THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Acts 15:36-16:40

Key Verse: 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.’”**

Today we are going to learn about Paul’s second missionary journey. That was the historical trip that opened the gate for the gospel to Europe. The length of the passage is long with many events and biblical figures that we can see, as we follow through the route of Paul’s trip. May God teach us the way how God leads his servants to carry the good news of Jesus to people who are in need.

**First, a sharp disagreement (15:36-41)**

Look at verse 36 **“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”** It was about 5 years after Paul finished his first missionary trip. Now Paul initiated to launch the Second journey with Barnabas to see how the newly pioneered churches were doing. Paul had already experienced persecutions while preaching the gospel in those areas. Hence he really wanted to encourage the churches there. Besides, the council at Jerusalem stated that the salvation was only through the grace of Jesus. The gentiles were not obliged either to circumcise or to keep the Moses’ law for their salvation. Paul also wanted to infirm this news to the Gentile believers so that they could freely come to Christ. Barnabas agreed and wanted to take John Mark with them. But Paul did not think it was wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. We learn that even great servants of God may disagree with each other on some matters. Paul was a task-oriented and Barnabas was a relation-oriented person. To Paul, his top priority was the mission of preaching the gospel. On the other hand, Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance. He believed that Mark could be restored from his failure, if he were given another opportunity. So who was right, Paul or Barnabas? Luke did not give us a clue who was right or wrong. This sharp disagreement caused two missionary teams to be parted and they served the missionary trips in two different regions. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and headed to Syria and Cilicia.

**Second, Timothy joins the mission team (16:1-5).**

Look at verses 1-2. **“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek.** **The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.”** Paul was impressed enough with Timothy to ask him to join their mission team. Timothy was young and timid, but Paul saw potential in him because the most important quality for a gospel worker is reliability, that is, faithfulness. This shows God’s provision, because John Mark and Barnabas just left Paul. When Barnabas leaves, God has a Timothy to go on with Paul.

Look at verse 3. **“Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”** In Acts 15, Paul argued strongly that it was not necessary for the Gentile converts to come under the Law of Moses for salvation. Yet, Paul did this not for Timothy’s salvation or right standing with God, but for the sake of trying to win the Jews. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:20, **“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.”** Paul wanted to help Timothy to concentrate on the gospel alone avoiding the unnecessary argument or conflict with the Jews. In Galatians 2, Paul refused to circumcise Titus who was a gentile co-worker as he served the gospel ministry there together with him. Here we learn Paul’s attitude in preaching the gospel. He was willing to curve the old idea and he was willing to adopt any kinds of methods if they were beneficial to serve the gospel ministry. As we learn from Paul, we need to know exactly to whom we preach the gospel and we should be able to adopt new ideas or means to bring the gospel to them. Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled from town to town and delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They told them how the Council had affirmed that people are saved by the grace of God alone. They were happy to hear the news. The churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

**Third, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (6-10).**

Look at verse 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.** After they visited all the churches that had been established during the first missionary journey, a question arose. Where should they go next? After strengthening the churches in the region, Paul sought to go next to the south-west, towards the important city of Ephesus in the province of Asia. But the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching there. So they tried to enter Bithynia in the north, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them either (7). All the doors seemed to be closing. Here we see that the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to preach the gospel in the Province of Asia twice. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching? There was certainly nothing wrong with Paul’s desire to preach the word in Asia; but it wasn’t God’s time, so this was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to say exactly how the Holy Spirit said no; it may have been through an inward speaking of the Holy Spirit, or by circumstances. Perhaps each time they began their trip, they discovered that Romans blocked the road for a bridge repair or weather condition was too bad to continue the journey. But one thing we can say for sure is that Paul was very sensitive to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the journey. From the beginning, God didn’t give Paul specific words of prophecy or inspiration regarding his plan for the trip. Paul and his journey team had to find the will of God as they were traveling the second missionary journey. As his route for the minor Asia has not been smooth, he must have been prayerful to know the will of the Holy Spirit. God usually let his servants struggle to find the way to serve the gospel ministry. Many times we don’t know what to do, where to go and what God’s will is for us at certain times. In order to follow God’s will, therefore, we must be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We may make some mistakes at some points, but God will surely lead and show us the way to go and the way to serve.

Let’s see how God showed his will for this journey team in the following verses of 8-9: “**So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”** In a vision, Paul heard the cry of a Macedonian man.Paul heard the Macedonian call. God’s direction for him became very clear at this point. It must have been a good lesson for Paul to learn how to obey and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit until he received the Macedonian call. Then let us think about the message that Paul received in the vision. The Macedonian man called for help. So Paul went to bring Macedonia the gospel—the best possible help. The greatest help we can bring anyone is the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. It is good for us to bring other help along with the gospel, but without the gospel, only a little help is given. Look at verse 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.** Beginning with this verse, the author Luke uses the pronouns “we” and “us.” Luke joined the journey team at Troas. The team was now headed for the part of the worldknown as Europe today. God had a big picture of world mission plan and Paul’s entry to Macedonia was a significant historical event that opened the door for Europe and the whole world to be evangelized.

**Fourth, the conversion of Lydia (11-15).**

They sailed from Troas to Samothrace, to Neapolis, and then went inland to Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony and a leading city of Macedonia. Look at verse 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.** In Philippi there were not many Jews there, and so there was no synagogue. Paul could not begin his preaching at a synagogue which was his custom.On the Sabbath they went outside the city gateto the river to find a place of prayer. By the river, there were some women, probably doing laundry. He and his team sat down and began to speak to them and one of listeners was Lydia who was a worshiper of God from Thyatira.

Here I’d like to take some moment to think about God’s hands of leading with the mission team. God usually opens a way for the gospel to certain regions through key men or women. Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch and he became a source of blessing for his country. Here Paul met Lydia and she took a great part in supporting Paul’s missionary work in Europe. When Paul’s team arrived in Philippi, he didn’t have any idea to reach out the natives. First thing Paul did was to search for the place of prayer to be led by the Holy Spirit. Lydia was God fearing woman from Thyatira and she might have come to Philippi for her business purpose. Right after prayer, Paul must have been inspired to teach the words of God to the women by the river. God’s timing was perfect to connect Paul and Lydia at this time. When we do not know what to do, we can still do prayer and the Holy Spirit will work to meet a right person at a right time to fulfill God’s will. As Lydia listened to the word of God, the Lord opened her heart. She accepted Jesus as her personal savior. She became the first Christian in Europe. She and her family were baptized. Then she opened her home for the Lord. It became the first house church in Philippi. The church supported Paul’s mission both financially and with prayers. The great church of Philippi began when one woman opened her heart to the word of God. One person is very important in the work of God.

**Fifth, Paul and Silas in prison (16-40).**

In verse 16-22, we see that a slave girl was used by her owners as a tool to make money. She was suffering greatly under the torment of a demonic spirit. She followed Paul and the journey team, shouting, **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (17).** She kept this up for many days. Actually what she spoke was right as the demon even knows who Jesus was. But her shouting was bothering Paul’s ministry a lot. God didn’t want the gospel message to be delivered by evil spirits. Paul turned around and said to the spirit **“In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!”** Tothe slave girl, it was the moment of liberation. She was set free from the demon. But her owners were angry, because their hope of makingmoney was gone. They were so upset that they stirred up Roman pride and had Paul andSilas arrested, stripped, severely beaten and put into a prison. This event shows how sinful and materialistic Macedonians were. Instead of being happy to see the liberation of the slave girl from evil spirit, they turned to be furious against God’s servants for they lost the source of income. Justice and love were totally broken in that city and materialism was regarded more valuable than human’s spiritual freedom. That city was really in need of spiritual help and salvation.

How did Paul and Silas react? Look at verse 25. **“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”** Paul and Silas remained calm and peaceful in their spirit. They prayed and praised the Lord in all circumstances. This pleased God and he sent a violent earthquake to open all the prison doors. When the jailer woke up and saw the open doors, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul stopped him and delivered a message of salvation “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”** Then they had preached the gospel with his family. The jailer and his whole household believed and were baptized (33).

In this passage, we learned that Paul heard the Macedonian call and carried the gospel to Europe for the first time. The character of Paul’s second mission trip can be summarized as the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit forbad Paul to preach in the Asia minor. The Holy Spirit open the door for Europe and showed the vision to Paul. The Holy Spirit led Paul to meet a very supportive mission co-worker Lydia. It was the work of the Holy Spirit that broke the jail doors to bring the gospel to a jail guard and to his household. Let us be humble and sensitive to follow God’s will and to be led by the Spirit so that we may be used to give help from God to the people who are in need.