

What Would You Do With Your Second Choice?

by John Follette

The sermon encourages believers to embrace second choices as divine opportunities for growth and service in God's plan.

Scripture: Psalm 37:5, Proverbs 16:9, Isaiah 55:8, Acts 16:6, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 4:13, James 4:13

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

John Follette delivers a message of encouragement, emphasizing the importance of translating spiritual values into practical living and being open to God's redirection in our lives. Using the example of Paul's journey to Troas instead of Bithynia, he illustrates how God's plans may differ from our own, but ultimately lead to greater blessings and opportunities. He challenges listeners to have faith, patience, and obedience in the face of shattered dreams, trusting that God can turn our second or third choices into avenues for His glory.

Transcript

I believe the Lord has laid on my heart a message of encouragement. So I would like to talk to all those who have problems and difficult matters to settle. While we should all be spiritually minded and inclined, we should be able at the same time to translate that which is of spiritual value into material and worth-while living terms. For if my Christian experience is merely of a theological nature and too theoretical, it does not become workable in my every day life and falls short of much of its purpose. Jesus Christ came not only to die but to teach us how to live. I believe He desires to help us translate our problems into opportunities for high living.

I suppose we all have troubles--I hope we do. I like people who have them; people who have blasted hopes, un-realized dreams, tumbled-down air-castles and seemingly wrecked lives. I always feel the possibility of getting somewhere with them. And what a leveler trouble is! It brings us all down to the same place--our common heritage: "but the Lord delivereth us out of them all."

Christian workers and evangelists who tell people that when they become Christians life is just one sweet song and a grand picnic misrepresent, I fear, the real life. I must say it is a very peculiar sort of picnic. So I hope I may help any who have not walked through the sunny dreams and whose lofty air-castles have no

stronger foundations than the cloud they rest upon.

As we read the lives of people we have been impressed by this one fact at least: nearly every one has had to take a second or third choice as far as life's course was concerned. It seems to be an almost universal experience. Very few have moved along smoothly and had their first choice materialize perfectly. They have had to take the fragments and pieces of their first choice in life which has been shattered, mend them together and make a success. Just that has been done over and over again.

When I visited the World's Fair in Chicago, I went to the Art Institute, for I am very fond of pictures and art in any form. I remember I went especially to see Whistler's beautiful picture, his Mother. It had been brought from Europe so that America, too, might see this lovely oil.

As I looked at it I saw something more than the picture--I saw the marvel revealed in a third choice. Whistler, the world-famous artist, never started out to be an artist. That was far from his thought. Do you know what he started out to be? A soldier at West Point. That does not sound very much like an artist, I am sure. It was his first choice. But while in training at West Point he flunked in his work in chemistry. That was one flunk that God could bless. I sometimes wish a lot of other folks would flunk so they might get started off on the right foot. Whistler then chose engineering and made a grand fizzle of that. Finally he started to paint, with the result that he became a world famous artist, giving to the world some of the very best in painting. His first and second choices crashed but he pieced his hopes together and became the Whistler who is known over the world for his contributions to his field.

Now let me give you an illustration of this truth from the Scriptures. It is an incident in the life of Paul. It is not recorded merely to give us an item in history but also to teach us a fine spiritual truth. For I believe the Word is Spirit and therefore behind the historic we may find the deeper spiritual teaching waiting for us. I am having a grand time keeping this in mind as I read my Bible. The Word is first spirit, but the truth is very often veiled behind a seemingly insignificant happening.

Let us take the story of Paul as given in the 16th chapter of Acts. Here we find Paul on one of his journeys. He is saved, baptized in the Spirit, and has all the gifts, and is now out in the work. He has a burning zeal for the lost, longing to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, and have churches built here and there over the whole country. It is a godly ambition, wonderful and noble. We read: "And after they were come to Mysia, they essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us."

That is the story for the background for this truth. It reveals one of the methods God uses in dealing with us in building Christian character. Here is Paul, wonderfully gifted, divinely called and commissioned of God, thinking how splendid it would be to go to Bithynia and carry the glad tidings to those who sit in darkness and wait the coming of the Light. Surely there was a great need; and he had the light and the power and the truth. No doubt he thought, "We have the power to communicate this light to those in darkness; let us go at once to Bithynia and save the lost."

It all sounded good. Many things do. It did not sound like the devil, to be sure. It was a fine, noble objective to hold before him. But what did the Lord think about it? He said, "You just keep out of Bithynia." We know it was the Lord, for it reads: "but the Spirit suffered them not"; and they "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in. Asia."

How can you reconcile such a statement ? Didn't the Lord love the souls in Bithynia? Certainly. But a missionary call must consist of something more than a consciousness of the need. There were heathen in Bithynia who needed to be converted and Paul had a real burden for them. He could have gone there and established some missions, and swung the entire country. That, no doubt, was very possible, and yet the Lord forbade him to go. How can you reconcile that with what we call our message of today? I don't try to. I don't have to prove the Bible or to explain God. Some people spend half of their lives proving the Bible, keeping God's glory bright, and holding Him on the throne. We were never called to do this. We are called to live for Jesus and let God take care of His work.

Here we see Paul, with all the enthusiasm of his heart and burning with a desire to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth, checked abruptly by God. He thinks he has to go to a certain end of the earth, but the Lord says, "I want you at another end." And so he, who had such a burden for Bithynia, has to turn around and go down to Troas. Notice that he goes down. There is usually a great going down after such an experience. But it is God's geography lesson and His road map.

Paul's first choice is ruined. His ambition, though godly and spiritual, is thwarted. Wanting Bithynia but landing in Troas. Did any of you having Bithynia for your objective ever find yourself landing in Troas, a city of which you never dreamed? This is quite a common occurrence and is continually repeated in Christian life and experience.

Paul wanted to go to Bithynia, but he went to Troas instead. Now since he hasn't had his wish fulfilled, do we find him getting into darkness or sitting down to cry over it ? No! Paul is patiently waiting till the night season rolls around. Who brought on the night? The Lord. He brings it on out of mercy to create the proper atmosphere. He is getting Paul ready to enter the door that He is about to open. And when it is dark and he knows not which way to turn, Paul realizes his desperate need of the Lord. He can but say, "Lord, you have led me to Troas. What now do you want me to do?"

We see him sitting there, his faith, doubtless, tried to the limit, and all he can see are the towering walls of Troas. So he is wondering what he is to do there. As the shadows of the night gather about him he sees a vision and lo, he hears a voice saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." That was the field the Lord had for Paul, and we discover something of tremendous importance there. This is the pivot upon which all Christian missions turn. They turn from Asia to Europe and thence to America, and the entire globe is girdled because Paul was obedient; God wanted the Gospel to travel from the East to the West.

What a wonderful day that must have been when Columbus started out from Spain ! What a momentous journey that was, for it opened up a brand-new country--just that one little trip of Columbus--and yet what great things hinged on his obedience.

But how much more momentous was the decision which Paul made that day when he said farewell to Bithynia! His hopes were shattered and probably he said, "This is my second choice but since it is God's way I will make this choice to serve me." So he takes hold of the broken bits of his dream for Bithynia, puts them together and starts out to do the will of his Master. And through that obedience he girdles the entire globe. Is it not better to girdle the globe in God's will than to save a few souls in Bithynia ?

What was the result of Paul's obedience? He became inseparable from the spread of the Gospel of Christ. We can never think of the great cause of Christianity moving on but that we identify Paul with it. Paul and the great missionary enterprise of that Early Church are inseparably bound together. Isn't it wonderful to

think that he dared to let his life be so open to God's will that today Paul is always identified with the missionary enterprise? It was because of the complete surrender of his life.

There have been others who have had their ambitions blasted and have taken of the broken bits and made the second choice to serve them. We have just celebrated another Christmas and many of us have enjoyed the singing of that beautiful hymn which Philips Brooks wrote.

"O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie."

I am always glad when they announce that hymn. I can never sing it without thinking of the author, for he was such an instrument in the hands of God for light and truth. He filled a real mission.

But was the ministry Brooks first thought and choice? No, indeed! His Bithynia (first choice) was to be a teacher and he longed to follow that vocation! He finished his college course and then taught school. That was his Bithynia. But he utterly failed as a teacher, broke down, and had to leave. I wish you could read some of the letters he wrote when he was so discouraged and ashamed of himself because he could not make a go of teaching--even though he loved it. He said, "The children are the worst I ever had to deal with." No doubt God permitted them to be unruly; He didn't want Brooks in his Bithynia.

Brooks was obedient to the call of God and landed in his Troas; there he found that the Lord opened a door of great spiritual blessing which would mean much more to the Christian cause than a few village pupils in a schoolhouse. His Bithynia crashed but he took up the broken bits, pieced them together and allowed God to sanctify his life in a fresh channel of spiritual ministry.

How the people loved him! and what a power he was! Among the letters he treasured was one from a cobbler who wrote, "Dear Mr. Brooks: Every time I can I come to hear you preach, because when I hear you preach I forget all about who you are and I find God." Who could want a greater testimony than to have people say when they hear you preach that they forget all about you and find the Lord! He wanted Ms Bithynia, but he got his Troas.

You who are down in Troas, how are you reacting to your broken dreams, when you find that God has so arranged circumstances in your life as to make it impossible to enter your Bithynia? Can you take a second or a third choice and make it an opportunity in your life? That is a fine test of Christian character. Is your touch with God, and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life strong enough to take that broken first choice and out of it make a splendid chance where God can come in and be glorified afresh? That I am sure, is a challenge to everyone as to the true value of His Christian experience.

Now what did Paul do and how did he gain the victory that he possessed? This Bithynia and this Troas are of course spiritual states, figurative of the Bithynia of your heart and life and the Troas of your landing.

What did Paul do? First of all, he refused to allow this strange shock to turn h/m absolutely away from Iris seemingly prepared channel of expression; he would not allow this movement in life to wreck his faith in God. He would still believe in the supreme and sublime purpose for his life--that he was called of God. If I am yoked up w/th God then He must have some purpose for me and I must find my way out of my Troas to be a channel for God to use me. So Paul says, "Troas, I shall use you as a means whereby a door shall open and I shall find my place where God will use me."

It took great faith on the part of Paul to do that. It took courage not to sit down and let self pity come in and eat up his faith and joy. Self pity will damn you quicker than tobacco will. Paul didn't sit down and say, "if

only," "if," "if." Have you noticed that the "ifs" are always in everyone else but yourself? "IF he had not failed," or "IF she had not said that mean thing." No, Paul did not develop a case of the "ifs" as some would have done. That might have blotted God out of the picture. You can wreck your faith by "if-ing" and by self-pity.

Come now, let us see who is back of all this maneuvering. Was it the devil that shut Paul out of Bithynia? Was it unbelief? Was it sin in his life? No, it was nothing short of God. So it didn't matter to Paul if all the people got whispering around and saying, "There must be something wrong with Paul. He had such a wonderful opening there and now there is nothing doing. We need to pray for him"; "Isn't it sad, Paul doesn't seem to be getting anywhere. I remember when the Spirit was on him and he had such wonderful gifts and now he can't even open up a little mission in Bithynia. He is just sitting down there in Troas. I wonder if the Lord has cast him off."

Just be patient. Let the night fall heavily upon him, for it is in the night that one gets a vision and it is in the night that one hears a voice. How does Paul meet this situation? He meets it in sublime faith, a faith that says, "I am walking before God and not trying to walk before fifty-seven varieties of people; yes, God, You can carry out Your plan for me." And so Paul walks before

God and stays in Troas while all the saints are wondering what could be the matter with him. I am glad for his courage. There he stays, waiting for the shadows of the night to deepen so he can see the vision and hear the voice.

Have you ever been in Troas? Could you by faith reckon, "My life is dedicated to God? I am intertwined and fastened to this supreme purpose of God and if He sees good to close Bithynia, I know He will open up a Troas sometime, somewhere. I shall wait and be patient." Does the door open immediately for Paul? Perhaps not, but he ties himself up to this supreme will of God, whether it be pleasing to his fancy or not.

Did he stay in Troas? No. It was but a doorway to all the rest of the world; a doorway for the rest of his life. The change was not easy, and yet he became so bound up in the will of God and such a love slave to Jesus Christ that you cannot separate him from it any more than you can separate the name Judson from Burma.

When you think of Judson you always think of Burma and yet Burma was not his first choice. He went to India but the officials would not allow him to stay there. They put him on a boat and after some very painful experiences he finally landed in Burma. He decided that he might just as well be in the will of God in Burma as any other place. Today his name spells Burma. Like Paul of old, he was able to take his broken dreams, piece them together, and in the will of God, with the grace of God, he was able to make it a finish.

Can you do that by faith? Can you keep your life surrendered to the special purpose that God has for you?
P

What does Paul do next? He is obedient to this call that says, "Come over into Macedonia." Now, he doesn't know what Macedonia means nor is he enlightened as to

its great privileges. He knew that Bithynia was at that time one of the richest countries, a most inviting field; but as for Troas he knew nothing. Did you ever have the Lord close the most inviting field, bar you from the richest opportunities, and put you into a schoolhouse? put you into a corner to labor with four or five people to listen to you? And that, just about as you were to go into Bithynia? Never mind--Bithynia is

not for you; it may be your Troas is a schoolhouse. You had better go through and keep the lamps trimmed, the floors clean, the fires tended, and preach the everlasting Gospel to the four or five, for they may prove to be the door that opens up Macedonia for you later on.

In the meantime Paul is willing to live and serve and pour out his life for everyone who comes his way. Can you do that, or will you wait till you can go out with your brief case and preach ? Can you serve some other way ? It takes more than a brief case and white necktie to make a true servant of the Lord. Can you stand your Troas? Then stay there till the vision shapes itself before you and you hear the voice of the man of Macedonia.

Paul could have felt sorry for himself and so confused over the unkind things the people were saying that he might have developed an ugly spirit toward them. I like these lines of Edwin Markham:

"He drew a circle that shut me out--Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But Love and I had the wit to win,

We drew a circle that took him in."

Can you be big enough to say, "I will love you in spite of it; I will make a circle that shuts you in with God and me"? That is being like the Lord. Don't sit down in Troas and mourn, but sit through your hour of darkness and listen for the Voice, and as sure as you live, God will open the door which He wants you to enter, where you may serve Him far better than you could have done in Bithynia.

We find the same true even in the life of Jesus Christ. His first great desire was a ministry among His own people, to pour out His heart for His own nation, but "His own received Him not." He wanted Israel but that Bithynia never opened to Him. He found Calvary instead--His Troas. What did He do? He made Calvary, made Troas, to become the doorway to Macedonia and to all the ends of the earth.

Dear hearts, take courage! If your life is truly dedicated to God, you need not fear. Let Him direct your life. Even though in your natural religious life a Bithynia may look most inviting, it may be God's will to turn you to Troas. Wait patiently there, and though the shadows deepen, keep praying.

O Bithynia, it is not for me to enter your fields though they be rich. Troas, here I am. Shelter me in the night that I may rest in your streets. And oh, gentle night, be kind to me. Give me the strength and grace to say "Yes" to the man of Macedonia, for out of the broken fragments of my first choice I shall mend together a most glorious opportunity in which God may rest and delight Himself.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-follette/what-would-you-do-with-your-second-choice/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net