

“Guided by the Spirit”
(Acts 16:6-10)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the Lord equipping Paul and Silas with another member for the Second Missionary Journey: Timothy.
 - a. Timothy was a young man, raised in the Scriptures.
 - (i) He had a faithful Jewish grandmother and mother, though His father was neither a Jew nor a believer.
 - (ii) Actually, no one in his family was converted until Paul came preaching the Gospel in Lystra, where first his grandmother and mother were converted, and then Timothy himself.
 - b. Timothy distinguished himself in the faith and quickly began to excel.
 - (i) By the time Paul reached him some four to five years later, he had already reached the stage where he was ready for more serious work.
 - (ii) This was apparent not only to those who knew him, but to Paul as well.
 - (iii) Paul would later write of Timothy’s Christ-like character – who focused his attention on the things of the Lord, rather than on his own interests.
 - (iv) This serves as an example and reminder to us to press forward in our own maturity, that we might bear as much fruit as possible for the Lord.
 - (a) It’s so easy to get caught up in the comforts and pleasures of this life and to forget why we’re here.
 - (b) We need to remember that the Lord created us for His glory, and it’s for His glory we ought to be living, not for our own interests.
 - c. And so Paul took Timothy, and wanting him to be as useful as possible, had him circumcised:
 - (i) We saw this wasn’t for his salvation, otherwise Paul would have fallen into the Judaizers’ heresy, but to give him a broader audience.
 - (ii) The Jews knew that Timothy’s father was a Greek, and they wouldn’t have accepted him or let him preach in their synagogues unless he was circumcised.
 - (iii) Paul wanted to remove that particular offense, so that the Gospel, humanly speaking, would more likely be heard.
 - (iv) We should become all things to all men – as much as possible, without violating the Scripture – that we might win some to Christ.
2. Finally, we saw them get under way:
 - a. They immediately set out for the work, going through the cities Paul and Barnabas had previously evangelized.
 - (i) Paul would later write to the church at Ephesus that they should “make the most of their time, because the days were evil” (Eph. 5:16).
 - (ii) Here we see him doing just that.

- b. They went throughout the cities reading the decrees decided on by the Jerusalem Council:
 - (i) This would effectively neutralize the spread of the Judaizers' heresy and at the same time build the church up in the truth.
 - (ii) When it came to the Gospel, we see that the apostles were not willing to tolerate any teaching that would destroy its truths.
 - (iii) But when it comes to other matters, we must remember to be patient and not destroy with our knowledge the unity of Christ's church.

B. Preview.

1. With the first churches having been strengthened, it was now time to break new ground.
 - a. But what ground? Where were they to go?
 - b. The Roman Empire was very large. There were many Jews and Gentiles yet to hear the Gospel.
 - (i) There were still many of the lost sheep of the house of Israel to gather.
 - (ii) There were still many Gentiles in darkness, ignorant of the things of the Lord, so many who needed to hear the Gospel.
 - (iii) Their personal resources were small: they were only three men.
 - (iv) Where were they to focus their efforts?
 - c. We see that Paul, Silas and Timothy didn't wait for a sign from heaven to tell them.
 - (i) They already had the commission of Christ to go to the nations (Matt. 28:18-20), and so they went.
 - (ii) But as they went, the Spirit directed them.
2. This morning, I want us to see that as we become earnest about doing the Lord's work, the Spirit will direct us.
 - a. First, we'll see several examples of this in our passage.
 - b. Second, we'll consider some applications of this principle.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, our passage gives us several examples of the guidance the Spirit gives to His people as they set their heart to serve Him.
 1. First, as they started out, the Spirit allowed them to go through Phrygia and Galatia, but not Asia: "They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6).
 - a. The "Asia" referred to here was a Roman province that included the western parts of Asia Minor.
 - (i) Ephesus was its capital.
 - (ii) This region also included several of the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation (1:11).
 - b. For some reason, it wasn't the Lord's timing that they go there.
 - (i) Luke writes that the Holy Spirit forbid them to go.
 - (a) The word translated here "forbid" (*koluo*) means "to cause something not to happen," "to prevent, to hinder."
 - (b) We're not told exactly how the Spirit hindered this, but that He did.

- (c) It could have been verbal communication, or more likely Providential guidance, through the opening and closing of doors/opportunities, or a turning of their hearts one way or another.
 - (d) It's interesting to note that, on his return, Paul did bring the Gospel to Ephesus.
 - (e) It's further interesting that on his third missionary journey, Paul stayed in the school of Tyrannus, reasoning daily for a period of two years, "so that all who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:9-10).
 - (f) It wasn't the Lord's timing at this particular point in their journey, but He didn't overlook those people entirely in His grace.
- (ii) Instead, the Spirit allowed them to go through Phrygia and Galatia.
 - (a) Phrygia is also in Asia Minor, more to the east. It includes the towns of Pisidia (Ac 13:14), Colosse, Hierapolis, Iconium, and Laodicea.
 - (b) Galatia is where the Galatian church was founded by Paul.
 - (c) Though the time wasn't right for the western portion of Asia Minor, it was ripe in other places.
2. After they finished preaching there, they came to Mysia (v. 7), hoping to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit didn't permit this, so they ended up going to the far west in that region to Troas.
- a. Mysia is in northwest Asia Minor.
 - (i) They would need to cross this region if they wanted to go into Bithynia – northern Asia Minor.
 - (ii) But again, the Spirit prevented them.
 - (a) The word (*eao*) means "to allow, to let, to permit."
 - (b) This is something the Spirit wasn't willing to let them do.
 - (c) Christianity would eventually spread to this region, for Peter, writing about AD 64 addresses Christians living in that area (1 Pet. 1:1), but then was not the time.
 - (d) Again, we don't know precisely how the Spirit prevented them – it could have been verbally, or a compulsion of heart, or through Providential opening and closing the doors: but the point is He did.
 - b. And so they passed by Mysia and came down to Troas (v. 8), the chief port city in the Province of Mysia.
3. Finally, the Spirit showed them it was His will they go to Macedonia to preach through a vision: "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.' 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" (vv. 9-10).
- a. When they arrived at Troas, they were still seeking to move forward in the work of the Gospel.
 - (i) They had covered everything the Spirit of Christ would allow them in the east, and now their backs were against the sea to the west.

- (ii) Where were they to go next?
 - b. Before they had a chance to move any further, the Spirit revealed His direction in a vision in the night.
 - (i) A man of Macedonia standing and appealing to Paul, pleading with him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”
 - (ii) Once Paul awoke, they immediately sought to go into Macedonia, since the Spirit had revealed this as His will.
 - (iii) Here is one more way in which the Spirit was guiding them: through visions.
 - c. Just as an aside, notice the change of pronoun from “they” to “we” in verse 10.
 - (i) Someone else had just joined them at Troas.
 - (ii) This was the author of the book of Acts, Luke, the beloved physician, who accompanied Paul on some of his journeys.
- B. Second, now that we’ve seen that the Spirit guides His people who are earnestly seeking to do His will, let’s consider some of the applications of this principle.
1. Let’s consider first the ways in which He did this.
 - a. First, He did so through the Word:
 - (i) They had the clear command of Jesus: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).
 - (ii) They knew what the Lord wanted generally; they just needed more specifics that the Spirit subsequently provided.
 - b. Second, through the Church:
 - (i) What was their specific role in this work the Lord calls His church to do?
 - (ii) He showed them through His personal call on Paul, as well as through the leaders at Antioch who commissioned Paul and Silas, committing them to the grace of God (Acts 15:40).
 - (iii) He showed Timothy as well through the call of his church – the laying on of hands by the presbytery/elders (1 Tim. 4:14) and Paul (2 Tim. 1:6)
 - c. Through a variety of other means:
 - (i) By placing a “burden” on their hearts: a desire to see the Lord glorified and the lost come to faith in Christ: Paul wrote to Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:8-10).
 - (ii) By opening and closing doors: “But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:8-9).
 - (iii) Through verbal communication (Acts 11:8).
 - (iv) And finally through visions: as we see in our text.

2. Second, let's consider the ways in which He continues to guide us.
 - a. Certainly, through His Word.
 - (i) We have the same call as a part of His church.
 - (ii) He tells us how to do what we do in a way that will glorify Him (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - b. As to the specifics of our call, realizing we have only so much time and resources:
 - (i) He guides us through His church: He has appointed the elders to teach, preach, counsel, to set aside men for the ministry; He has given us each other to admonish and counsel one another.
 - (ii) Through giving us a burden: some are restless until they go into the ministry, some He gives a burden for a particular work; He leads us to a particular calling.
 - (iii) By opening and closing doors of opportunity:
 - (a) Sometimes we may have a godly desire, but the Lord will close the door on possible opportunities to fulfill that desire, until He has prepared us for the right opportunity.
 - (b) Through Providence, all of us are afforded different opportunities in life, sovereignly given us by the Lord.
 - (c) Not all of us will be given the opportunities others have had, and we will receive many others haven't. The Spirit guides our steps through these things as well.
 - (iv) As far as the last two – verbal communication and visions – He no longer communicates in that way. The only verbal communication He gives is through Scripture: its reading and preaching.
 - c. But finally, He appears most often to guide us once we respond in obedience and begin to seek that guidance.
 - (i) Paul, Silas and Timothy were in motion when the Spirit began to direct them.
 - (ii) The church in Antioch was already seeking Him when He directed them (Acts 13:2).
 - (iii) Of course, He is the One who moves us to seek Him first, but we must respond: if we don't take that first step, there isn't any need for further direction.
 - (iv) And so if we would know the Lord's will for our lives, if we would have the direction of His Spirit, we must do first what we know He wants us to do – seek Him – and then once we begin to move, He will show us what we need to know, when we need to know it.
 - (v) We should simply do whatever our hands find to do for God's work and let the Spirit guide us.
 - (vi) We can sit still waiting and wondering, or we can begin to do whatever we think might be helpful and then be directed by the Spirit. It's easier to direct an object in motion.
 - (vii) May the Lord help us all to move forward in His will. Amen.