

Acts 16:11-40

“Walking In God’s Will” pt 2

I opened our time last week drawing to your attention the fact that when it comes to God’s will, we as humanity generally over complicate the issue in a minimum of 2 ways. By the fact that we overly mystify the matter, and that we have a tendency to misunderstand the matter.

We think that for me to come into an awareness of God’s will for my life that I’m going to need to have some “mystical” experience where by the “Will of God” is made known to me. and That until I’ve heard the big booming voice, or had that emotionally draining experience with God whereby He’s made it crystal clear, that I don’t know what to do, “But when God speaks to me, than I’ll know.” But we discovered the fact that such is not always the case, God’s not always going to roll back the clouds of heaven and speak to us from out of the sky, as a matter of fact it’s a rare to perhaps never (in this lifetime) that God will give us direction in a super spiritual overly mystical manner. We discovered that sometimes walking in God’s will is as simple as being willing to walk down the path that life brings your way, how that sometimes we discover God’s will by the fact that we’ve tried every other option to no avail so the one that’s left must be God’s will.

Such was the case with Paul as he began his 2nd missionary journey. He didn’t know what direction to go, he thought he’d go *this* way, but it didn’t work out, so he decided to head the opposite direction, didn’t come together, he’d come from the other direction over here, so there was only one option left, and in that, being guided as it were by hindrance, he discovered God’s will. From the human perspective he was making mistakes, going where he wasn’t directed, but I’ve discovered that the only people who make mistakes are the people who are actually doing something. If you want to ensure a life with out mistakes, than just do nothing, but the irony of that perspective is that to do nothing is the biggest mistake of all, God has called us to get in the game. There’s no such thing as a “Bench warmer” in the kingdom, unless you’ve been placed there by becoming disqualified, being out of biblical order in some way. So if you’ve made a mistake or 10 in your life seeking God’s direction, that’s ok, it just means you’re available to God, seeking the direction *of* God for your life. But God’s will isn’t overly mystical; to the contrary it’s generally very practical. and Generally speaking the one who’s always looking for the emotional experience, or needs the all but audible voice of God to direct them, is often a very unstable individual. Because rather than just relying on the never wavering direction of the word of God, they’re open to doing whatever it is that they feel directed of by “The Lord” regardless of the what God’s Word might say about that particular direction. Often times they’ll put more stock in that dream, or vision, or, emotional experience that they label “God’s voice” than they do the written word. I’ve had people basically tell me that they would do what they believed God spoke to them to do, regardless of what the bible says about it. and That’s a very dangerous position to be in, because our emotions are about as stable as water, and can be manipulated very easily. But the Word of God holds true.

Can God give you a vision? Sure, He gave Paul one, and from that he was able to glean that he was on the right path and that God was going to take him on in to Europe. Remember he saw a man of Macedonia *pleading* with him to come over and “help” them. and From that they concluded that God had called them to *preach the gospel* to them. and That’s the best help you can be to anyone, it’s great to minister to the needs of the body, but how much better the eternal desperate/deep need of the soul that’s just crying out for help?

Today we’ll see that walking in God’s will isn’t always a joy ride, that’s the “misunderstanding.” That’s if I’m in God’s will everything will be perfect, no problems, never suffering, always doing well from the natural perspective. (Not true)

Well, the team is in Troas, they’re persuaded that they’re to preach the gospel in Europe...

Vs11-12

So they hopped in the boat, the winds were with them and they made it to their destination, around 125 miles in 2 days. Now later he’ll make the trip in the opposite direction and it’ll take them 5 days. and That’s the way it is sometimes in the ministry, the winds are with you, you’re clipping right along, things are going smoothly, and you’re in the groove (so to speak). But then there are other times that it seems like the winds are blowing contrary to your direction and your pushing the whole time, and it seems like a constant battle, just to maintain your course. Now that doesn’t mean that you’re in God’s will when things are going smooth, and out of His will when things are going rough. But that there are different seasons in our lives whereby God is developing in us/through us different things that otherwise couldn’t be done. Be it patience, fortitude, learning to walk by faith rather than our feelings, learning the reality of our own insufficiencies that we might be continually clinging *to* and dependant upon Him because we can’t do this thing on our own, and on and on it could go. There are times when God is just blessing, your efforts and energies seem multiplied, again the winds are with you, you just raise your sails and go. But don’t be deceived, there are times you’re going to struggle through life. Is God any less with you? No, but welcome to a fallen world, this is where we live, sometimes the winds seem to *carry* you, other times they seem *contrary* to you.

Once they came to the port city of Neapolis, they ventured on land to Philippi which was a major metropolis of Macedonia, and this was sort of Paul’s style. He generally planted churches in major through ways, areas of commerce, large populace and all because he knew that the gospel would spill more easily *from* those places than *into* those places. and That as people came from various places into these cities to do business, if they got turned on to Christ, they’d by default take the gospel back to their homeland, so Paul was strategic in his missionary agenda.

Now we read here that it was a colony, which means that it was a *Roman* colony. and This was one of the things that Rome did, as they conquered various places they'd establish colonies here and there which were basically a little Rome away from Rome, and they'd have some of their citizens move there, make it a military retirement type city. and They figured that that gave them an edge in having strong "Pro-Roman" cities in these strategic places, and they'd enjoy all the benefits of Rome, they'd exempt them from taxes, govern them by Roman laws and all the rest. Now the reason this is brought out here is because Paul's going to need to usurp his rights as a Roman citizen later, so Luke lets you know that this was a Roman colony and should've been governed by Roman law, procedures and protocol.

The last thing I want you to see here is that when they got to the city Luke tells us that they, "Stayed there for some days." What does that mean? It means they didn't just immediately set forth to win the city for Jesus, they knew that they were "where" they needed to be, but the "when" and the "how" are as equally important. They were no doubt scouting the city, praying about their approach, seeing what area might be the most advantageous to begin, asking if there were any synagogues, things of that nature. and I've mentioned this before but God's timing is very intricately woven into His plan. and Often times God may reveal to you some aspect of His plan for your life, but knowing "what" and even "where" needs to be balanced with the "when" and "how." Because if not we get out there ahead of God rather than walking in stride with the Spirit. and That's always our desire, not to be out in front of the Lord, or lagging behind the Lord, but just stepping in stride with what the Spirit is doing.

Vs13-15

Interesting that Paul wanted to go into Asia but God wouldn't let him, however his 1st convert in Europe is a woman from Asia, the city of Thyatira! Which is the same Thyatira that Jesus addressed in the 2nd ch of the book of Rev. But we notice that there wasn't even 10 Jewish men in the city because there wasn't a synagogue, and as far as that goes they weren't even directed towards a man to begin with but rather a group of women who met by the river for weekly prayer meetings. So Paul was the keynote speaker at the women's study. Now vs 14 is obviously the vs we want to hone in on for just a second here.

It's here that we're introduced to Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira who was there in Philippi perhaps on business, maybe she'd relocated there we don't know. But we do know that purple was a very expensive fabric so her business was one that would cater to the more wealthy class of people, perhaps the Roman officials and upper class who were there. and We read that she "heard" them which is to say that she *picked up* on what they were saying, she *perceived* what it was they were communicating, and then we find that she was *persuaded* to *personalize* the message. We read that, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul."

So she *heard* the message, and then (as we all should do) took *heed to* the message. Now we see that she was already one who “worshiped God” but she’d never heard the message of Jesus Christ She was sort of a female version of Cornelius the centurion, feared God, sought to worship God to the best of his ability, but hadn’t heard about Jesus. That was sort of Lydia’s position, she was open *to* the Lord, was one who sought *after* the Lord, wanted to be right *with* the Lord, so God brought to her someone who could introduce her to Jesus Christ It’s like the scripture we read in Jer 29 where it says, “*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD,*” Jer 29:13-14

These ladies were just meeting by the river seeking the Lord, and God honored their pursuit of Him. and You know what? God will honor *your* pursuit of Him as well. He’ll reveal Himself to you, being as it were found by you when you search for Him with all your heart. But notice what we see here, even though she worshiped God, it was the Lord who opened *her* heart to heed what Paul shared. What does that mean? Jesus said it like this, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;*” John 6:44

The work of salvation, in its entirety is the sovereign work of God in my life, I don’t choose Him, He chooses me. Paul told the Romans that it’s not of him who wills, or him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. It’s the Lord who causes us to *hear*, that is, understand or perceive, and to *heed*, that is, to be persuaded, and put into personal practice that which we’ve heard. The bible says, “...*it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” Phil 2:13 Which is to say that both the “want” and the “work” itself is God’s doing in your life, it’s not of you, it’s of Him *in* you or Him dealing *with* you as the case may be. It’s God who opens the heart to hear and to heed, not a carefully crafted message so cleverly and eloquently articulated- the Lord opens our heart. In 1st John Ch 2 John said that we don’t need that anyone should teach us, but that the same anointing teaches us all. Now that doesn’t mean we don’t need pastors and teachers, the bible says that God has given such as gifts to the body of Christ for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. But what it *does* mean is that though I can give you *information*, and you can learn and understand perhaps intellectually what I’m saying, I can never give you *revelation* that changes your heart inwardly, personally and intimately, that’s the Lord.

So she had the inward transformation, underwent the outward demonstration, and identification with Christ through baptism. and Then we see that she was more than likely a very successful business woman by the way she extended herself to Paul and the crew.

She says, “If you’ve judged me faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” Now what are you going to say? “No, you’re not faithful.” She was able to persuade you to her perspective, I’m sure her business prospered. and Like with Cornelius her whole household was saved as well, they all believed in Jesus. So we have the makings of a church, she apparently had a rather large home if she could house all her servants along with the entire missionary team, we read in vs16.

Vs16-18

Couple things here quickly. We read that they encountered this slave girl who was demon possessed who brought her masters much profit by fortune telling. They were sort of “occultic pimps” who prostituted her spiritually for money. The question comes up, “Can Satan, or can a demon foretell the future?” I believe that the bible teaches an emphatic, “No!” There in Isaiah 41 God is speaking to the nation and rebuking idolatry, and He says, “*Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; Let them show the former things, what they were, That we may consider them, And know the latter end of them; Or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, That we may know that you are gods;*” Isa 41:22-23 Later on in ch 46 He says, “*For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done,*” Isa 46:9-10 So being able to tell the future is an attribute of God alone, but the *demonic realm deals* in deception, they deceive you by giving you insights into someone’s life, or even your own that no one could otherwise know because they see you, but you don’t see them. and They’re master manipulators seeking to draw a conclusion to a certain chain of events so as to convince you that they’re telling the future.

Now the message she shouted was true, which tells us even the demons believe, so simple intellectual assent doesn’t save anyone, you have to personalize and internalize that so that you take it to heart for you *personally*, rather than just acquiesce to something *generally*. But this spirit was getting on Paul’s nerves, why? Wasn’t what she said true? Yeah, but Paul doesn’t need Satan spearheading God’s advertising campaign, and who knows she may’ve been disrupting the service, shouting in the middle of his sharing. He definitely didn’t want to send the mixed message that they were somehow on the same type mission or on the same team. He just wasn’t looking to the world, much less Satan to promote his cause, and I think there’s a principle there that the church does well to glean. So often we’ll seek to imitate the world in promoting our cause, but God would have us be the innovators rather than the imitators. Don’t imitate the world, in promoting the cause of the kingdom, just let God do the work, the way God wants to do the work, don’t let there be a mixed/misunderstood message as to what you’re about.

So after several days of this, Paul finally looks at her and says, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” You might underline that, Jesus cast out the demonic of His own accord, we don’t have that authority, always keep Jesus between you and the enemy, take him on yourself, you’ll wind up like the sons of Sceva, battered, bloodied, bruised, and beat up. The authority lies in Jesus, and having a personal relationship with him, not in ourselves.

Vs19-24

Ah, the glorious life of a missionary, welcome to Europe! Now these guys drum up charges on a political level. Because Roman law permitted you to have your own religion but you weren't allowed to proselytize, of course they didn't know Paul was a Roman by birth. and They play the personal prejudice that Rome had against the Jews at that time as well, "They're Jews and they're breaking our law in teaching other customs, religious practices and all." Now at the heart of the matter was the fact (vs 19) their hope of profit was gone, the love of money was the root of this evil. But these guys whip the mob up into a frenzy; the magistrates tore Paul and Silas' clothes off their backs and commanded them to be thrashed with rods.

Now the Jews had a law, no more than 39 lashes, the Romans didn't observe anything like that. So they were beaten quite badly I'm sure, this is one of the 3 times that Paul reports that he was beaten with rods there in 2 Cor. and Now that they're beaten and bloodied, they're given to the jailor whose told to keep them securely. So not wanting to take any chances, he places them in the inner prison, and puts them in the stocks, fastens them to the wall. Now remember, they're where they've been directed to go, they're in the will of God. But this is far from life on Ez street. You're in a different country, there's different customs, you don't know anyone, you're in prison, fastened to the wall in stocks, you've been beaten, you're uncertain of the outcome, now what do you do?

Vs25

These guys were amazing... They weren't griping against the government, questioning the love of God, declaring injustice, they were in the midnight hour placing their prayers *before* God, and singing praises *to* God, and notice this – "The prisoners were listening." Probably blown away, you need to know that those around you, who are in the bonds of sin with in earshot of you, are watching your life; they want to know how you respond to tough times. They want to know how you cope with life, especially in the midnight hour, those dark times that are tough, and troubling, and in the midst of unjust suffering, pain and persecution, you know what they saw *in* and heard *from* Paul and Silas, #1 Prayer to God, and #2 Praise for God. Anyone can be happy when circumstances are favorable, but true joy only comes from God, because it's not based upon what's going on around me, but it's the overflow of Christ *in* me. (You might read the 1st 4 vs of James ch 1, and 1st Thess 5:18 at some point with regards to tough situations) But look what happens.

Vs26-34

Last week I mentioned to you that sometimes our suffering has nothing to do with us, but that at times we might suffer for the sake of another. I'm convinced that the reason Paul and Silas suffered, were beaten, battered and throne in jail, was because God wanted to reach out to this jailor and his family, and this was the opportunity that would afford Him to do just that.

Sometimes your suffering will put you in places that you might not otherwise be. Be it in the hospital, or at home to get that phone call when you'd have otherwise been at work, or whatever. But the way you respond to your suffering, or pain, or injustice is critical. These guys could've been venting against the whole situation (justly so, "why me, we've done nothing to deserve this" and all the rest) and they'd have missed what God wanted to do completely.

But I want you to notice in vs 26 that though you may be in pain, you may be in the midst of persecution, that from that place there is *earth quaking, prison shaking, chain breaking* power in your prayer, and your praise to God. and Not only for your own life, notice it loosed the chains of everyone around them as well. God will use your praise, and your prayers to set other captives free.

Now this chain of events woke the guard up, (I have no doubt) I doubt that the earth quaking was exactly common. Some times people need rattled pretty hard in order to wake up and see the desperation of their situation. All the prison doors were open, he thought everyone had escaped, he knew that he'd be killed in that case in the morning so he just prepares to off himself. Now I don't know if Paul saw his silhouette, or heard his sword unsheathe, but he calls out to the guy, "Don't do it, we're all still here." Now when you're on the brink of death, you start to think things through, this guy is having a brush with his own mortality, and he's terrified of his uncertainty. But before we move on (not too far from finished) notice that Paul wasn't guided by circumstantial evidence, but by the compelling/constraining force of love.

When that door flew open he could've interpreted that as God's divine design, it was a jailbreak, too bad so sad for you dude, we're gone! But he didn't, you see we're generally concerned for our own well-being but whatever happens to *others* must be God's will. Paul was more concerned for other's well being and whatever happened to *him* must be God's will; its no wonder God used him so much.

Now vs 30 should be underlined in your bible, he comes in, trembling before Paul and Silas, and says, "Sirs, what (notice) must I do to be saved?" What's the non-negotiable essential? (Follow that up with an underline there in vs 31) "Be baptized, become a member of my church, and pay your tithes" is that what your bible says? Mine says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." and He adds that if his family believes they'll be saved as well, all have sinned, therefore all can be saved by faith in Jesus Christ That's the only work you can do, believe, place all your eggs in the basket of Jesus Christ Hold nothing back, trust *in* Him, depend *upon* Him, give yourself *to* Him completely, and you'll be saved. One day some people asked Jesus, "*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*" *Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'*" John 6:28-29 Now in vs 14 we saw God's sovereignty, in vs 30 we see man's freewill, there's always the balance.

They shared the word of God with them, they all believed, and were saved. They were baptized as well, I love that scene, the one who most likely gave them the stripes, is now washing them, and ministering to them. Jesus Christ changes lives, he's already bearing the fruit of repentance, Jesus just gives you a servant's heart. When Lydia was saved, she immediately sought to serve them, this guy gets saved, he's immediately helping out, God grabbed hold of them in radically different ways, but in the end they were both saved, and that's what it's all about. God reaches different people in different ways, but in the end His concern is that they not perish but have everlasting life. This guy went from suicidal, to rejoicing in Christ seeing his whole family saved in a matter of minutes, God is so good.

Vs35-39

You wonder why Paul didn't tell them of his citizenship before; perhaps there was no time in the mob mentality. But now he's all, "They beat us as a *show*, with no trial, Roman citizens now they want to put us away in *secret*?" "The beat us *publicly* and they want us to leave *privately*? It doesn't work that way, if they want us to go, they can come and get us out themselves." I love that, because now it's the magistrates, not the missionaries who are forced to negotiate. Because this could have radical consequences, Roman citizens were immune from the beaten that was just administered to Paul and Silas. Why did Paul do this? No doubt to gain the fledgling church some added security as opposed to questionable ambiguity. This would make sure that they were left alone, and notice they left only after they reassured Lydia and the bro's who were saved that things would be well for them now.

Vs40

So now when you read the book of Philippians you'll know the circumstances that surrounded this particular church's birth.

Some are born again in serene situations, others are added to the kingdom in adversity, the main thing is that you hear the message of Jesus Christ and that you heed the message of Jesus Christ that you believe on Him whom the Father has sent, if God is dealing with you, than why don't you do that today, place your trust, your faith, in Jesus Christ and you will be saved, that's all you have to do.

Prayer Points: Lord there's so much to soak up in Your Word, thank You for making salvation so simple, we realize that though it's free, there's nothing cheap about it, it cost You everything, even Your only begotten Son. Help us to be able to call upon You, to give our praise to You even in the midst of persecution or pain. and May you use our lives to set the captives free, Lord open our heart to heed the things spoken in Your Word and may we take these principles and internalize them, personalize them that You might be glorified in our lives.