

I. Introduction

Good morning! In **John 10:27**, Jesus says, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”** We want to know His voice. We want to follow Him, because Jesus is our Lord and we know that He leads us according to His love and grace. But sometimes His voice does not seem clear. Today, let’s learn from how the Lord guided Paul in his mission, so that we can hear the Lord more clearly in our own lives. First, let’s read **Acts 16:6-15**.



II. Scripture Reading (Acts 16:6-15, NIV)

6 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. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

10 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. 11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. 13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

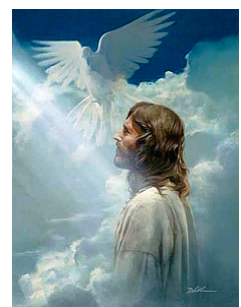
III. Teaching

As we saw last week, because of their disagreement about whether to take John Mark along, Paul and Barnabas parted ways and two missionary teams were formed and sent out from Antioch instead of only one. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus to visit the believers there. Paul and Silas, on the other hand, travelled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches there and then continued on to Derbe and Lystra.



At Lystra, Paul invited Timothy to join the mission team. So, Paul, Silas, and Timothy continued onward and eventually arrived in Troas. But along the way, they were redirected by the Holy Spirit at least twice. First of all, **Acts 16:6** says, **“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.”** In this context Asia refers to the Roman Province of Asia, which was the southwest part of modern Turkey. We don’t know exactly how the Holy Spirit stopped them from preaching in Asia. Perhaps it was a prophetic word, or even just a strong feeling that restrained them. But in any case, the Spirit made it clear that this was not the right time for preaching in Asia and therefore they travelled onward.

Acts 16:7, **“When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.”** This verse is interesting because the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus here. We are reminded again that the Creator God is revealed in the Bible as a Trinity, one God in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God is the same Spirit whether we say the Spirit of the Lord or the Spirit of Jesus. Earlier, Paul’s missionary team had tried to go south into Asia, but they were prevented by the Spirit; next they tried to go north into Bithynia, but



once again the Spirit did not allow it. Since they had come from the east, they finally traveled in the remaining direction which was west until they came to Troas.

In Troas, Paul receives a very specific call. **Acts 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.’”** The Roman Province of Macedonia was located in the northern part of modern Greece, across the Aegean Sea from Troas. Why did the Spirit bring Paul and his team to Troas to receive this vision? We don’t know for sure, but there is a subtle hint in the next verse.

Acts 16:10, “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.” This is the first time that the word, “we,” is used in reference to Paul’s ministry team. This usage indicates that Luke, the author of Acts, met Paul in Troas and joined the mission team. Luke is humble. Luke does not place his name into the story. But from this point on, Paul’s missionary team is called, “we,” and that tells us that Luke is with them. The Holy Spirit kept Paul from turning north or south and led him on west to Troas so that he could be there at just the right time for Luke to join the team.

Paul and his team sailed for Greece and then traveled overland to Philippi, a leading city in Macedonia. We are familiar with Philippi because of Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. Here is a photo of the ruins of central Philippi. And, here is another photo which shows the well-preserved theater which was in use from about the 4th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. When Paul visited Philippi, it was a thriving city.



Acts 16:13, “On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.” Paul and his team had arrived a few days earlier and during that time they must have heard about this place of prayer. Apparently there were very few Jews in the city and no synagogue, only a place of prayer by the river. On this day, only women had come. In those days, most Jewish preachers would probably have ignored the group of women, but Paul and his team sat with them and shared about Jesus.

Acts 16:14, “One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.” Lydia was not a Jew, but she was a worshiper of God. God used Paul to present the Good News, but it was God Himself who opened her heart to believe. Lydia was a business woman. She sold purple cloth, or possibly purple dye. In Roman times, purple was obtained from the excretion of sea snails. It took thousands of snails to make enough dye for a single cloth and the process was very labor intensive. Because of this, purple was very expensive and was generally worn only by people of high status. A dealer in purple would probably be quite wealthy. Often it is hard for the rich to come to faith, but Lydia seems to have made a firm decision to trust in Jesus after a single message from Paul.

Lydia is the first known Christian convert on the continent of Europe. She is greatly honored by the Orthodox Church and called by them, “Equal to the Apostles.” At Philippi there is still a church named after her and it is likely that she was very influential in the beginnings of the church in Philippi and beyond.



Inside this church, Paul and Lydia are shown side-by-side in stained glass. There is no mention of a husband of Lydia and many scholars believe that she was probably a widow. In any case, she seems to be the head of her own household. After she came to faith all of her household joined her in getting baptized. She then very generously invited the missionary team to stay with her as long as they were in Philippi. **Acts 16:15, “When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.”**



Paul came to Philippi and preached to a group of women who had gathered by the river to pray. This photo shows the Gangitis River where, according to tradition, Paul



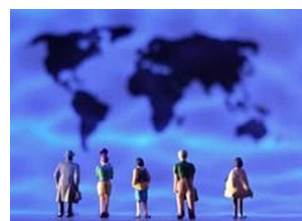
met Lydia. A short distance away, there is a developed baptismal connected to the river. Lydia and her household were baptized near here and today many people choose to be baptized in the same place.

It is a wonderful thing for a household to be united in their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This photo shows a family rejoicing together in Christ Jesus. I pray that we would be bold like Lydia in our efforts to share the Good News of Jesus with our families and that there would be many families in our church in the years to come.



At this point I would like to step back and consider how the Lord was leading Paul and his team each step of their journey. First, let's remember that the story of this second missionary journey began back in **Acts 15:36**, where it says, **“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’”** Why did Paul suggest this second journey? The first missionary journey was started after the church received special leading from the Lord. However, there is no hint of any special leading of the Lord at the beginning of the second missionary journey.

Paul seems to be simply using common sense in deciding how best to be obedient to the general commands of Scripture. In **Matthew 28:19a**, Jesus told the disciples, **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.”** On their first journey, Paul and Barnabas had won many converts to faith in Jesus, but for these new believers to grow into mature disciples, more teaching was needed. This was just common sense and it did not require special leading from the Lord.



Once the second missionary journey had overcome a rocky start over the issue involving John Mark, Paul's missionary team visited places they had gone to before and shared the news about the decision of the Council in Jerusalem and taught the disciples in more depth. This also did not require special leading from the Lord; it was a common sense approach to carrying out the Great Commission to disciple the nations.

However, when the mission team started to consider going to new places, God began to provide specific direction. First, Paul and his team were compelled by the Spirit to postpone ministering in Asia. Next, they were prevented by the Spirit from entering Bithynia. That left one remaining open road, the road west which brought them to Troas. At Troas, they were providentially joined by Luke, who became the author of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts.

In Troas, the Lord gave Paul a vision of the man from Macedonia asking for help. When Paul got to the city of Philippi in Macedonia, the first one to believe the Good News of Jesus was Lydia. So some Bible teachers say that the man from Macedonia turned out to be a woman. But I think it is better to understand the vision of the man from Macedonia as representing the people of the entire region and not a single person. After all, in the vision he does not say, “help me,” he says, “help us.”



The help we all need the most is forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Creator God who made us. However, consider this: a man can have cancer for many years before he knows it. He only learns of his need for surgery to remove the cancer after the doctor tells him the diagnosis. In a similar way, many people are at first unaware of their need to be reconciled to God. So, when we go to tell people about Jesus, they often need to hear the bad news before they are ready to accept the Good News.



People need to know that all have sinned and that sin leads to death. Only then can they recognize the Good News of Jesus. **Romans 6:23**, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** As Christians, like Paul, we carry this message to a lost world so that they may have new life in Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:20**, **“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”**



Paul carried the news to Philippi, and although many were slow to believe, Lydia was ready to believe because the Lord had opened her heart. After she and her household were baptized, Lydia invited Paul and his team to stay at her home. **Acts 16:15**, “**If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.**” Lydia’s faith and generous hospitality opened the way for the Good News of Jesus to spread in Philippi and beyond, eventually even to all of Europe.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for us, His sheep. We call Him Shepherd, because He is with us always, watching over us, guarding us, and guiding us. We call Him Lord because He is the Creator God come to us in human form, worthy of our loyalty and obedience. He is Lord, but many people struggle to hear His voice clearly.



However, did you notice that in today’s Scripture passage, Paul did not receive specific direction from the Lord until after he was already well into the journey? It was only after Paul had set out in common sense obedience to the general command to disciple the nations that Paul received specific direction from the Spirit of Jesus and from a vision.

Many people want specific leading from the Lord before they begin to do anything. But I think the Lord often wants to see us begin to obey His general commands before He gives us more specific direction. Do you want to hear the voice of the Lord? Do you want to know the heart of God? Then, may I suggest that you begin with striving to obey His most important commands? I think that as we grow in obedience to the written commands of Scripture, then the Lord will speak to us more and more.

Let’s close with the two most important commands of all. If we obey these, the Lord will lead us to reconciliation with Him and with many of the people around us. **Matthew 22:37-39**, “**Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**”

Let’s pray.

V. Prayer