

The Spirit's Guidance.  
Acts 16:1-10

Psalm 68:1-19

Ephesians 1

Responsive Psalm 139:1-12

This morning we are going to be looking at the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter as we continue our journey through the book of Acts. Let us go ahead and read chapter 16. If you remember, last week in chapter 15 was the account of the council of apostles in Jerusalem to determine the necessity of circumcision among the Gentiles. This was a very important debate that had arisen as more and more Gentiles were coming into the churches, for it dealt directly with the core message of the gospel itself. That is, faith comes by hearing, and believing thus becoming a new creature, a new creation in Christ apart from any works or good deeds or adherence to any laws or traditions, but merely through belief and confession and a turning away from sins is one saved. And the proving of this is the gift of the Holy Spirit that was given to the Gentiles just as it was given to the Jews who believed. Confirming that salvation has come to the Gentiles apart from the law.

So now being unified in message, having set straight this controversy we see Paul has gone out on his second journey, this time taking Silas with him, for as we saw in the end of chapter 15 he and Barnabas had a dispute over bringing John Mark, who had abandoned them on their first journey. Here we see Paul and his party returning to the churches that were established through the first journey, and they are returning to as it says, strengthen and encourage them, and also to give them the instruction of the Jerusalem Council regarding the issue of circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic Law. We see here that Paul meets up with Timothy in Lystra, and Luke describes him as a disciple, one who also believes in Jesus Christ. He was well liked and highly spoken of by the church in Lystra, which attests to his belief and faithfulness. But there arose a slight problem, for his mother was Jewish, and his father a Greek Gentile. The passage says that his mother also believed, but it would appear by the this text that his father was not himself a believer and is likely why though technically being a Jew, Timothy was not circumcised. His father it would seem likely objected to such a practice pointing out again that he himself was not a Jew nor a believer in God.

As we all know, and as we can see in the later writings of Paul, Timothy plays a very important role, not only in the ministry and in the faith, but also as a friend and colleague of Paul's. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul refers to Timothy as his beloved and faithful Son in the Lord. Paul was a sort of mentor and father figure to Timothy in the faith, implying that there was a special bond and connection in their friendship, one of love and respect as a sort of father and son. In Paul's other writings we also see mention of Timothy being with him, for in his greetings in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, he introduces Timothy as one who also sends his greetings and is apart of this letter written to the Corinthians as well. And again we see Timothy with Paul in the writing of the letter to the Philippians, in verse 1, where it says, "Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ." Again we see the same in the letter written to the Colossians, and also in both letters written to the Thessalonians. And finally we have 2 letters written by Paul to Timothy, to bring him instruction and encouragement, where Paul again refers to him as a son, his beloved son in the faith.

As we can see, Timothy becomes a very important person to Paul, and also himself becomes a very important person in the ministry of Christ. But, as we see there is an issue with Timothy when Paul first meets him, and that is the issue of his parents, one being a Jew, and one being a Gentile. As an uncircumcised son of a mixed marriage, Timothy would have been regarded by the Jews in that region as an apostate, meaning he would not have been able to enter into the Synagogues.

This becomes an issue, for though Paul's ministry was largely focused upon the Gentiles, which would have no issue with Timothy's standing, yet as we have seen throughout Paul's journeys he does not give up on his fellow Jewish Countrymen, by first going into the synagogues to preach in every town that he enters. This would be an issue as Timothy would not be allowed to accompany him in such a ministry, so if he was to journey with Paul, and join in this ministry then he would need to be circumcised. Notice the motive and purpose of this decision, it has nothing to do with the previously argued requirement for salvation, nor anything to do with being pressured by the Jews to do so, but is solely for the purpose of the ministry of the gospel. This is important to note for Paul was one of the Apostles making the argument in chapter 15 that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised, yet here he has Timothy circumcised. Some theologians have some skepticism regarding Luke's record, seeing this as a contradiction to the previous chapter. We see in another account in the book of Galatians that Paul does the opposite with Titus, another one of his companions who he insists does not become circumcised.

The difference here is that Titus was being pressured by the Jews just like we see the Gentiles were being in chapter 15, Paul resisted the circumcision of Titus because it was being urged upon him by certain false believers who had as Paul said, "Infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus to make us slaves." But as we see in the case of Timothy there was no such pressure, It was not being put upon him as a means of salvation or sanctification, but merely a removal of what could be a hindrance in his ministry. Timothy himself being a Jew, voluntarily did so for the sake of reaching out to other Jews. As Paul had said to himself in 1 Corinthians 9:19 "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win all the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ) that I might win those who are without law; of the weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be a partaker of it with you."

Paul taught that such things were inconsequential to the believer, for personally they did not bring any merit, that is...before God, yet in each of these cases, whether ministering to those under the law, or those without the law it becomes an issue in his ability to approach them as equals. It becomes an issue of acceptance, not by God, but by the people that he is seeking to be a witness to. If you think about it, a Jew was likely not to listen to a Gentile, seeing them as being accursed from God, and believing themselves to be better, to be God's chosen people. If a Gentile was even able to enter into the synagogue and teach, they would have little to no respect for what he was saying and would already have shut out what he was saying before he could get in a word. And likewise probably the Gentiles as well for the opposite reason, having seen the Jews as haughty, arrogant, prideful judgmental people, would likely have little respect for such a teacher as well. So it is as Paul says, becoming all things to all people so that he may reach some.

Timothy, like Paul being a Christian Jew, was free from the requirements of the law, recognizing that it was Christ who fulfilled it on their behalf, making such rituals and practices unnecessary for faith, yet necessary to reach those who still put themselves under such restrictions. What this section of Acts shows, is not that this is inconsistent as some scholars have believed, but rather it shows the flexibility on such matters when it comes to the ministry of the gospel.

But it should be mentioned, that Paul in his discourse about becoming all things to all people so that he may win some, is not arguing for the practices of sinful behavior. That is, one does not justify sinful behavior in the name of being a witness. In the matters of indifference, in the things in which make no real difference in your faith, or christian walk there is freedom, but that freedom is yet limited by sinful behaviors for though being free, we are not free to sin. But here is the reality of it, those who are of God, who love God.. though there may be in a sense a freedom to do for we are no longer under the condemnation of the law, we are yet not a lawless people, but are subject to another law, which is Christ who indwells in us, so though being free, we are not free to sin, for we have Christ and the Holy Spirit working in us to will and to do. we really are not free to sin, for sin is a rebellion against God, and as new creatures born again to be a holy nation of priests, and heirs of the everlasting kingdom, our will and desire is to please God, and to not sin, we should neither desire to, nor use the ministry as an excuse to do so. Paul addressed this very issue in his letter to the Roman's chapter 6. After having talked about being free from the law, and no longer bound to it, for we have been covered by grace through Jesus Christ, he says, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" That is, since God is glorified in the forgiveness of our sins, should we not sin all the more so that God may shower upon us even more grace? Well of course, the answer is "certainly not, How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

Though we have the freedom to become all things to all men, we do not have the freedom to become sinful to reach the sinful.. indeed if Christ dwells within you, this truly is not even an option. We do not become drunkards to reach the drunk, nor drug addicts to reach the addicted, there is no justification for such actions for they are contrary to the very message of salvation and deliverance that we bring. We are to be a light in this world, the bearer's of the good news of the gospel, set apart by God for good works, and while some may argue that engaging in certain social behaviors, or seeking a sort of approval to gain relationships so as to share the gospel justifies some actions, the reality is in many ways you will be judged for it by the very people you seek to minister to. And it may in effect have the opposite effect of your testimony then you desire, which is why Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, that they should abstain from even the appearance of evil, that is though it may be permissible, it may not be the best as far as your witness is concerned.

It is a fine balance to strike, to strive to reach the mark, to be faithful in all things, and to flee from sin..yet to be all things to all people, we must not be caught up in the sinful practices and desires of the world but we must also not set ourselves up as one who is better than anyone else either. But we must be humble in our pursuits, meek in our approaches, and steadfast in our determination to live for Christ. But the good news is, we have the Holy Spirit as a guide through all of this, as we seek to navigate through this world, both living in it, and ministering to it. Luke gives an example of the spirit's work in bringing the gospel message in verse 6 and 7 of our passage this morning, where he writes about Paul and his party on his second journey, "Now they had gone through phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

The Holy Spirit opens doors, puts people in our paths that we may be a witness to, or can also put us in places that we never thought we would be for the very same purpose. In this passage we see a bit of the inner workings of what is written in Proverbs 16:9. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." It is the divine nature and will of God working through our circumstances, our desires, and situations to fulfill his own purpose.

Even Paul and the other Apostles must face the reality of this statement and endure the frustration of their own plans in order to discover the opportunity that God holds open. This next opportunity may not seem logical by our calculations, but if it is brought about by God then who are we to doubt it? This rings true not only in the ministry but in every aspect of our lives. There are circumstances which arise around us beyond our control that seems to force life changing decisions. Things such as issues of health, or even Job loss can put one in a position where they must make such decisions that will have drastic effects upon their life. But as we know, none of these things happen by pure chaos, but have a redeeming purpose hidden within, for God works through such, yes, may even allow such so as to work his own good will and pleasure within your life.

It may seem frustrating or disappointing at the time, but through it God works out blessings that we would never expect. Each and every one of us today are exactly where God would have us to be for this moment, it is he who has brought you to where you are, I often reflect on what God has done in my own life to bring me to this point of where I am today, never in my wildest dreams would I be standing here before you this morning, but God has worked innumerable, countless things in all of our lives to bring us all here to worship together this morning....and each and every one of those things, the trials, hardships, tough decisions, God has used in each of our lives to put us exactly where we are at this morning. This realization kinda changes the outlook does it not? For even in trial and hardship, to know that God is working through it for his own good will and pleasure, that through whatever it is we may be struggling or suffering we have a God who cares for us as his very own children, a loving and gracious father who seeks the best for us.

Look what Jesus said, in Matthew about God the father. Chapter 7 vs 7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son ask for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who him! God has given his Son so that we may believe...what greater gift has anyone ever given? What sort of Love is this that he loved us while we hated him to the point that he sent his Son to die so that we may be reconciled to him and live. If God has given this gift, will he not also provide and shower us with gifts and blessings in our every day lives? He has not redeemed us, then left us to our own devices to wallow in the much and mire of this world. No he has set us apart, lifted us up and placed us upon solid ground so that we may be his people, a nation of priests, a holy and blessed people.

As we read this morning in Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Just as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise and glory of his grace, by which he made us accepted in the beloved." What greater love is this? John 15:13

“Greater love has no one that this, than to lay down ones own life for his friends.” We have a savior who loves and cares for us to the point that he has laid down his own life. One who has personally chose us from before the foundation of the world to be his adopted children. Will he not also care and provide?

My thoughts go out this morning to all the struggles that I know each and every one of us are facing, the hardships and difficulties in our lives, life altering moments,...yet we can take great comfort in knowing that God sees, and God knows each and every one of us, our desires, our frustrations, our struggles, and he does not abandon us...in fact he carries us through them. We who are his children have a supernatural hope, a hope that believes beyond all which brings despair, for our hope is not in this world but is firmly placed upon the one who has by merely speaking a word caused all to be. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from the fathers will. The very hairs of your head are all numbered, do not fear for you are more value than many sparrows. Not even a sparrow dies outside of the will of God, and he is so intricately involved in your life that the very hairs on your head are determined...if he cares so much about so little, will he not also provide and care for so much more? IF we can only just get an inkling of understanding of this love it will change our lives! We can face each day with hope knowing that our Father has set this day before us, and through it is working out his will in our lives.

There is nothing beyond his reach, whatever the day may bring God has already ordained it to be, and he has promised that he shall never leave nor forsake us, but rather will grant us the grace needed for the day, and the strength to endure. We can rest in this, we can rest upon his unending love, he has given us the Holy Spirit as a companion, a helper and guide to navigate through this life, he has given of himself to bridge the gulf between his holy nature, and our sinful self. What more could we ask having the very God of the universe to love us in such away, and to walk with us through this life? Let us rejoice, not just today..but daily in the abundance of his grace and mercy, of his provision and care for us, that there is nothing in this world that can separate us from him, even death the greatest feared event in the human experience is itself bound by his sovereign hand,

Whatever may be happening in your life, or where ever you are, take solace in knowing that God is right there with you, Lean on him, rest in him, praise and worship him and he will carry you through.