "Macedonia." "Macedonia" is the northernmost region of Greece. That meant that, if you are going to go straight from "Troas" into "Macedonia," you will have to come into the port of "Neapolis," and that means you have to take a ship; so they booked passage on a ship to cross that little northern tip of the Aegean Sea. It's not a long trip at all.

But I wonder if you noticed something new in Verse 10. Two little words there are more significant than you might think: "we" and "us." That meant that whoever wrote the Book of Acts—which was Luke—was with them at this time. And this is the first of five sections in Acts which record the times that Luke was with them. They are referred to by commentaries as "The 'We' Passages." You can tell when Luke was with them, and when he was not.

Now, we don't know a *tremendous* amount about Luke, other than that he was a really good writer and a really good researcher, and he was a "physician." In Colossians 4:14, Paul calls him "the beloved physician." We believe Paul may have had some sort of a chronic disease. Having a good friend who is a doctor who travels with you—well, that could help. We know that he was with Paul when he was in prison in Rome, and that connects with the final "We Passage" up in Chapter 28. But now, we are having a First Person account—Luke is with them. It doesn't change the meaning of the passage, but it is an interesting little observation.

To keep your geography knowledge growing, you might have noticed, looking at the map, that Colossae is one of those key cities in the province of "Asia" which they had skirted on the front end of this journey, and it came to be one of the places where a church was planted later on. So you have the connection here: Paul, Luke, Asia, Colossae. Maybe Luke came from Colossae—we don't know. But he is mentioned as being known to them.

Well, let's get this group to Philippi; that is the first city that they visit in Europe. Chapter 16, Verse 11—"So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days" (vss. 11-12).

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As I said, it is a pretty short trip across there. It doesn't look like it is very much more than sailing across the Sea of Galilee diagonally. "Samothrace" is a little island that was basically halfway across there, and it was known as the home of a cult involving various deities that supposedly granted protection to those who came by sea. Of course, man would make a religion out of it, and worship some deity, when the fact is: It is smarter to spend the night in a safe harbor and to sail again the next day than it is to sail at night across a portion of the ocean. But they got there, they spent the night there, and continued on to "Neapolis." That is the port city that served the city of "Philippi."

"Philippi" was named for Philip II of Macedon, who was the father of Alexander the Great. "Philippi" is called "a leading city of the district of Macedonia," and as I said: named for the father of Alexander the Great. So it was a strategic place for the Gospel. Influence always radiates from uniquely-placed cities.

And "Macedonia," you will notice, is referred to as a "colony" of Rome. There were several places within the Roman Empire that were considered "colonies of Rome." What that means is: They were not under the direct, daily government of Rome. They had a certain level of independence and autonomy, different from most places in the Empire. They had their own provincial government. It is very much like the way it was for the Jews, who in Israel were granted a certain level of autonomy. The Sanhedrin—the governing group of the Jews (Acts 5:21)—was able to control and handle *most* of the things. As long as taxes got paid to Rome, as long as peace was kept, as long as there was not rebellion against Rome, then those places would be allowed to govern themselves, if you will, to whatever extent they wanted to. Now, mind you: Rome could exert its will. Eventually, they came and destroyed Jerusalem. But as long as there was no rebellion, they could carry on.

That brings us to a unique person that God used in His plan to spread the Gospel "to the Jews first" and also to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). You are about to meet the first convert in Europe under Paul's ministry. So that is when The Lord Lures Lydia.

This group arrived in the city of Philippi. They landed in the port of Neapolis, and walked the distance to Philippi. And the plan was exactly the same as the plan always was with Paul: Find the Jews, and preach the Gospel to them first. Remember, Verse 12 says: "We were staying in this city for some days." "Some days" is "a while." They did not just pass through; they spent time there.

They may have had to discreetly seek out the Jews of that city. We have no indication that anybody on Paul's team had a contact in Philippi among the Jews there, so they waited until a Saturday to make their first contact. We are told about that in Verse 13—"And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled."

You need a little background to understand that. Why "outside the gate"? Well, in Philippi there were a lot of other religions, and Judaism would probably be regarded as introducing a foreign god, so they went "outside the gate" of the city.

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Now, why the "riverside"? Did they decide to evangelize fly fishermen first? Was that the plan? No. Why didn't they go to the synagogue? Was Paul just sick and tired of getting thrown out of synagogues, and so he skipped it? No. This issue was that in Philippi, there were hardly any Jews to be found.

There was a well-known rule among the rabbis that stated that in order to form a synagogue, it required a minimum of ten Jewish men to band together and start the synagogue. When there were not that requisite minimum ten men, the Jews in a city—and this was all their custom; this was not prescribed by the Old Testament. The synagogue grew up in the intertestamental period after the close of the Old Testament. But this was their custom, and it was well-known and followed: If they did not have the ten men to form a synagogue, the people would gather in what they called "a place of prayer." And they had criteria for the "place of prayer": It was to be under the open sky, and near a river or the sea. Now, feel free to make up as many reasons as you want to, why those things were specified—and your opinion will be as good as anybody else's. But that was it.

So they figured, "If we can't find a synagogue, let's go 'outside' the city"—there happened to be a river nearby—"and let's look for the place where the Jews are gathering to pray "on the Sabbath." So, "outside the gate," down by the river. They "were supposing that there would be" this "place of prayer." They found it.

And by the way: There is another confirmation that this was a small group, including less than ten men, because notice how many men are named here? Zero. Apparently, there were *no* Jewish men in that city—at least, not willing to be known for worshipping in public. So, it was with "the women who had assembled," and it says: "We sat down and began speaking" to them. That is the normal practice for rabbis when they taught. So, as is Paul's custom: When you are with the Jews, *act like a Jew* (1 Cor. 9:20). When you are with the Gentiles, *act like a Gentile* (vs. 21). In anything that is not sinful, relate to the people that you can talk to.

Something else interesting here: We are not told what Paul said there. We don't *need* to be told what he said there. If Paul is with people, he is talking about the Lord, and the Gospel was preached (Rom. 1:14-15; 15:19; Col. 1:25; 2 Tim. 4:17). Luke takes us directly to the first convert. And let's meet her: Verse 14—"A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

Several things there are stand-out points.

First of all, rather obvious: She is a woman. Now, that is no trivial detail. It is significant that the first group that we have record of Paul preaching to in Europe on this journey was apparently *all women*. It is rather popular these days, on the part of people who don't like Christ, who don't like the Bible, who think that Christians are pretty much the problem in the world—they love to reject parts of Paul's writings where he deals with things like the relative roles of men and women (e.g., 1 Cor., 11:3), and marriage (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1-6), and divorce, and remarriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:8-9),

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and the structure of the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Critics and sceptics like to portray Paul as this backward, legalistic, chauvinistic oppressor supporting the hegemony of male domination of women and anyone else who can be subjugated.

And that is exactly accurate if you are *totally 180 degrees wrong!* That *wasn't Paul!* He wasn't prejudiced! Quite the contrary: He preached and practiced, and he was used by God to write the Scriptures that reveal *God's* plan—not for oppression, but for *unity* and *reconciliation* (Gal. 3:28), not division.

By the way: If you think about Paul's attitude, remember his background? He was a leader among the Pharisees. *No* rabbi among the Pharisees would *ever* stoop so *low* as to *speaking* with a group of women! As a matter of fact, there was a ritual prayer often repeated among Jewish men in those days, in which they thanked God that they were not Gentiles, slaves, or women. That was the view of the Jewish religious hierarchy. *That was who Paul used to be!* Now, he joyfully takes the Gospel to *anyone* who will listen.

And by the way: The Greco-Roman world was not really any better in its treatment of women. They were *property*—not treated as full human beings, if you will.

So, this is nothing less than a *radical*, life-changing message of the good news of salvation in Christ in which there is "no distinction" between "male" or "female," rich or poor, "slave" or "free" (Col. 3:11). "*All* have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), *all* need the Savior (Jn. 8:24), and Jesus is the Savior (Jn. 1:29; 1 Tim. 2:5).

And like Jesus, Paul *greatly* valued the ministry of women (Mk. 15:40-41; Phil. 4:3).

This first woman that is mentioned here is "Lydia." She has quite a career. She is "from the city of Thyatira." That city was part of that region of Asia, but it is also in an area called "Lydia," so maybe she was "the lady from Lydia." Some people even debate that that might not have been her name, just that she was "the Lydia girl." Or, maybe she *was* named "Lydia" and she happened to be from Lydia. That doesn't make any difference.

We are told that she was from "Thyatira." That is one of those eight cities in the province of Asia in which a church was planted in the first century. Jesus dictated a letter to the church in Thyatira, in Revelation Chapter 2, Verses 18 [through 28]. And that city of Thyatira was especially known for manufacturing "purple" dye and fine goods that were dyed "purple."

There were two kinds of purple dye. One of them was very expensive, and the other one was more expensive than that. The finest of those dyes—I didn't make this up—was made from the glands of the Murex Snail. Go ahead and research that all you like, but as for me and my house, we want nothing to do with learning how to milk the glands of a snail. Purple dye—very costly. I mean, you can see that would be a pretty tedious project: "Here, little snail, come over here. Gotta do something for you. Milked the cows earlier; it's your turn now."

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Even the less rare kind of purple dye—that was made from a plant—was still expensive to produce. And that is how it came to be that purple clothes and accessories were worn by royalty and by very wealthy people. It was a *status symbol*. "How much bling do you have?" Well, in those days, "bling" would be purple.

So, to be "a seller of purple fabrics" meant that Lydia was involved in a very profitable trade. We don't know if she just traveled—she did have a "house" here (vs. 40), so probably she had relocated to there. And we will see soon that she used that house for the work of God, and that became the first place that the church in Philippi actually met.

All of that implies that Lydia was wealthy, and she was respected. She had obviously maintained her roots to Thyatira, because you would need a constant supply of purple and purple dye, even if you lived in Philippi now.

We are told that "Lydia" was "a worshiper of God." Now, remember: We saw that same term used for Cornelius, back in Chapter 10, Verse 2 (cf. 18:7). A "worshiper of God"—or a "seeker," they are sometimes called (cf. Acts 17:27)—those are people who have turned from pagan idolatry, and they have sought to worship the true God, whom they recognize to be Yahweh—"Jehovah" (Ex. 6:3; Ps. 83:18; Is. 12:2; 26:4, KJV)—the God of the Jews.

Now, she had not gone all the way through the conversion process to Judaism. Maybe that was because there wasn't a synagogue there—we don't know. But she came to hear the Scriptures, along with the few Jews that were in that area.

And interestingly, God was at work in Lydia, *even before* Paul's team arrived. She was seeking the truth because *God* was drawing her to Himself. Don't forget what Jesus said in John 6:44—"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." So it is significant that we heard that "Lydia...was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." (see Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 3:3, 5; 2 Cor. 4:6; Titus 3:5)

Then comes a verse jam-packed with implications: Verse 15—"And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." A lot there.

"Things spoken by Paul"—obviously, that refers to the Gospel (see Eph. 1:13). This is a fast-forward verse. It does not describe the process, but we know that Lydia had heard the Gospel, she had "repented" (Lk. 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 20:21), she had "turned" to Christ (Acts 26:18, 20; 1 Thess. 1:9), and therefore she had been saved in the only way possible—because He is the only way that *anyone* can be saved (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

We also know that Lydia had a family. We are not told who all was in "her household"—presumably a husband, maybe children. And the indication being that she was probably quite wealthy, likely there were domestic servants who were regarded as sort of adjunct family; when you say a "household," you would include all who were biologically related and all who worked there (see Matt. 24:45).

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We also know that we can infer from this that Lydia was influential. She had such a reputation that when she turned to the Lord, those who were closest to her immediately wanted to follow, and her *whole household* followed her example. This was not some flighty woman; she was a woman of genuine influence.

Another thing we see here, and it is consistent all the way through the Book of Acts: Baptism was inseparably connected to putting one's faith in Christ. The Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" and "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19-20). That public declaration of faith through baptism—that was the expected first important step of following Christ (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:33-34; 18:8).

Now, there are reasons why, in most corners of Christianity, we have gotten away from that *immediate* baptism of believers, but that isn't necessarily the best. Certainly in Acts, they understood better what baptism stood for: To be baptized in the name of a god was to make a public declaration of your allegiance, regardless of the cost, so it was a big deal there. But if the Lord has opened *your* heart to respond to the Gospel, and you have turned to Christ as your Savior, you should declare your faith by being baptized. If that is you and you haven't done that—well, let's talk. We would love to include you in our next baptism.

We also know from this that Lydia was generous and hospitable. She immediately took in all of Paul's team, and her house actually became their headquarters during the entire time that they stayed in Philippi.

And notice, it says there at the end: "And she prevailed upon us." She was one of those women that, when she invited you to something, you wound up there! That's just the way she was. The word translated "prevailed" is a rare word—only found twice in the New Testament—that means: "to persuade against nature." In other words: Paul was not looking for a place where his team could be comfortable. He wasn't jonesing for a place to hang out. Lydia was *so thrilled* with her new life in Christ, she wanted to immediately do *all she could* to help the cause of the Gospel, and that was embodied in Paul and his team.

You know, in First Corinthians we are told that among those who respond to the Gospel—"not many wise...not many noble," not the powerful, not the persuasive of the world (1:26). Those are the ones God usually calls to Himself. So, they go into Europe. Now, if we were doing that, we would try to have made prior arrangements to get a hearing with the mayor or the governor or the general of the army base that is there. They reach a Gentile woman. That is how it all began in Europe.

So the Gospel is off to a start for the first time among Gentiles in Europe. It all began in the city of Philippi. So immediately, Satan attacks. God Guided Them To Greece, The Lord Lured Lydia, and now: The Devil Distracts. Look at Verses 16 through 18—"It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer"—so, they would go from Lydia's house to "the place of prayer," to Lydia's house, to "the place of prayer"—"a slave-

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girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, 'These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.' She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' And it came out at that very moment."

Now, what's with *that*? Well, we will circle back and maybe say some more next time. But you understand: What she was saying was *true*! "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." So, why would that "annoy" Paul? Well, because she was demon-possessed. Why did it annoy Jesus when demon-possessed people said, "You are the Son of God!" (Lk. 4:41)? Because He was not going to take advertisement from the other side. And if this woman had *not* been confronted, had *not* been exposed, she could have wormed her way into that fledgling little church there, and done all the more damage. So, we will get back to that.

I just got too busy yesterday. I was going to make up a quiz for you and have a blank map, and have dots on it, and have you write in "Troas," "Thyatira," "Galatia," "Cappadocia," "Bithynia," "Neapolis," "Samothrace"—all of those places. I didn't have time to do that.

So, *how* are we ever going to apply this passage? Well, I already said a couple of things.

When God prevents you from doing something, that is just as much His hand on you as when He blesses something tremendously that you do.

Now, how might God guide you, since He doesn't give you visions in your dreams? That does not happen anymore. How might God guide you and me *without* special revelation? Well, let me suggest some things to you. We have already seen some examples in Acts.

One way that God leads is by exposing you to a *need*. Acts Chapter 6. This doesn't look like, you know, "Let's have high level meetings, and strategize how to reach the whole world." It's, "Hey, wait a minute! Some of the widows are not being treated fairly. We need some people to help here."

When you see a need, and you have the ability to meet that need, God is *leading* you. You may not be the one to do that, but that is something for you to consider. And our first thought should *always* be: "Sure! I'll help with that." Now, you can't do everything; I realize that. But God often leads you by letting you see a need. Ask God to give you discernment to maybe see the need that other people are not seeing.

There is another way that He might lead you: Expose you to an *opportunity*. Do you notice: Paul is *always* adding new people to the team. He recruited Barnabas. He recruited Silas. He recruited Timothy. He recruited Luke. And he's not done yet! There are going to be more and more along the way. God often leads you by letting you see an opportunity to do something that you didn't realize you had the opportunity to do.

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There's another part of it: God will sometimes give you the *desire* to serve. First Timothy Chapter 3, Verse 1—"If any man aspires to the office of overseer"—elder, pastor, leader—"it is a fine work he *desires* to do." Part of doing a ministry is having a desire. So, it is perfectly legitimate—as a matter of fact, it is wise—to ask God to give you a *desire* to serve in a certain way (cf. Phil. 2:13), *so that* when you see that need, *so that* when you hear of that opportunity, you can say, "Hey, I could *do* that!"

Another thing, very general: Keep growing in your understanding of His Word (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; cf. 1 Tim. 4:6). Keep increasing in your maturity and wisdom in Christ (Ps. 84:7; Prov. 4:18; 2 Cor. 3:18), and your discernment will always be more and more developed (Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 2:2, 7).

And then, another thing you can do is: Look for some training. We live in an era of *endless* books, blogs, articles, videos—*so many ways* that we can learn. In the next months, we are going to start some evangelism training here. You're not great at evangelism yet? Well, look for a way to get *trained* in that!

We mentioned a while back, opportunities to get trained to learn to do godly Biblical Counseling, and several people have taken advantage of that. And right away, the response is: "Oh, whether I ever counsel somebody else or not, *I* am growing! And my day-to-day conversations are more spiritually productive."

I came to Christ without *any* church background. I didn't know *anything* about *anything*. I was just about to go off to college. I went off to a tremendously secular, ungodly place. And then somewhere along the way, I developed a hunger for God's Word through a good pastor teaching His Word. And I found new desires coming up. And eventually, I recognized: "Gee, you know, one more year and I'm going to have this prestigious degree in Chemistry." And no offense to Eric Kron—I *no longer wanted to be a chemist!* My big brother was the chemist in the family; he was the one whose footsteps I was following. But now, *I was saved!* And I wanted to know: "What can I do?" I had never heard of a "Tween Year" or anything like that, but that's kind of what I wanted to do. "Okay, I'll get this degree, and I know I *don't* want to go to graduate school in *science*. So, what do I do next?"

Well, my pastor suggested: "Go to seminary." I said, "Oh, no, that's for pastors. That's for missionaries." He said, "No, it isn't, necessarily. Just go!" And I said, "Well, I want to learn the Bible before I know what to do when I grow up—so, okay, I'll do that!" And I went purely for my own edification. And all these other guys were talking about how, "I'm going to be a chaplain," "I'm going to be a missionary," "I'm going to be a pastor." And I'm saying, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. What's next?"

Well, somebody brought an opportunity. My friend who was a junior high pastor said, "I really need an Eighth Grade Boys Sunday School teacher this fall." And I had no excuses. I did it. I found out a couple of things: God is good—none of them apostatized because of me. And I found out: I don't think that's my age group for a lifetime of ministry.

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But, you start studying. You start growing. You see an opportunity. You see a need. Somebody says, "Come on and help!" You do it. You know, maybe something *highly spiritual*, like coming on Saturday and cleaning up the campus around here—where you *might* just meet somebody you don't know who might be your friend with whom you link up and serve in some ministry, arm in arm.

You can definitely take advantage of Sunday School, Men's Bible Study, Women's Bible Study. There are other groups. Heritage Bible Church is not the beginning- and end-all of all of those things. Just *keep moving*, and let God lead you! *You will find out* that you are part of His plan! And it *will* unfold. And you probably won't wind up in Bithynia, either! Maybe Kuna. Maybe Meridian. Maybe right where you live. On your job, you may be the only Christian that some people will meet in the next six months. There's your ministry!

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for Your great faithfulness in causing all of this to happen. Here we are, millennia away, thousands of miles away, standing complete in Christ as Gentiles who have heard the Gospel because of the everlasting fruit brought about by those men who went to Philippi on that day. So, Father, help us embrace Your plan for us. Help us to be faithful stewards of all that You have entrusted to us. We know that You know our every need, even before we ask. And so, we simply ask You: Enable us to do that which pleases You most. In Jesus' name. Amen.