

**Come over to Macedonia and help us**

Acts 15:16-16:40 (key verse 16:9)

" During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

As believers who is really the master of our lives? Is it God or is it our own ideas of how things should be? Who or what are we committed in following really? Because God's way of working is generally different from our ways. I had a particular idea of how I was going to get married and I can tell you now, it was completely different from how it happened. God made it clear through convicting me timeless times through his word to surrender my ideas and mainly my human will and accept His will. It was not a pleasant process but a painful one. God's way of working is many times beyond our way of understanding and expectation. But it is wonderful because it is on a firm foundation. It's the life led by the Holy Spirit. While preparing this message, I came across this quote by A.W. Tozer that really got my attention. "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference." I believe no believer wants to live their Christian without the leading of the Holy Spirit. We want to be a movement led by the spirit of God and not simply doing things out of routine. Today's passage is a great example of what a ministry led by the Holy Spirit Looks like. Through preparing message the lord granted a prayer topic to really live a led by the spirit of God. As we go through this passage, let's see how God first leads Paul away from Asia Minor and gives him a new vision. Then let's see how this vision is realized as God leads Paul to three very different people that each needed Jesus. Amen.

After Paul and Barnabas separated over a sharp dispute, Paul took Silas and then came to Derbe, then Lystra where there was a disciple named Timothy, his father was Greek while his mother a Jew and a believer. Timothy was spoken well off by the believers at Lystra and Iconium. Look at verse 6-8, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas." Paul and his companions had passion and zeal to preach the word of God in the province of Asia. However they were prevented by the Holy Spirit. How could the Spirit of God prevent them from doing such a wonderful thing. Was not this Paul's obedience to Jesus command? They were doing what they knew best for the work of God, however still the Spirit of God prevented them from entering Asia. Now they were traveling in the region of Phrygia and Galatia in a way seeking what's God's leading was. Arriving at the border of Mysia, they were again prevented from entering a place called Bithynia by the Holy Spirit. This was the second time they are prevented by the Holy Spirit from doing a good work, does this mean they should just return back and forget about preaching the word of God? It could not be, because they knew that Jesus did empower them with the Holy Spirit to be His witness throughout the world. So what was happening. This could really be discouraging, to travel tirelessly to do the work of God only to be prevented by God from doing what you believe is what the Lord wants you to do. The question we could ask ourselves is "how do I know when God is leading me away from a 'good' work?" This may be the hardest to discern.

One thing that makes discerning the Holy Spirit difficult is ourselves. It is so hard to separate ourselves, our own desires, our own wish dreams, and our own ambitions from God's vision. So as God works in us, to show us his will, we need to be honest with ourselves, and be aware of the reality that our own subjective selves, our bias, prejudices and preferences, will get in the way of seeing God's vision. In this case the Holy Spirit was preventing them from entering certain places. This means that as much as we like it when God opens certain doors for us, God can also close certain doors. We should then seek the door that he has opened. Another question may be, why did not God show them from the start the door that is open or where to go. They could have saved a lot of time and energy. The major problem with us is our own personal visions. Paul and his companions searched throughout the land, they had literally reached the end of land, and maybe ran out of ideas of their own. So now, with open hearts, God can show them his vision. The Holy Spirit works not only to give us his vision, but to tear down our own. Many times we are focused on others, bringing the word to others but in that process God is also dealing with our hearts and desires. I pray that we may be prepared to lay down our own plans and ambitions to see God's vision. May god give us all open and humble hearts to actively seek God's will, not our own. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see what He sees and where He leads us to.

Now let us see how God grants Paul and his companions vision, lets all read verse 9-10, "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready

at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” We notice couple of things regarding this vision, **firstly, it was virtual**. God could have given a command to Paul to go to Macedonia, but rather he gave him something virtual. Something he can imagine and virtualize. **Secondly**, the vision was about a person who was open hearted, begging and situated in Macedonia. **Thirdly, God placed a sense of burden or problem in Paul’s heart**, the man in Macedonia was begging for help. This required Paul to respond to this need. God’s process of planting his vision in our hearts can be a long and painful process. Paul and his companions had to travel around 640km on foot before God’s vision was made clear to them. When God breaks our vision and plants his vision it can be painful, because generally our visions are selfish or rather not about God. However, the Holy Spirit works to empty us of ourselves until we can humbly accept God’s vision.

It’s easy to be ignorant and stick to our own ideas of how God wants us to serve him. And to some extent even serve our own ideas instead of God himself. It’s easy to focus on ourselves, sit on the couch, enjoy our comfortable homes, attend all our church activities, and not worry about the people and issues around us. But I pray that each one of us may have a burning desire to see God’s vision for the people around us. I pray that we may be a church that loves and serves our neighbors. Let’s not just talk about being a church that teaches the Bible and raises disciples and expect someone else to do the dirty work. Let’s not just say we are about world mission and expect someone else to go out and be a missionary. Let’s get our own hands dirty with joy and enthusiasm. Let’s get out into our neighborhoods and campuses, let’s be salt and light at our workplaces where we spend the majority of our day, lets love the people in our own homes to find the open needy hearts around us.

I was happy to hear some of our leaders and bible students went on to campus to share the gospel yesterday. Let’s actively and humbly seek after God’s vision, that our hearts might be broken for the people around us. Do you see God vision? May God give each one of us such a vision that breaks our hearts and compels us to respond. Taking note that Paul and his companions were not sitting idle after the Lord said No for Asia, but kept searching God’s vision by traveling around to try and go to another place to preach the gospel. I remember when I was young, I could see that our UBF ministry was about campus students, but I told myself that this is one vision or ministry of God, there are other ministries of God. So I was tempted not to commit so that I could first wait to hear and see God’s vision for my life. I could feel that I was developing a sense of idleness and rather than at least committing to what was clear from the bible. To share the gospel of Jesus whether campus students or not. Paul and his companions were not idle and God could finally give them his vision. So if you are really eager to know God’s vision for your life, get dirty and working in the things of God, commit to whatever he has giving you or where you are at the moment in serving him. if you serving as presider serve as though you serving before God, if you are serving one bible student serve them as though serving before God, a family member who does not know Christ, why not share, etc. Then In time I believe God will remove our own ideas and plant his vision.

Paul then traveled by sea from Troas into Neapolis then into Philippi a leading city in Macedonia, one of the Roman colonies. They stayed the several days and on the Sabbath looked for a place of prayer which was possible by the river. It is there that they met some women there and began to preach the gospel of Jesus. Look at verse 14, “One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” purple cloth was for royalty, so this suggested that she was a very successful woman and well connected because she was dealing with a cloth of royalty. As well off as she was, she needed help, she needed to hear the message of the gospel of Jesus. We are told that she was a worshiper of God, worshiped the best way she could but did not know Jesus. She wanted to know more but there was no one to help her until Paul and his companions came around. She even convinced Paul and his co-workers to come to his house and had his family baptized. So, the first person in Macedonia that accepts Paul’s message is a woman. But wasn’t God’s vision to Paul of a Macedonian man? It seemed reasonable to me for Paul to dismiss this group of praying women, and specifically Lydia saying to himself, “this wasn’t in my vision, it was a man, not a woman!” This shows us that Paul was not clung on his own ideas when following the vision’s details, but he followed the working of the Holy Spirit to see where God is working. That spirit led him to a river outside of a main city to a group of women. To human eyes, this was not even the ideal place to begin a great work of God! They were led to minister to one person, this is the amazing heart of God, who is concerned about one person at a time.

Paul did not show any prejudice or have any bias. As a Jewish man he may have also had to overcome some discomfort to be welcomed into a Gentile woman’s home. God led Paul to an unexpected place, to find an unexpected Gentile woman, to share

the gospel with. May God give each one of us an attitude and a willingness that follows the Holy Spirit to overcome our prejudices and take us out of our comfort zones to share the gospel. The next person who needed help was the slave girl who had an evil spirit that could predict the future, she followed Paul and his companions and kept saying **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”** Which was definitely truthful, but Paul could not allow the ministry of demons to be mingled with the ministry of Jesus. Paul then commanded the spirit to come out of her, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. This girl was been enslaved by greedy men who made money out of her prophetic abilities. And now Paul released her from tis bondage. This little girl was probably trying to impress the people for her own slave masters so they could make more money out of her. Its like today some of these “men of God” who would be telling people how many tomatoes or onions are in their fridges. Having nothing to do with the ministry of Jesus. Sadly, they are actually enslaving their members. But Jesus through Paul brought freedom to this little girl.

The owners were not happy with what Paul did, and started to bring all kinds of accusations against Paul and his companions. Paul and Silas were dragged into the market place to face the authorities. They were stripped and beaten up so badly and then thrown into prison with a jailer to guard them. This could have been discouraging for the Paul and Silas, however we should know that in this world doing the will of God will come with some form of persecution. It is the will of God. Paul and Silas also responded with praying and singing hymns to God. Which also showed their ultimate trust in God’s will. There was a sudden earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison and all the prison doors were open, chains also became loose. When the jailer woke up and saw prison doors open, he drew his sword about to kill himself for he thought prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights and rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. Look at verse 30-31, “He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” It seems the jailer was also a man with much troubles in his heart, and had deep desire to be saved, so he asked, what must I do to be saved. The jailer was the third person who received help in Macedonia and also influenced his family to come to the faith.

Notice that when Paul was released from prison, when they visited Lydia’s house, verse 40 says, After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, **where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them.** Then they left. They met brothers and sisters, it was not just Lydia’s family. This was the start of the Church in Philippi.

**In conclusion,** In this passage we can see how God wants to empty us of our own plans and ambitions, he wants to give us his vision, and carries out his will by showing His saving grace to one person at a time that needs Jesus. The reality is that our own plan can be selfish and short sided. There are people all around each one of us that God prepared in advanced for us to meet. People in need of love and of a shepherd. People in need of the gospel and the truth. Can you see what God sees in this world? Can you see people’s real needs? There are students with so many questions on their hearts, searching for answers. Can you hear them calling for help? We each have neighbors and coworkers around us with so many pains and wounds in their lives. Is our heart broken for them? Some of us have children and family members that we’ve taken for granted, we think they’re doing ok, but they’re looking to be loved. Can you feel their longings?

I must confess that I too desire to live a comfortable life, instead of desiring to know God’s vision and been led by the Spirit of God than my own ideas. I generally think a lot before I do something, it can be a good thing but also my downfall. Instead of relying on God I tend to rely on my own ideas and generally my ideas are what is comfortable for me. I am guilty of just talking about reaching out to others with the gospel, talking about missions. I pray that I may seek God’s vision and summit to the leading of the Holy Spirit. To serve family with God’s vision, serve my fellowship and ministry with God’s vision and surrender to God’s leading for those I need of the gospel of Jesus. Would you join me in my prayer, that we as a church would get our own hands dirty, get out into our neighborhoods, get on to the campuses and have God’s vision. Let’s make genuine relationships and genuine friendships with the people around us. Let’s not overlook our own children and family members. Let’s love our coworkers and get to know them. Would you allow the Holy Spirit to find the open needy hearts around you? God may lead us to the most unlikely people. May God help us to find the Lydias, the slave girls and the jailers around us and share the gospel with them by the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.