

Day 55, Acts 16

by David Servant

Paul's second missionary journey demonstrates the importance of being sensitive to God's will and timing, as well as the effectiveness of God's guidance and influence in leading people to salvation.

Scripture: Acts 16:6-31, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Gods Guidance", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

David Servant discusses the importance of being sensitive to God's will and timing, as seen in Paul's missionary journeys and the guidance he received. He emphasizes the influence of God on our hearts, which we must yield to, rather than an irresistible force. Through the story of Paul and Silas in prison, he illustrates how believers can praise God even in difficult circumstances, leading to a powerful prison ministry and the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household.

Transcript

As I'm sure you realized, Paul had Timothy circumcised, not because he believed Timothy couldn't be saved otherwise. Rather, it was because Paul knew that Jews would not be receptive to an uncircumcised man who was bringing a message about the Jewish Messiah. This shows us how amazingly important circumcision was to the Jews of Paul's day. It was the litmus test, and I hate to think that any Jews actually required Timothy to drop his drawers to verify his credentials, but yet such a thing seems possible in light of what we've just read!

We're reading today of Paul's second missionary journey. You can see on the map below that he visited some of the places where he planted churches during his first missionary journey (red line), but that he traveled far beyond Galatia (in modern Eastern Turkey) to the eastern coast of modern Greece (blue line). Notice also on the map below that Paul and Silas initially made no preaching stops in "Asia" (modern western Turkey) because they had been "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word" there (16:6). Obviously it was a matter of strategy and timing, because Paul eventually made a brief stop in the Asian city of Ephesus on his way home, and he eventually settled in Ephesus for two years during his third missionary journey. As a result, "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (19:9). How important it is to be sensitive to God's will and His timing.

Paul's 1st (red line) and 2nd (blue line) missionary journeys

Luke wrote that "the Lord opened the heart" (16:14) of Lydia, the first disciple in Europe. This does not prove, as some say, that God zapped her with some "irresistible grace" due to the fact that she was specially chosen to be saved. Luke's words simply emphasize God's influence on her heart, an influence to which she yielded. If I said, "Your speech tonight melted my heart," does that prove that you exercised some kind of irresistible power over me that affected me apart from my own receptivity to your words? Obviously not.

Note that the spectacular guidance Paul and Silas received via a night vision to preach the gospel in Macedonia was soon followed by a beating and imprisonment. When God guides us through such spectacular means (beyond the gentle inward leading of the Spirit), it serves to warn us that difficulties lie ahead. The Lord knows we'll need the extra assurance of being in His will that only spectacular guidance provides. Beware of those who claim to have visions and see angels on a daily or weekly basis, especially those who do nothing else to build God's kingdom but have visions and see angels.

Certain that they were in the center of God's will, Paul and Silas were able to sing praises to God, even while their feet were fastened in chains to a prison wall. The Lord's very effective prison ministry resulted in a jailhouse shaking and revival!

The Philippian jailer, however, got more than "jailhouse religion." When he asked what he needed to do to be saved, Paul did not tell him to invite Jesus into his heart or accept Jesus as his personal Savior. Neither did Paul tell him to believe in Jesus. Rather, Paul told him to believe in the Lord Jesus (16:31). He did, and his faith went right to work. He washed Paul and Silas' wounds, fixed them a meal, was baptized, and "rejoiced greatly" (16:34). He demonstrated four fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, kindness and goodness (see Gal. 5:22).

Paul was not saying in 16:31 that if the jailer believed, it guaranteed that his whole family would be saved. That would contradict many other scriptures (see, for example, 1 Cor. 7:16). Paul was simply saying that if the jailer and his family believed in Jesus, they would all be saved. Notice that Paul preached the gospel to everyone in the jailer's household (16:32), and they all individually believed (16:33-34). We cannot "claim" Acts 16:31 for our families to guarantee their salvation. We should tell them the gospel and live godly lives before them.

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