

## Acts 16:1-10

“Walking In God’s Will”

When it comes to walking in God’s will, it seems to me that for some reason we as human beings have a natural tendency to overly complicate the issue in a minimum of 2 ways. #1 “We Overly *Mystify* The Matter.” We think that the will of God should be revealed to us in a mystical, sort of a super spiritual manner, and until we’ve had that “close encounter” regarding God’s will for my life, “I’m just not sure what I should do... but when God speaks to me it’ll be clear.” But then also not only do we overly mystify the matter #2 “We *Misunderstand* The Matter” and What I mean by that is that we generally have this idea that if I’m walking in God’s will that everything will be “peachy” in my life, I’ll be riding high, the wind blowing through my hair, and I’ll be leading life on easy street, but if there’s complication in my life, than I must somehow, for some reason be out of God’s will.

Now I’m not going to say that there could never be a time when God might direct you in His will by a mystical/super spiritual experience, I believe He can. We’ll see such an experience with Paul today, but we’ll also see Paul directed into God’s will by no “voice” from God at all, as a matter of fact the way God’s will was determined was by the fact that after every other option was played out, there’s only one thing left... must be God’s will. My point being that sometimes from our perspective rather than walking in God’s will we sometimes stumble into His will by trying every other option 1<sup>st</sup> and when none of those things work out, we discover God’s will, it’s the only option left. Ch 16 shows us that walking in God’s will is sometimes just as simple as going down the path that life brings us. We don’t always know from the human perspective which direction to take, and that would only make sense if we’ve given our lives to Christ. Because if I’ve given my direction to be determined by God, and God’s ways are high as the heavens are above the earth beyond *my* ways, and past my finding out, than why would I fool myself as to believing that I’m always going to understand *His* ways for my life? The bible puts it like this, “*A man's steps are of the LORD; How then can a man understand his own way?*” Prov 20:24 There are going to be times in my life where I just don’t get it, but that’s ok. Because what *I do get* is that God loves me, is *for me* and not *against* me, thinks thoughts of peace and not evil *towards me*, so I can completely abandon myself *to* Him because I can fully trust *in* Him, even when perhaps I don’t understand what’s going on, or which way I should go.

2<sup>ndly</sup> ch 16 shows us that walking in God’s will, can be far from the “perfect” life according to the flesh. That I can be right where God wants me to be and yet still experience hardship, trials, unjust pressure/pain and unjust persecution, I can be in want, or somehow suffering, and yet still be in the center of God’s will for my life.

The bible has much to say about suffering, and what God is able to work out for us, and develop in us through suffering that otherwise couldn't be done. Whether it be learning obedience *to* Him, trust *in* Him, dependence *upon* Him, learning to draw strength *from* Him, we gain a heart of compassion for others who suffer in like manner that we otherwise wouldn't have, we're taught the faithfulness of God, it loosens our grip on the things of this world so as to set our sights on Heaven, and on and on it goes. But beyond all of that we understand that when it comes to our lives, God is working out things that pertain to the eternal, rather than the temporal here and now. and Because of *that*, somehow *in* that, those things that make for temporary struggles, set backs and sufferings, God uses for our eternal well-being. and Not *only* that, sometimes He uses them for the sake of *other's* eternal well being as well. It may not be for your sake that you suffer at all, but for the sake of others.

Now there's something Christ like about that isn't there? Suffering, for the sake of others... we'll see that in ch 16 as well, however that'll be next time.

We left off seeing Paul and Barnabas part ways, I was going to spend a little more time on that, but I think the idea was communicated. The parting wasn't the problem, it was the manner in which they parted, there was contention, and it led to division. They had 2 different approaches to ministry, Paul was hardcore, Barnabas had a softer edge. They disagreed, divided and went separate ways. You know, I love the transparency with which the bible deals with circumstance, these guys that God used weren't perfect. Now that should give you hope, because that means God can use us to, He wants to and He will, you just have to avail yourself to Him. Well, these guys ultimately reconciled, we know that even Paul and Mark made up by Paul's writings. and God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, problems come up, people rub each other wrong, but forgiveness and reconciliation is where it's at, we're to forgive one another.

But for now, Barnabas and Mark headed off for Cyprus as they did the 1<sup>st</sup> time, and Paul routed the opposite way with Silas, sort of back tracking by land. 1<sup>st</sup> He ministered in the local region, than he headed the land route back to Derbe and Lystra, the last 2 stops on his 1<sup>st</sup> trip.

Vs1-3

So enters Timothy into the scene, and this is the same Timothy who would become as a son to Paul in the faith to whom was written both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy. and Here we learn a little bit about Timothy, and the 1<sup>st</sup> thing that's pointed out to us is that he was a "disciple." Which to you and me means that he was a believer, and had been seeking to follow after the Lord for a while now. Most people believe that he was converted during Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey which was about 5yrs prior to this and most people believe that he was in his early teens when Paul passed through the last time which would place him somewhere around 18-20 yrs old or so now.

It's cool to see Paul take such an avid interest in him because Paul understands that he isn't going to live physically forever. So he grabs a young guy from the next generation and begins to pour himself into him, now surely there is wisdom in having people who are your contemporaries and even older than you on your team whenever possible. But wise is the person who is willing to invest themselves into the up and coming next generation. Divulging that which God has invested into you, into them, of course somewhere in there you could even apply the parable of the talents. We're to invest that which God has entrusted to us so that it brings Him a return, and continues to grow His agenda rather than just burying it, keeping it to ourselves and giving it back to Him with no interest upon His appearing. One way we invest that which God has entrusted to us is to take those insights, that understanding, the practical "How to's" and "Wherefores" that God has taught us over the years and invest them into the lives of those coming up behind us who'll carry *on* long after we're carried *out*. and After Paul had invested himself into Timothy, he encouraged him to do the same thing with others. We read in 2 Tim 2:2 where Paul said to him, "...*the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*" "You've heard it from me, now you commit it to others, and encourage them to teach it to *others still.*" So if you have a few miles on you in the Lord, you do well to find someone with a few less miles on them, that you might spill into their lives those things that you've gleaned by walking with Him.

We also find out here that Timothy was ½ Jew, ½ Greek. That his mom was a believer, and that his dad was not, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim reveals the fact that his grandma was a believer as well.

Vs 2 tells us that he was "well spoken" of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

Which is to say that he had a good/godly reputation, and anytime you're considering people for leadership positions in the church, that's a big one. So often people will take people of material wealth, or business savvy, and place them in positions of power in the church. But everyone knows they're a scoundrel, but because of what they have to offer, people will overlook it. and That's absolutely shameful, Paul was interested in his character, concerned for the position of his heart, and the brethren testified that he was the real deal, a genuine lover of God. and It's neat to see God giving Paul another young man to bring alongside the *work* of God and instruct him further in the *ways* and *word* of God. John Mark didn't work out for him this way, but God gave him Timothy who would.

Now if you're not careful vs 3 will confuse you. Because he just went to the wall fighting for the fact that you didn't need to be circumcised, and now here he is taking Timothy and having him circumcised. What's the deal there? Simple, it's that "Law of love" thing we were talking about last week. He wasn't circumcised for the purposes of *salvation*, but rather for the purpose of *communication* and there's a big difference.

Timothy was ½ Jew, apparently his unbelieving dad never allowed him to be circumcised as a boy, but Paul knew that if they were to be at all effective in communicating the gospel to the Jew, coming into the synagogues and all, that Timothy would have to be circumcised. Or else they'd be fighting up hill all the way, when it comes to the essentials of salvation, there's no compromise. But when it comes to the effective means of communication, there's room to negotiate. So that if me wearing kacky pants and a button up shirt, a tie now and then gives me a more effective platform to minister to the guy or gal who doesn't understand that the message is the same if I'm wearing cut offs and a T-shirt, than fine, I'll wear nice clothes. When I'm in Africa I minister in my "Sunday best" in Russia I wear shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, its not a matter of salvation, it's a matter of communication. What do I need to do, in order to make sure I've not shut them off from hearing the message of the love and grace of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for them upon the cross? It's not a matter of legalism at that point, it's a matter of love, because you love them, you're willing to minister *to* them in an environment by which they can receive. Paul phrased his position best when he wrote to the Corinthians, leave the book of Acts, look at 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:19-23

Hey, if the situation demands a suit, I'll wear a suit, if I'm ministering at a bikers rally, I'll wear the leather, whatever I need to do (with in the confines of acceptable before God) in order to win the more to Christ, that's what's happening here. He knows there's Jews that they'll be ministering to, Timothy is ½ Jew, if they're to give him an ear at all, Timothy will need to be circumcised. Again it wasn't about salvation, it was about communication, keeping that door of ministry open so that some might be saved. What love is there in exercising my liberty in Christ so as to shut out someone from hearing the gospel because I've stumbled them from being able to receive from me.

Vs4-5

What were the decrees that they were delivering? Remember we saw them last week, and really they were certain works that they were asking of them. How that they were to walk, not in legalism, but in love towards their Jewish friends/brothers, not doing things to stumble them or strain their relationship just because they were free in Christ. and I Love the fact that they were delivering to them certain decrees, but that the churches were strengthened in the faith as opposed to being brought into legal bondage. They were able to glean the difference and grow in love, rather than being bound in legalism, they seized the opportunity to do the loving thing.

We like seeing that they were strengthened in the faith, rather than *shaky* in the faith. When we see the word "strengthened" here it carries the idea of being firmly established. It was used in the medical sense in Acts ch 3 when Peter lifted up the beggar who'd been lame from his mother's womb in the name of Jesus and we read, "...and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." Acts 3:7 Which is to say they were set firm, and established in strength. and That's what was taking place in these churches, they were headed in the right direction already and when Paul came back around all he did was strengthen and make them firm in their position.

You have to know that it made Paul so glad to see these churches doing well after not having had any contact with them for a # of yrs now. Because Lystra is the city that they were ready to sacrifice to him in one minute, and the next minute they were stoning him, dragging him outside the city and tossing his body in the dump just left for dead! Now, you've ministered in this city, led people to Christ and established a work, but after they've seen the way you were handled, they might have 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts as to whether or not they want to actually be apart of this thing? But you remember that Paul took the opportunity to teach them after all of that, that "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*" Acts 14:22 Life in Christ isn't always a cake walk, and they saw that 1<sup>st</sup> hand, now he's back and they're just flourishing. You know it just topped him out, why? Because the fruit of his ministry was remaining.

Most people are about the big surge. They come through town, whip people into a frenzy, get them pumped up and when they move on they feel they've done a great work. But getting people's name on a roster somewhere isn't where its at, I want to know how many of those people are still walking with Christ 5yrs from now, that's where the fruit is. When those people you've ministered to, or led to Christ are still walking with Christ years down the road. Jesus said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain,*" John 15:16 and Paul is seeing here how the fruit of his ministry has remained all these years. and Now they're increasing in # daily, no gimmicks, no "Pack a pew" Sundays, or "Raffling off camels" just teaching the word of God, encouraging them in the grace of God, and God is just blessing His Word, and His work done His way.

Vs6-8

Or to understand all that another way, they tried to go in every direction except the right direction 1<sup>st</sup>. Understanding that they came from the south and east, they headed up North and around the bend to Derbe and Lystra, then they thought well, lets head over here into Asia minor, but that didn't happen. So they thought, "Well lets head up here into Bithynia" but that didn't happen, that only leaves one direction untapped, west. So they headed down from the coastal region of Bithynia to Troas. What's my point in all this? That sometimes truth be known I'm not always going to have a crystal clear mystical experience leading me down the path of God's will for my life. Paul didn't know which way to head. He thought he'd head one direction, but the Holy Spirit said, "No." Now how did the Spirit minister that? I don't know, Silas was a prophet, perhaps through him, maybe it was by circumstances that somehow prevented them, but nevertheless they got the idea, this is a closed door. "God must have something different for us over here..." So they took off a different direction, closed door # 2, "Well, that's the way we came from." So they went the only other direction there was and headed for Troas, but that wasn't what Paul *set out* to do, as a matter of fact it seemed to be his last choice. But it was God's choice for him, and the Spirit was guiding him, (notice it) by hindrance. The Holy Spirit was guiding Paul from a negative perspective humanly speaking. and Often times the Spirit will guide us by *closing* doors every bit as much as He'll guide us by *opening* doors.

When we were looking for church property, we knocked on the door of these 60 acres up the road about 3x. We couldn't get it to happen, it was a closed door, so we moved on to 10 acres out by the MSSU, we bartered, negotiated, sought to seal the deal and everything else, the door closed. Then the Lord led us out to the 18 acres that we're currently remodeling the building that was already on it. and It was by far the best deal out of the 3, but the Lord led us, not by opening the doors initially, but by closing them. Paul knew what that was like, and it should encourage you to know that even the apostles didn't always have clear direction on which way they were to go. Paul didn't go the right way here until every other direction was no longer an option. There was nothing *mystical* or *super spiritual* about it, as a matter of fact Paul was probably fairly frustrated, because he couldn't figure out why God wouldn't let him minister in certain areas. But he was about to find out that his vision was much smaller than God's was. and That's generally the way it is, Paul wanted to minister in Asia minor, God wanted to give him the uncharted (as far as the gospel was concerned) continent of Europe. Which for us is a good thing because many of our forefathers were over there in that region, now God was going to reach those other areas as well, but not with Paul at this point.

#### Vs9-10

So you see God can lead us at various times in various ways, sometimes its real clear, God may give you a vision and tell you plain. I've never had a vision per say, being completely awake yet being brought into a zone like this where God speaks to me in a vision, generally with me it's the other, never knowing exactly what direction to go so God leads me by closing one door after the next. ;0) But that's ok, if my steps are of the Lord, than how am I always going to understand my own way? But notice a couple of things here and then we'll close.

#1 In vs 10 we see the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun used with regards to the writing of the book of Acts, did you notice it there? Luke goes from saying things like, "They did this," or "They went there," to "We sought to go to Macedonia" which tells us that Luke was there in Troas and became apart of the team at this point. Now what exactly the terms were surrounding his joining the team he doesn't tell us, but I like to think of him as another blessing that God was wanting to give Paul that had he had his way, he'd have missed out on. Because Luke was a medical physician, he was a doctor. and Paul had some physical afflictions, so God is his grace added Luke to the team here to travel *with* him and tend *to* him. Now he'll travel different places with them at different times, but this happens to be one of them as the boldly go where no missionary has gone before.

Notice that they sought to go, "Immediately," I like that. Once he received clear direction, they wasted no time in stepping out into the work. Often times we have a tendency to procrastinate, or we make excuses, want confirmation 15 times over. But these guys got their marching orders and went for it, they knew that God could close those doors if He wanted to, they'd had some personal experience with that before.

So let's go for it, you know God knows your heart, if you want to do what God would have you do and really don't want to violate the parameters of His will for your life, He knows that. and He'll honor that, when you start heading in a direction that goes beyond those parameters, He'll close those doors, just like the property pursuits I was telling you about. If God is speaking to your heart about heading in a certain direction, or stepping out into a certain arena, go for it, if you missed it, He'll close the door. But He just might be wanting to bless your life, and use your life to bless others.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and last thing I want you to see is that the plea of the man in the vision was for what? "Help!"

So how did they interpret that? What was their conclusion? That God had called them to, "Preach the gospel to them." Listen, the greatest help that you can give to *anybody* is the life changing, eternal impacting, good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Oh it's great to help people practically, and at times we're called to do just that, and it can be a great tool, but the whole idea is to simply create an avenue whereby I can minister to the deeper need of the heart, and the eternal need of the soul. Because if you're cold, so I give you a blanket, that's great, I've helped temporally, but what real good have I done you eternally? You see the greatest need that mankind has, and the best help we can be to any people, is to give them the message of the gospel, because life's but a vapor. Think about that, think about how long you'll live (50yrs, 80yrs, perhaps 120yrs), now compare that with how long you'll be dead, where's the real need? They concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel, to answer their spiritual cry for help. They're crossing a portion of the sea, coming into a different country, different culture, different people, but they're bringing with them the same message. People may be different culturally, times may change historically, but the need of the human heart transcends time, culture, countries or anything else. No matter where you may be, or where you may go, you can know that no matter how different things may be circumstantially, we all have the same need internally, *all* have sinned, therefore *all* need a Savior.

Maybe you're here today and you've never submitted to Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. I'm going to give you that opportunity, what is the *gospel*? That Jesus came to this earth, fully God/fully man, died on the cross to the price for your sin, rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that by believing in Him you might be justified before God. You say, "How does that work?" I don't know, God doesn't ask us to *understand* it, He asks us to *believe* it, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Prayer Points: Lord may we be a true help in a time such as this, You've called us to be where we are, in the time that we are, around the people that we are, that we might be a help, that we might give people the good news of the cross of Jesus Christ May we be a help and not a hindrance to Your work. Thank You that we can trust that You'll lead us where we need to be, even when we're not exactly sure ourselves, Lord may we be strengthened in the faith, in the inner man, and may You bring forth fruit in our lives that remains, to Your glory.