**May 26, 2019 Acts 16:9-15**

***Who’s Leading Who?***

**Scripture:** Acts 16:4-8 NRSV

(4)As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. (5)So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. (6)They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (7)When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; (8)so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.  (9)During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (10)When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. (11)We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, (12)and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. (13)On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. (14)A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. (15)When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

**Notes:**

1. How did ***Paul*** know where to go?
   1. Paul’s ***prayer*** life helps him to know.
   2. Pray until you are finished, and ***listen*** even longer.
   3. Paul’s ***scripture*** ***reading*** helps him learn these things.
   4. The Word of God is ***alive*** and ***relevant*** to our needs.
   5. Paul’s acts of ***worship*** help him know.
   6. Paul’s acts of ***service*** helps him to learn these things.
   7. Paul is led to say the words, and the women are led to ***accept*** ***Jesus*** as Lord and Savior and demonstrate this rebirth through her baptism.
2. As the Lord led Paul, so he ***leads*** ***us*** as well.
   1. We must be ***prepared*** and ***listening*** for His word.
   2. Are you spending time daily in ***prayer***?
   3. Are you reading the ***scriptures*** daily?
   4. Are you actively involved in ***Worship***?
   5. Are you actively involved in acts of ***service***?
3. We are ***called*** to be an integral part of God’s kingdom.
   1. The lines of communication must be ***opened***.
   2. Our lives must be ***committed*** wholly to doing his will.
   3. We are listening for his ***voice***, we are listening for his ***direction***, and we are patient waiting on him to do so.

**Transcript:**

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. Summer of 1998 and I was in the middle of building my house. But that wasn’t the only thing on my mind; I was struggling with a decision and was praying that God would lead me to the correct decision. So I made a call to a friend.

How do I know when the Lord is leading me to something? Understand this is about three or four years before hearing the Lord’s call to ministry. And I was trying to live my life the God would want, but there were many things I had yet to learn.

“You will just know”, he said

“Will you hear God's voice?”

“Not really.” He said, “You will have a sense of peace about the decision.”

“How will I know if I am on the right path?”

And my friend said something that sticks with me, words that I cling too in moments and words that are always in the forefront of my thinking, “I can’t really explain it, but there is a feeling that comes over me when I am making a decision, and I just know that it must be God speaking.”

When I hung up the phone that day, I was more confused than ever. What should I do? How will I know God’s directions for me, if I am not able to recognize His voice? How can I be certain that it is God’s will, and not my inner voice trying to convince me? And what if I do hear God’s voice audibly; should I be afraid. Moses had his burning bush, and Paul had his encounter on the road to Damascus, but I am just Kevin, nobody spectacular, nothing great, and a bit selfish. If I hear God’s voice, should I share that I heard it, or just share what I have been told?

So many questions and I am still in the same situation I was in when I first made the call. I believe we all have moments when we doubt the direction God wants us to go; moments when we are unsure of what we should do next, moments when we hear the voices in our head and it is difficult to figure out which voice is God’s and which voices are our own.

It is difficult to know God’s voice when there is so much going on around us. In our passage today we read of a time in Paul’s life where he was having difficulty doing God’s will; not because he wasn’t trying, but because he was more focused on what he wanted to do. Yet God had other plans, God had other places to send him. Today we read from Acts 16:9-15, in God’s word today .

(4)As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. (5)So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. (6)They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. (7)When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; (8)so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.  (9)During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (10)When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. (11)We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, (12)and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. (13)On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. (14)A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. (15)When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:4-8 NRSV)

So Paul is on his second Missionary trip. He is traveling with Silas and Timothy; he had previously had a disagreement with Barnabas, and the two had decided to part ways. Paul and Silas headed into Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), and here they meet Timothy and invite him to join them. They begin to travel through the local communities sharing the decisions of the leadership in Jerusalem. This encourages the local congregations. But as they begin to move into new territory, they are forbidden to share the gospel. They travel through the eastern portion of Asia Minor, known as Galatia but the Holy Spirit “forbid” them from speaking to the people there. They headed north into Phrygia, but again they were forbidden to speak to the people. So they turn east towards the region of Mysia and the town of Bithynia Again they are forbidden by the Holy Spirit to enter they are now headed into Troas.

They spend the night in Troas, and this is where Paul has a vision. In Paul’s vision he sees a man from Macedonia pleading him to come and help. And scripture says the trio immediately tried to cross into Macedonia. Troas is on the western edge of the Aegean Sea, so the missionaries find a ship and set sail for Macedonia. Once they land in Neapolis they head straight for Philippi.

One may wonder why Philippi and not stay in Neapolis. There are two reasons why Paul heads to Philippi. First, Philippi is a Roman colony, and since Paul is a Roman citizen, it makes sense to head there; here he may have better contacts. Second, Scripture says that Philippi is a leading City in Macedonia. It is a center of commerce. This means there is likely much more traffic traveling through Philippi. There will be opportunity to do some work as a tentmaker and there is greater opportunity to meet people and share with them.

So in Philippi they stayed for some days, it doesn’t say how many but I would estimate that some days means a significant number of days. On the Sabbath day they went outside the city gate to the river, here they supposed there would be a place of prayer. You see, Paul’s custom was to go to the synagogue and teach, apparently there is no synagogue in Philippi. In order to have a synagogue, there must be at least 10 Jewish men who have made the commitment to be at the synagogue and pray. So Paul is at the river outside the city of Philippi looking for a place of prayer. It is a Jewish custom that if there is no synagogue, to find a place close to the river in order to gather and pray. But our passage doesn’t say anything about any men being there.

Paul and his company meet some women and begin to share with them. And now we hear of Lydia, a woman who was already a “worshiper of God” Lydia was from Thyatira, a city in western shores of Asia Minor, north of Ephesus and south of Troas. Lydia was a business woman, everything points that she was not married, that she was in charge of her own business, and everything points that she was very well off, because she was a dealer in purple cloth, which is very expensive.

Lydia was listening to the words that Paul is speaking and the Lord opened her heart. I take this to say that she believed in God, she worshipped God, but she did not know God. Paul most likely was speaking of Jesus and what he did to cleanse us of sin, she asked Jesus to enter into her heart, and received Him as her Lord and Savior. Immediately She and her entire household were baptized.

So, what does this have to do with knowing God’s voice, and what can we learn? In our passage we find Paul following the leading of the Holy Spirit. You cannot follow the leading of the Holy Spirit without knowing the voice of God? If you follow the Holy Spirit, you follow God, if you hear the Spirit speaking to you, you hear the voice of God. If you sense the presence of the Holy Spirit you sense the presence of God. Why, because they are one and the same.

In our passage we watch as the Paul travels through Asia Minor, trying to find a group of people to speak to about the Lord. But as he travels through Asia Minor, Paul is constantly being turned away from locations by the Holy Spirit. Places where he could easily speak to the people about Jesus, places where people are in need. But these are not the places where God wants Paul to go. The scripture doesn’t say how Paul knew that the Lord didn’t want him to enter these cities, that the Lord wanted him go anywhere at all. Just that the Holy Spirit forbid him to enter these cities and areas.

How did Paul know where to go and where not to go? Paul has been doing this for a while now. He has learned to identify the voice of God, he has learned to know the nudging of the Holy Spirit, He has learned to recognize when the Lord is leading. How you may ask lets find out.

It is through Paul’s prayer life that he is able to know these things. As we settle down before the Lord in prayer we begin to take the time to know Him. Yes it is in prayer that we ask for things, but it is also in prayer that we take the time to listen to Him and Him alone. How often do you settle down to pray and find yourself doing all of the talking? That is the first sign that you are not listening to God. I have often wondered how long I should pray, how long I should talk, and how long I should listen. There is no set rule, except you must pray until you are finished, and listen even longer. We should constantly be listening for the word of God.

It is through Paul’s reading of scripture that he is able to learn these things. If the Scripture is the living word of God, it only makes sense that by reading and learning scripture you are able to learn the things that God wants us to learn. By reading scripture we see what others have done and learned and we can learn from their example. Paul, being a Pharisee of Pharisees understands that the word of God is alive and that as we read it the words come alive in our world and relevant to our needs.

It is through Paul’s acts of worship that Paul knows these things. How many times have we engaged in worship and the spirit of God falls down upon the service; the Spirit leads us in another direction all together. Do you catch that statement there, He leads in another direction!!! There is something about engaging in worship, that takes our minds off of our own worries and leads us into the presence of the Lord Himself, it is there in His presence, that we can hear him the most clearly.

It was in worship that I first felt his tug on my heart leading me into ministry. It was in worship that I realized my utter dependence and need for him to be at the center of my life. It was in worship that I knew that my life was not as it should be, leading me to the altar to repent. It was in worship that I surrendered my will to his and became like a slave to him. Perhaps this is why I enjoy singing praises to him, because it always brings me back to Him.

It is through Paul’s acts of service that Paul is able to learn these things. As he works to makes tents he is more than providing a service he is learning the needs and desires of those he serves. And through this knowledge he is able to be led by the Lord into meeting the much greater need of the person, the need for Jesus, the need for the Holy Spirit, the need for God. A relationship is formed and allows Paul to enter the more personal areas of their life.

But perhaps the one place in our passage today we overlook the leading of the Holy Spirit, is in the life of the women to whom Paul speaks, especially Lydia. By being willing to follow where Paul is being led, the timing was perfect for Paul to meet Lydia, and for Lydia to meet the Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul is led by the Spirit to say the words that the women hear. And the women are led to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. And Lydia is led to not only receive the Lord, but also demonstrate this rebirth through her baptism.

As the Lord led Paul and his companions, so he leads us as well; when we recognized the voice of God, he had come for us, and now he wants us to go as well for the betterment of others taking the gospel to all who will receive it.

But the Voice of God must be recognized first for what it is, that still small voice that tells us what is right and what is not, that idea for a way to serve others that we believed to be a fleeting thought. The compassion we feel in our heart when we see somebody who is hurting, hungry, or in need in so many other ways. Or that recurring thought that continues even when we try to put it out of our mind. These are just a few examples, I am sure there are more.

But in order for us to hear the word we must be prepared and listening for His word. Are you practicing your spiritual disciplines? Are you spending time daily in prayer? Do you ask for the Lord’s guidance and supplication? And then even more important, are you waiting and listening for His word to come to you? Remember to pray until you are finished and then listen even longer. I believe that is what Paul means when he says we should pray without ceasing.

Are you reading the scriptures daily? As you read are you wondering what can I learn from this, Lord? How can I apply this in my life? Help me understand why this is in your word for me to see.

Are you actively involved in Worship? Are you singing the songs of worship? Are you singing the words with meaning; or are you saying the words with a melodious tune. Worship involves more than singing songs of worship. Worship involves giving your tithes and offerings, Worship includes sharing your testimonies, worship includes being in fellowship with others.

Are you actively involved in acts of service? We have so many ways that you can engage in acts of service. Visiting with the elderly or homebound, And they do not need to be strictly from our church. Are you participating in some of our kindness outreaches like the gas buy down, dollar drop, Laundromat wash and dry, and the you spray it we pay it car wash; how about the Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas blessing, children’s Easter egg hunt, then there are the Dunkard Hollow Block Party, and the many fellowship opportunities that we offer.

Participation is not mandatory, but how can you be a part of the body of Christ, when you are rarely together with them, when you would rather be alone in the privacy of your home or hanging out with your friends.

We are called to be an integral part of God’s kingdom. This means He (God) wants us to be in action actively building his kingdom, welcoming others into his fellowship, teaching them about his love for us and His love for them. Leading others into a saving knowledge of Jesus, and building His kingdom one soul at a time.

To be an integral part of God’s Kingdom the lines of communication must be opened, we must be hearing his voice directing us and leading us. And the only way we will be able to do this is if our lives are committed wholly to doing his will, is if we are listening for his voice, we are listening for his direction, and we are patient in waiting on him to do so.

Who is leading who today? Is God leading you? And are you leading others to God?