

Sunday – AM – January 11, 2004
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Led by the Holy Spirit

Did you ever decide to go somewhere or say something and then get that little check – that uncomfortable feeling that you really can't explain? Sometimes you stop the plan until you think a little more about it, but sometimes, we just blow it off and continue as planned. There may be consequences to that action that we consider only afterward. We all have schedules that are too full, meetings to attend, decisions that have to be made now. Sometimes it's just plain good logic that governs our next move. We all want to be led by the Holy Spirit – or so we say.

The text for this message is found in the book of Acts 16:6-40, a rather hefty portion of Scripture. The book we call the Acts of the Apostles might more appropriately be known as the Acts of the Holy Spirit. As we have learned, the book of Acts is really the second volume of Luke writings that also includes the Gospel under his name. In the beginning of his gospel, Luke states, *"since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you..."* We have also learned that the order of these events is a geographical order. Luke documents the ministry of Jesus as He progresses toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the Holy City, where the wonderful/terrible final hours of Jesus' life were spent; the place where He was crucified, died, was buried, and raised from the dead; the place where the plan of God was carried out and fulfilled. We are all here today because of what happened in Jerusalem.

Jesus, was filled with the Holy Spirit during His time on the earth, and His ministry was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He left His followers with little to go on except this command and promise... *"but stay in the city until you have been clothed with **power** from on high,"* (Luke 24:49), power to proclaim to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name. This news about Jesus would be the source of joy to all who hear and accept the Gospel message. As the writing continues in the book of Acts, we read more specifically who the source of this power is ... *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). The book of Acts then is the progression of the message of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem, outward, to the ends of the earth. Since the Roman Empire was the known world at the time, Rome was the central focus. The book of Acts records this steady progress of the message of good news about Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Rome.

I - The Holy Spirit leads and guides us.

Acts 16:6-12 – the Holy Spirit guides the path of the missionary team

We pick up the action in Acts 16 and verse 6 with Paul, Silas, and Timothy, who they asked to join them while in Derbe. They are about to move on to Asia and head toward

the important city of Ephesus, the next logical area in their missionary journey. However, Acts 16:6 states that they were “*kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.*” We know from other New Testament writings that this area was in God’s plan for the message of salvation, and it would even be Paul who would be a part of this evangelistic effort, but for now the Holy Spirit restricts their movement into this area at this time.

Instead, they decided to head for Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit again prohibited them. After halting all forward movement, they must have sought the Lord’s direction more diligently. The Holy Spirit, this time, provided them the direction they needed by way of a vision. God can use any means necessary to get our attention and give direction and guidance to our lives. We should be receptive of a variety of ways the Holy Spirit can offer direction to us. It might be a dream, a vision, a still small voice, a word from a friend or prayer partner, or the circumstances we find ourselves in, and even a question or comment from our children. As Christians, we have to learn to rely on the Holy Spirit for direction and. Luke mentions that Paul saw the vision and concluded “*God had called ‘us’ to preach the gospel to them*” (Acts 16:10). Verse 11 begins the first of the “we” sections of Acts. These sections give an indication that Luke himself accompanied Paul on this journey. Luke switches in this section from saying “they” and “them” to saying “us” and “we.” He brings us a documented record of the events that took place in Philippi as an eyewitness rather than using a secondary source. And so, the missionary team head to Macedonia and settle in Philippi, a Roman Colony and a leading city of this region.

II - The Holy Spirit opens the hearts of those who accept the gospel

Acts 16:13-15 – Lydia and her servants accept the message

We read that on the Sabbath the missionary team went out to the “*place of prayer*” and spoke to the women gathered there. In these Gentile communities, an official synagogue could only be established if there were ten Jewish men who regularly gathered together for prayer and teaching. If there were not ten men, then the believers could gather in a given place, usually near water, and pray together, recite the Shema, and listening to visiting Rabbi travelers. In this case, a woman called Lydia was in town. She was a native of Thyatira, and traveled to Philippi to sell her purple cloth. She was a “*worshipper of God,*” which means she was a Gentile who had converted to the Hebrew faith. She gathered with her servants and helpers and listened to the teachings of Paul. Again we see the Holy Spirit at work here as Luke tells us “*the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.*” She and her household heard the message of the good news about Jesus Christ and chose to believe and all were baptized. Notice that the Holy Spirit is the one who opened her heart and caused her to respond to the Gospel. It wasn’t Paul’s dynamic speaking or the spirituality of those present, but the Holy Spirit who made the difference. As we share the Gospel of Jesus with others we should realize the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the response of those we talk to. God is able to save and keep those who He has called to Himself – we are only the vehicle He can use to get the Word out to them. It’s God’s responsibility, through the Holy Spirit, for people to respond, not ours.

III - The Holy Spirit gives discernment and authority over evil **Acts 16:16-18 – deliverance of the demonic slave girl**

During their time in Philippi, a slave girl was following them each day. The Scriptures say she had a spirit of divination. She earned great amounts of money for her owners by her telling of the future. To the people of this time she would have been known to have a Python Spirit. Historically, the Python guarded the temple and oracle of Apollo. Eventually Apollo killed the Python. “Later the word Python came to mean a demon-possessed person through whom the Python spoke.” The words she spoke came to pass, and she had credibility in the community or she would not have earned her owners a good living through her fortune telling. She shouted words of truth about Paul and his missionary team. They were servants of the “Most High God,” a term used of the God of Israel or any supreme deity. Her words were powerful and seem to offer some support to Paul and his mission. However, the enemy can use truth and even the Word of God to sway people toward him and away from God. Paul responds after several days of patient endurance, *“In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.* (Acts 16:18). Not only does he command the spirit to come out, but also he commands it out in the Name of Jesus Christ, the name that is above all names. The woman spoke correctly that they were servants of the Most High God, and by that same God the python spirit was cast out of her, causing her owners to get really ticked off at Paul for causing them such great financial loss. She was useless to them now, but not to God, for her exorcism brought her to the truth in the message about Jesus. She was delivered by the power of the Spirit of the same Most High God that she had shouted that Paul and his company served. As Christians, we need the discernment of the Holy Spirit and His power to speak with authority in the Name of Jesus. Many will cross our paths stating what may even be words of truth, but a further element is needed, the gift of discernment to determine whether we listen or rebuke. Only the Holy Spirit can give us the wisdom we need to discern the truth and what is from God.

IV - The Holy Spirit is with us in adverse situations **Acts 16:19-24 – public beating and imprisonment**

“When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” You would think that delivering someone from an evil spirit would be a good thing, and for the slave girl personally it was. However, to her owners, this was a permanent end to their profit making through her special talent. Besides, Paul was a Jew, and he was preaching a message of salvation in Jesus Christ to this community. Now, in every Roman colony, like Philippi, there were two magistrates appointed to officiate empire rule. One regulation was that proselytizing was strictly prohibited. Since Paul and his group were preaching a religious message, they were an easy mark for being accused of proselytism, a forbidden practice in a Roman colony.

There was already a strong dislike between the Romans and the Jews, so they were immediately publically beaten and thrown into prison. Why does Luke say that only Paul and Silas were imprisoned, when only a few verses before he was saying “we” and including himself in the group? Well, Timothy was born of a Hebrew mother and a Greek father, and he may not have looked much like a Hebrew. In the eyes of a Jew, he was Jewish adopting the religion of the mother, but to the Greeks, he was Greek following the practices of the father. Luke was a gentile and probably known to the people of Philippi. So, for some reason, only Paul and Silas were beaten and arrested, for *“throwing our city into an uproar.”* Anything that could disturb the peace (Pax Romana) of the city would be swiftly and severely dealt with.

Most of us do not know what lies ahead as we follow the call of God. It may cost us financially, socially, geographically, etc. None of us would volunteer for suffering, torture, or death. What has God called you to? Whatever our specific area of interest in ministry, we are called first to be obedient to God’s call. As He leads each of us by His Holy Spirit, we answer, “Yes, Lord!” and go forward in faith, empowered by the same Holy Spirit who directed us and called us. We are challenged to walk with God and obey His voice. Whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, we know God is with us to accomplish His purpose through us, because we are being led by His Spirit.

In a Roman colony like Philippi, jailers were often retired soldiers. This was advantageous to the Roman empire since these men knew how to follow orders, they were loyal to Rome, and could adhere to the ruling of the local magistrates because they understood “chain of command.” When the magistrates said to make sure these two were securely guarded, the jailer had no qualms about putting them deep into the inner prison area, and locking their feet in the stocks like hardened criminals of the state. So far, a very successful, rewarding, spiritually exhilarating missionary journey as directed by the Holy Spirit. I think I would be having second thoughts about hearing God’s direction at this point.

V - The Holy Spirit delivers those whose focus is on God
Acts 16:25-30 – Paul and Silas released – and protect the jailer too

Paul and Silas are undaunted by their surroundings, and they serve as wonderful examples of servants of the Most High God. In fact, they begin singing songs of praise to the God of Israel for all in the prison to hear. If they were going down, it would be in a blaze of glory. But then, suddenly, the ground starts to shake ... what could be happening? An earthquake shook the prison so severely that all the cell doors opened and the shackles fell of their feet. Paul and Silas must have realized this was the hand of God, acting through the Holy Spirit to free them. If it were me, I think I would have said, “Thank you Lord!” and ran for the hills. The power of the Holy Spirit is sufficient enough to deliver us from any circumstances so we can follow the call of God.

VI - The Holy Spirit turns sorrow into joy for those who accept the gospel
Acts 16:31-34 – The jailer and his family are saved and rejoice

Paul and Silas, again led by the Holy Spirit, remained in their cell along with all the prisoners under this jailer's watch. Not knowing this, the jailer is so distraught at the thought of his prisoners' escaping, and knowing the consequences awaiting him under Roman law, decides to kill himself by falling on his sword. Paul calls out to him, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" Of course, the jailer is ecstatic and falls at the feet of Paul and Silas and utters the famous question found in Acts 16:30, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" The text is not clear as to why he would have asked such a thing. I might have asked, "What are you still doing here?" Perhaps he knew of the proclamation of the slave girl, that these men were servants of the Most High God telling the way of salvation. Perhaps it was the singing followed by the miraculous earthquake release. Why didn't Paul and Silas run for it? Couldn't this earthquake release be considered the Lord's deliverance for them? Didn't they recognize this as God's miraculous power at work? Paul seems to take this in stride and answers by the well-known Acts 16:31 verse, "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household.*" Now there have been many who have preached that if a member of a household gets saved, the whole household must, by some promise of God also eventually be saved. I have sat under this teaching, bought into it, and even proliferated it to others. But, the fact is that in both Lydia's case and the Philippian jailer's case, the gospel was brought to each of their household members and then they believed. Now it was common, especially in this culture, for the family members to follow the religious practices of the "man of the house." The fact is that Paul was afforded the opportunity through the Holy Spirit's working to preach the gospel to their household members, and then they decided to follow Jesus and get baptized.

VII - The Holy Spirit gives boldness to stand up for the ourselves and others
Acts 16:35-40 – Paul demands an apology and secures the believers

I have to think it was also the Holy Spirit's direction that Paul waits until now to reveal that he is a Roman citizen. This is particularly bothersome to the magistrates, since they know that it is unlawful to arrest, beat, and imprison a Roman citizen in a Roman colony without a proper trial. Assuming they were only Jews, they short-circuited their own judicial process and now Paul called them to answer for it. He demands an apology (in a sense). He asks for the magistrates themselves to come and release them from prison, which would make this a public matter. In so doing it also helps secure the safety of those who Paul would be leaving in Philippi, those who have just accepted the gospel message and would remain to establish the Philippian church. And the magistrates comply with Paul's request. After leaving the prison, the missionary team visits the house of Lydia to encourage those who had gathered there. I'm sure this incident remained on their minds for years, and they must have been greatly encouraged as they started to meet in Jesus Name and grow through the ministry of the Word and the message about Jesus Christ. We may have to face the local officials to stand our ground and speak up for what is right and lawful. We may have to go to bat for the church or for those in our community.

Conclusion:

We have seen how the Holy Spirit was instrumental in leading this missionary team to the exact place they needed to be to accomplish God's plan in Philippi. Although they faced various trials and disturbances, they remained faithful and obedient. We all will face decisions that need the leading of the Holy Spirit. When He leads, will we follow in obedience and trust wherever God leads, or will we take the safer path? We may be safe for the time being, but will we accomplish what God intended for us? Sometimes a decision will have to be made in an instant. Can we trust God's direction by the Holy Spirit and obey?

Illustration Story: The Father and the capsized boat.

In this story the decision was excruciating and required quick reaction and obedience. Look at the result. God was able to accomplish a perfect and more effective plan by the father's obedience even though it cost this man his son. How far are you willing to go to be obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading? Can you truly trust and obey?