



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 15:36–16:10

“Send the Light!”

TRANSCRIPT

We’ll, let’s turn in our Bibles to Acts chapter 15, in verse 36 and we’re going to reach chapter 15, verse 36, through chapter 16, in verse 10. Now, I’m doing something that I don’t usually do—as you probably can guess, if you’ve been following closely—we are skipping just a few verses in Acts chapter 15, because what is involved is a simple recording of the fact that certain decisions were made, and now they are going to be sent out. And the information is to be brought to other churches. So, for the sake of simplicity and the exposition of Acts, we are going to skip from verse 21, or 22, to verse 36. And in verse 36, now, we read:

And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. (Now, Luke is alluding to the fact that when Paul and Mark and others left Cyprus, traveled to southern Asia Minor on the first missionary journey, John Mark returned home. And that’s recorded in Acts chapter 13, in verse 13. And so, we read in verse 39):

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, (Asia, incidentally, is not a reference to Asian continent here, but to the Roman province of Asia, which was a much smaller area of Asia Minor.)

After they were come to Mysia, (his is in the north) they assayed to go into Bithynia: (which is somewhat to the northwest or northeast, I should say) but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas (this is to the west and this is the ancient city of Troy). 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. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Now, if you're a careful reader of the book of Acts, you will notice that this is the first time in the book that we have this expression, “We endeavored to go into Macedonia,” the first person plural pronoun. And so, it's likely that the narrator of the book of Acts, Luke, joins Paul and his company here. So, it's Luke and Silas and Timothy and Paul who are now together; and, perhaps, some others also, as well.

Now, if you will turn over to chapter 20 and verse 5 and 6:

These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

And then, after that again Luke uses the third person, so we gather from this that Luke left the company for a time there.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the reading of the Word of God, and for the privilege of studying it. We thank Thee for the way in which we are instructed by these events in the life of the apostles, as they sought to carry out the commission that had been given to them by the Lord Jesus Christ; to be witnesses of Him beginning at Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth. We thank Thee, Lord, for the perspective from which we look at this great missionary enterprise and we thank Thee for the fact that it has reached to us here in the West. We are grateful for the faithfulness of godly men, who were enabled by Thee to be faithful to the Word and faithful to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as they sought to express their gratitude to Thee in Christian service. Lord, give us something of the same devotion to the Word of God and to devotion to the will of God, devotion to Thee in service of Thee.

And, in the 20th century, Lord, may this work of the proclamation of the gospel continue. We thank Thee for this day; we thank Thee for all of the days that Thou dost give us, whether they

be days of sunshine or rain or storm, we know this is the day that Thou hast made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon those who have been afflicted in our midst, those who are ill, those who are bereaved, those who have been troubled, who are seeking also special guidance in particular situations. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt minister to all of us, in our needs; we especially remember those whose names are in our Calendar of Concern. We thank Thee for them, for their families and friends. We ask, Lord, that if it please Thee, that Thou wilt show Thyself to be the great God of heaven in ministry to them.

We thank Thee for the church of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for this country in which we live. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon the United States of America, our president, our government, Lord, if it should please Thee, we pray that Thou wilt preserve us, enable us as a nation to be free that the gospel may go forth in freedom. Now, we ask Lord that Thou will be with us in this meeting and may it be a time of spiritual blessing for us as we sing and as we listen to the Scriptures. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Many weeks ago, when we began our series of studies in the book of the Acts, I mentioned several times that Acts is the second volume of Luke's one work on the works and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we tried to make the point that what we have in the book of Acts is the continuation of what our Lord began in His earthly ministry. And He is continuing His work now, through the chosen men and disciples, who have that contact with Him through the possession of the “new nature” and, especially, the presence of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling third person of the Trinity.

You have, no doubt, noticed, as you have listened to the exposition and read the book of Acts yourself that Acts is a book that throbs with the burden and mission of the early church. There is a human side to it; and, there is a divine side to it.

Many years ago I read a little book on “Introducing the New Testament” by A. M. Hunter; and in it, as he begins his discussion of the book of Acts, he says, “Every schoolboy knows

Browning’s poem, “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” with its electric beginning, springing to the stirrup, and Joris and he; “I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three...” He said, if you changed the place names for Ghent and Aix, and write Jerusalem and Rome, you get an admirable description of what we have in the book of the Acts, because it’s the story of how they brought the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

Well, that’s the human side; but the divine side is prominent in this book, as well, because it is how Jesus continued to do and teach—but to do and teach, now, not in person but through His apostles and through His representatives. I think, also, sometime ago, I mentioned a story that John Foster told how an enquirer from Hinduism came to an Indian Bishop, and all, unaided by anyone else, he had read through the New Testament and the story had fascinated him and Christ had laid His spell upon him. He read on and felt he had entered into a new world. In the Gospels it was Jesus and His works and His suffering, in the Acts, it was the disciples did and thought and taught; and where our Lord had left off, in His earthly ministry, it seemed as if they had continued.

And so, he said to the Indian Bishop, I must belong to the church that carries on the life of Christ. And the Acts is the story of how the church carried on the life of Christ, even though He is at the right hand of the Father.

I also mentioned, when we came to Acts chapter 13 that that was something of a Continental Divide—a watershed—in the book. Now, up to that time, Peter had been the prominent figure. Now, Paul will be the prominent figure. But, up to that time Jerusalem had been the prominent city, but from chapter 13 on Antioch is the important city. And, then, up to that time Palestine had been the sphere of the ministry of the Word, but from that time on the whole world as they knew it becomes the sphere of the ministry.

Well, that is largely transpired to this point, and the first missionary journey has now taken place. And, that was followed by the first missionary conference, when Paul and others came back to Antioch and told about their ministry and how the Gentiles were turning to the Word of God. And that was followed by the first theological conference, in which Antioch sent representatives up to

Jerusalem. And there, they discussed the question of the relationship of circumcision to salvation. And when we studied this, just a little while back, I made reference to the fact that circumcision is paralleled by the difficulties that we have over baptism today, and I tried to make the point that the essential facts of circumcision are true of baptism. And that, if it is true, that circumcision is a work; then baptism is a work. And, consequently, to affirm that it's necessary to be baptized in order to be saved, is to come under the same kind of judgment that the Apostle said should come upon and over those who taught that circumcision was necessary to salvation.

Well, Paul has come back to Antioch now. They have had the conference in Jerusalem. And here, we read, in Acts chapter 15, in verse 36, that after some days of ministry—and, by the way, you will notice that verse 35 says: “Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Over and over again, we've made reference to this; and, it's very important to see it. I don't like to wring the changes on this too much because it does offend a lot of people—but sometimes we need to be offended in order to see the truth—I think you will see that the church at Antioch—and an ideal church it was—was not a church that was organized like most of the churches in Christendom today. It did not have a pastor. It did not have anyone who had the office of pastor. In fact, in the New Testament—I say this over and over again, but very few people ever bother to pay attention to it—they just don't like to pay attention to it, evidently, because it seems to go cross purposes with tradition and practice in Christian circles—there is no such thing as the office of pastor in the New Testament.

There is the gift of pastor-teachers; but, there may be one pastor-teacher, there may be two or three or four in a local church. There is no such thing as the office of pastor-teacher. The early churches were ruled by a body of elders; those men held the office of elder and they governed the local church. They had the oversight over it. Ministry was carried on by gifted men.

Now, you can see that right here; Luke says that, “Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”

So, they were not only among the ministers, Paul and Barnabas, but many others as well, so that gifted men carried on ministry.

In Believers Chapel, now, there are many things no doubt in which we are not thoroughly in harmony with the Word of God; and I wouldn't want to stand up and say to you that everything in the Chapel is ideal. There are probably some things that none of us realize are wrong; and then there are probably some things that some of us may think are wrong—or at least, not the best—and so we are not claiming perfection at all. But, one of the things that we have tried to do, under the will of God, is to have ministry by gifted men. Now, in order to do that, we have had to have a meeting in which there is an opportunity for ministry by gifted men. And, we have thought that the New Testament teaches that that is the time when the Lord's Supper is observed. And that's why on Sunday night, we have the open meeting in which the men—gifted men—are free to exercise their gift. There is—I repeat—no such thing as the office of pastor. No epistle in the New Testament is addressed to a pastor. And the recognition of the gift is just not there.

The Christian church, however, continues to practice that principle of the pastor of a church, and often gives to him an office that is very similar to the president of a corporation. The same kind of attitude that prevails when we say “Church government should be democratic government,” and that, I'm sure—I cannot prove this—I am sure is a carryover from the fact that in the political sphere, we prefer democracy to other forms of government.

And so, the ideal is to have democracy in the church—there was no democracy in the early church. The early church was governed by elders and the Scripture says that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to appoint elders.

Do you know how you can tell an elder? It's not because the church votes in a meeting and selects them. The Bible says, in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, Paul is speaking to the elders at Ephesus, “Take heed to the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost has appointed you overseers.” Elders! That's how you can tell a man is an elder. The Holy Spirit has appointed him.

Now, I know what you’ll say. “I don’t know how to tell whether the Holy Spirit has appointed a man as an elder.” Do you have some special feeling? Is there some kind of light or halo that pervades the head of an elder? And so, you can pick him out? Do you see around Mr. Prier, or Mr. Dean, or Dr. Mims, any kind of halo? Some of you are smiling already. No, of course not—we see no halo. No, you will not see a halo. You can tell an elder, on the human level, by whether he’s functioning as an elder. Is he exercising oversight in the body of believers? Is he shepherding the flock? That’s the confirmation of the appointment of the Holy Spirit.

And so, consequently, an elder stands out, on the divine side, by the fact that God has appointed him; but on the human level, he stands out as an individual who is functioning as an elder. Same thing with deacons.

Sometimes people come and say to me, “You know, in Believers Chapel we ought to have more elders.” I wouldn’t disagree with that. I think it would be nice if we had six, or eight, or ten elders. But I’d like to see six, or eight, or ten functioning overseers. That’s the determination of what is an elder. Does he function? Is he really functioning as an overseer? To have the elders say, “We want a man to serve as elder with us,” doesn’t necessarily mean they will function as an elder. It’s very much like anything else.

It’s like being a missionary; if you are not a missionary at home, you will not be one if you go abroad. And so, likewise in the early church—and in this church—my feeling would be, fine if we have some more elders. I hope God would raise up some men in our midst, who will function as an elder, who will have right biblical conceptions of the nature of the church, and the organization of the church, and the doctrines of the church; and then will function by caring for the saints, guarding them, guiding them, nourishing them. These are the things that mark out an elder. And the best way to start, if you feel that God may be calling you to the office of elder, is to do some shepherding. That’s how you can tell an elder. Not because he’s been elected by hands raised in a congregational meeting. That’s the way to get elders who are not truly elders, and to harm the church rather than to herd it.



Well, you see here, there were many others, who were teaching the Word with Paul and Barnabas, because ministry is free and open to gifted men.

Now, here is Paul, and he's in the meeting and he goes to Barnabas and he says, “Look, Barnabas, I'd like to go back out and visit the brethren and every city where we preached the Word of God and see how they do.” Now, that's by the way, the heart of an apostle. I think that's also an elder. He was concerned about them. He wanted really to see how they were doing.

G. Campbell Morgan, in one of his books—I've forgotten exactly where it is—it may be in his commentary on Acts, I didn't look it up again—makes reference to the fact that there was an eminent Bible teacher that he knew who once made the statement that he would, “Rather go...” that he would, “Rather build up one man in the faith, and see that man perfected in the faith, than to call hundreds of people to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now what, of course, Morgan meant by that and what that man undoubtedly meant by it is that if you can have one man who is brought to a sense of maturity in the Christian faith, he will do more good for you than the salvation of a hundred individual souls. That may seem strange to people today because, again, the Christian church has put such a high value on evangelization—and no one wants to reduce the significance of evangelization—but in the process, we have not appreciated what it is to bring men to maturity in the faith. One man brought to maturity in the faith can do more good for the church, so this eminent teacher felt, than a hundred people just saved. And there is some truth back of that, at least, it seems to me from experience.

One mature Christian, faithful, devoted to the Lord Jesus, can do an awful lot of good. The story of Gideon illustrates it, I think, very well.

So, Paul wanted to go back and see what was happening. I'm sure that Barnabas thought that this was a great idea; and so, Barnabas said, “Let's go. I'll take Mark and we will get ready and go.”

Well, the mention of Mark was enough to disturb the Apostle Paul, because when he determined to take John Mark—and, remember, Mark was related to Barnabas—Paul said, “No,

Barnabas, I do not think it would be wise for us to take John Mark, because, remember, on our first journey, when we got to Asia Minor, Mark turned and went home, when we needed him.”

As someone has said, “Mark flinched, flickered, and quit.” Why he did, we don’t know. Some have said he was homesick, perhaps. Some said he was afraid of the perils of the journey from Pamphylia and Perga, as they made their way up into the hills to Antioch in Pisidia. Some have even said he was disturbed by Paul’s preaching, because after all, he was a Jerusalemite and Paul was talking about freedom from the Law, and that circumcision was not necessary for salvation and things like that that were different. And Mark had not been brought up that way. And some have thought that maybe Paul’s theology was such a kind of theology that raised questions in his mind.

But, at any rate, he left and Paul felt that that was a mistake. And Barnabas said, “No, I’d really like to take Mark.” And Paul said, “I don’t think that he ought to go.” And Barnabas said, “I’m determined to take him.” And Paul said, “I’m determined that he not go.”

And so, we read that the contention was so sharp between them—by the way, that word in the Greek Text, translated “contention” in the Authorized Version, is the word from which we get, paroxysm, in other words, this was a paroxysm of struggle between them and anger between them.

G. K. Chesterton once said, “The worst thing about a quarrel is that it stops an argument.” Well, they were arguing and arguing—and it’s fine to argue and argue—but, sometimes, when the argument becomes a quarrel that’s something else. And this was sharp contention.

And so, as a result, they decided to go their separate ways for the time; and so, Barnabas left, he took Mark, he wouldn’t change his mind. They sailed off to Cyprus. And so, Paul chose Silas, and they decided to take the land route and go around the horn, so to speak, and go that way back to the churches that they had been ministering to.

Well, you can see the imperfect goodness of good men here.

Now, Barnabas was a good man. In fact, Luke, when he wrote this book, after this, still says about Barnabas, chapter 11, in verse 24, “He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,

and much people was added to the Lord as a result of his ministry.” This is the last glimpse in Acts of Barnabas. But, it’s not the last glimpse of Barnabas.

One can see that the grave issues of small faults—some think that this ruined Barnabas’ life. I don’t think that’s true, but some have suggested that. Paul later refers to Barnabas in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, in verse 6, and he refers to him in a sense that indicates he still appreciates Barnabas very much. They just had a difference of opinion over this, and an argument over it, and they decided to go their separate ways.

Now, if you are asking me—if you were to ask me, “Who was right?” Well, I don’t know who was right. I do know this, though, Luke says, verse 40, “And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.” That would seem to indicate that the people who knew about this in Antioch gave Paul, in a sense, the right hand of fellowship, in what he was doing. And, evidently, at least said, as far as Paul was concerned, they were convinced that what he was doing was of the Lord. Perhaps Paul was right.

We know this, also, about John Mark. We know that later on in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, when he is in Rome, and he describes this in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, he asks that Mark be sent to him. In 2 Timothy chapter 4, in verse 11, he says, “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for ministry.” So, Mark—if in Paul’s eyes he had lost a bit by turning back at Perga in Pamphylia,—he evidently in the intervening years has convinced the Apostle that he was a faithful man of God, and useful in the work of the Lord. And, Paul wants him with him in his prison in Rome.

Well, it’s sad to see Barnabas and Paul separate here. Paul owed more to Barnabas than to any other. It was Barnabas who went off into Tarsus and brought him to Antioch, so he could teach the Word. And then, Barnabas was leaving the greatest spirit of the age. There was no question in my mind—and no question in the minds of many others—that the Apostle Paul was not only the greatest of those in the Christian Church, if we were to pick out someone as great—but there’s little

doubt that the Apostle Paul has probably influenced the Western World more than any other person of his day.

That’s why his works are still studied today. That’s why in schools all over this Western World, and even in the Eastern World, as well, have departments of religion and professors who specialize in Pauline studies, among others.

He was a great man, and it’s too bad that Barnabas and he separated. But, they did. And Paul, now, begins the second missionary journey. And so, he begins to take the land route, and he gets back to Derba and Lystra where he had preached.

“And, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.”

Now, he was Paul’s convert. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he mentions the fact that he was his son in the faith; and so, he had been converted through the preaching of Paul, probably on that first missionary journey. So, he’s Paul’s convert and, probably, his mother was also.

His mother’s name was Eunice, and his grandmother’s name was Lois. And so, we have today people who are named Eunice and Lois, in the Christian family, named for Timothy’s mother and his grandmother. We don’t know anything about Timothy’s talents, his education, his approval by the saints is the thing that is important.

Now, I think that that’s worthy of some emphasis. We are inclined to think that the way in which we prepare for the service of the Lord is to go off to a Bible college, or a Bible institute, or a university or a college, and major in religious studies. And then, go to theological seminary and, if possible, to graduate school beyond that, and then, we will be a servant of the Lord. That’s another one of the great mistakes that is so often made.

Would you notice what Timothy’s qualifications were for Christian service? Luke doesn’t say anything about his talents. Luke doesn’t say anything about his education. What he does speak about is the most important thing, and that is: he was well reported of by the brethren who were at Lystra

and Iconium. He was a person who had proved to be an effective servant of the Lord in his own local church. That’s the finest qualification that a person could have for Christian service. Give me a person who is well reported of by the brethren in a particular local assembly, over any academically education man—all things being equal—that man well reported of by the brethren will be a success. The other? Questionable. He has to prove himself in the same way. And, if he doesn’t prove himself in the same way, all of the education that you require in our schools, so often filled with obstructions to the knowledge of the Lord, and faithful service of the Lord,—all of that is of no great significance in the light of this significant, necessary attainment to be well reported of by the brethren in a local church.

Timothy had that and because he had that, Paul wanted him to serve with him. How important it is to win souls at home, before we seeks to win and help souls aboard.

Now, Paul did a strange thing with Timothy. We read, “Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters...”

What is interesting about this, and what is somewhat puzzling about it, is that when we turn over to the Epistle to the Galatians, we find that with Titus, Paul would not allow him to be circumcised. And, in fact, he said, when people asked that Titus be circumcised, that, “He would not yield in subjection and permit Titus’ circumcision. No, not even for an hour would he yield in subjection.”

And yet, here, he is having Timothy circumcised. Well, we could say, Paul was just inconsistent, and people have said that. He was just inconsistent. He’s just like the rest of us. He’s inconsistent.

No, I don’t think that’s true at all. If you turn over to chapter 9, verse 19 through verse 23, of 1 Corinthians, Paul explains the incident very acceptably. It’s in accordance with certain principles that he believed were important. And so, listen to Paul, 1 Corinthians chapter 9, in verse 19. And he’s talking about ministry and he says:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, (that is, the Gentiles) as without law. (But, now, lest you think that by being outside of the law, that means that I should be lawless, or an outlaw, he inserts, “being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,” now, here is the purpose.) That I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak...

In other words, I even did things that my conscience permitted me to do, but I did not do them because of the weakness of brethren who did not understand our freedom in Christ. In other words, among the Mormons, as we were talking the other day, the Apostle would not have drunk coffee, because that would offend them. He had the freedom to drink it, but he was among weak people, whose consciences are weak, weak consciences are those who do not understand their freedom in Christ, so to them that are weak, he became as weak that he might gain the weak.

“I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

So, you see, my dear Christian friend, a Christian is free to live under the law, if he wishes, in order to reach people who are under law, he’s also free to live apart from the law as a code—but he’s not free to live contrary to the moral standards of the Old and New Testaments.

So, the Apostle, in connection with Timothy, it’s quite clear he was going to be in the synagogue often. Timothy is a Jewish man. It would be expected that he be circumcised. And so, Paul said, for the sake of the Jews, “Timothy, I think it would be wise for you to be circumcised because they’re going to ask you, ‘Are you circumcised?’ and You can say, ‘Yes, I am.’ You know it doesn’t have anything to do with the gospel. That’s why I wouldn’t let Titus be circumcised, because

the issue there was the gospel. Here, the issue is not the gospel, the issue here is simply open doors to preach the Word of God and a Christian is free to be circumcised, or not to be circumcised.”

It all is so consistent with the principles of Paul. It’s amazing people can call him inconsistent. I can only attribute it to failure to pay attention to all of the Word of God.

Well, at any rate, “They went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders, which were at Jerusalem. And so were the church established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”

Inward and outward growth, both are needed. And now, we have another one of these incidents—interesting incidents. “When they had through Phrygia and the region of Galatia,” Paul sought to go into Asia, which was to the west. And he was “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia.” So, he didn’t go west. He turned north. He felt that the Holy Spirit was impelling them on, couldn’t go west, so he could go north.

So, he went up to Mysia, and then he assayed to go into Bithynia, which was a little to the north and east, and again, the Holy Spirit “suffered” him not. And so, he was forced down, by the nose, that he was receiving, down to Troas, or ancient Troy, on the Aegean coast. This is near Homer’s Troy, was the battleground between Europe and Asia. It’s the place of which Virgil and Homer wrote. And it is here, that Paul and his company will make their invasion of Europe. It’s obvious that in the Spirit’s mind, evangelization of Europe is there. Paul doesn’t comprehend it all, yet. He’s following guidance day by day. He doesn’t know the overall plan; but the overall plan is evangelization of Europe.

So, I’m sure, he and the others who were with him, such as Silas and Timothy, and now Luke, they discuss this question and wondered about it. What is God doing with us? And they did not know the overall plan.

So, they are now in Troas, and we read, “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. And after he

had seen the vision, immediately,” Luke says, “we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”

That word “assuredly gathering” is very interesting, because it’s a word that means something like, “to put two and two together,” and so, what evidently transpired was Paul and others discussed the things that had happened to them. They said, look, you remember, a few weeks back, we tried to go into Asia. We weren’t allowed to go into Asia. And then, we sought to go into Bythina, remember and not too long ago, and we weren’t allowed to go there. And so, here we are now, done in Troas, and I’ve had this vision. It’s obvious that the Holy Spirit has wanted us to go into Europe. And, now, as we look back over the past and as we consider what has just happened, it seems plain, this is the will of God for us.

Now, you can look at this in a different way. You might look at this and say, Why was he forbidden to go into Asia and Bythina? Well, the people there were just not as good as other people. [Laugh] Or, you can say, their wills weren’t ready to respond to the gospel. And, after all, you have to respond of your free will to the gospel. Well, no, it’s obviously not that. This is what the Lord is doing. It takes a work of grace for anyone to be saved; and the Holy Spirit is saying to Paul and to those who are in his company, “I intend for you to go there, and hearts are prepared to receive the gospel, and so, that’s where you are to go.”

We learn a whole lot about guidance here, it seems to me. It’s very possible for a man who is an apostle not to know what the overall plans are. The overall plans belong to the Lord. Our responsibility is to follow, day by day. There are lots of things Paul, no doubt, learned by being forbidden to go into Asia.

Do you know that later on, in Acts chapter 19, when the time came to preach in Asia, we read, “All they in Asia heard the Word.” It wasn’t the time. The Holy Spirit’s preparation of the hearts in Asia had not been completed. Later on, that will take place.

So, day by day, even apostles have to find the will of God and, do you know, even our Lord had to find the will of God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, “O My Father, if it be



possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.” All of the experiences of finding the will of God belong to all men—and our Lord was a man, too.

I think we can learn a lot about personal guidance here, too. Guidance is by the Holy Spirit, ultimately. That’s why we’ve been given the Holy Spirit. He is the one who guides us. We are led by Him. The problem with guidance is largely the problem of failure to give God time.

May I illustrate this? F. W. Boreham was an outstanding minister of the Gospel of Christ in New Zealand. Mr. Boreham has written a score of books; they’re all interesting—marvelously interesting and entertaining author—he has books on the favorite texts of famous people. And, more than one book on that subject—I have them in my library. They are very interesting and very illustrative of great principles and great texts.

He tells of an experience that he had that illustrates guidance, I think, so beautifully; and the principle of giving God time. He said, there was a man in New Zealand, who was a well-known minister, whose name was Doke. And Mr. Doke had said to him, one time, when he had asked him, “Can we really know that God is guiding us?” And Mr. Doke said, “Yes, Mr. Boreham, I think we can know really when God is guiding us. But, we must give God time.” And then, he gave a word of exhortation to Mr. Boreham. He said, “Above all, give God time.”

And then, Mr. Boreham told of an experience in his life. He was ministering in a little town in New Zealand, and it was just a small church. And about three years before they had given him and his wife a trip to England, at an expense that he felt the church could hardly afford. But they had sacrificed and they had given him this trip; and he felt an obligation to them because they had done that for him. And, he received a letter in the mail from a church in Hobart, in Tasmania. And the church in Hobart had heard of him, and they called him by letter, to the ministry of the Word of God in Hobart. And, Mr. Boreham was torn up over this because he felt that maybe it was the Lord’s guidance, but he hated to leave that church that had sacrificed so much for him and to which he was so intimately connected. And, since Mr. Doke had said to him, “Give God time,” he said, “I’m going

to put that to the test. I’m not going to tell anybody about this call that has come to me.” He and his wife alone, that’s all—nobody in the church, nobody in the area was told.

The church in Hobart had written in the letter that, “We must have a decision,” and they named a date, which was about three weeks beyond the time that Mr. Boreham had gotten the letter. So, he said, “He committed it to the Lord and he was going to give God time. And he waited.” He said, “Nothing happened.” Day after day after day, nothing happened. Finally, the day came in which he had to give the decision, and still nothing had happened. And he waited.

He said, “The way I had to make the decision was, I had to go down to the post office.” You can imagine this small town. “...Go down to the post office, and send a telegram.” That where you sent telegrams.

So, the hours of the day went on, nothing happened. Still nothing happened. Nothing happened. And, finally, at the proper time, he told his wife, “We’ve got to make the decision. The time is just about up.” He said, “We’ve got to walk down to the post office.” So, he said, “We walked down to the post office, and as we got in front of the post office, who should come along—riding on a bicycle—but the church secretary. And the church secretary rode up, and he said, ‘Pastor, I hear that you have a call to a church in Hobart.’ Now, he hadn’t told anybody. Somehow, the news had gotten out that he’d been called. And he said, “Well, yes.” He said, “But I’m very torn up over it.” And he said, “I really hate to go because the church has been so good to me here and gave us that trip to England, just a couple of years or so ago, and spent all that money. I just don’t feel that I can accept this invitation and leave this situation.”

The church secretary said, “Pastor! That was three years ago! And, furthermore, you earned that trip. As a matter of fact,” he said, “You’re just about due for another trip.” And so, he said, “Three minutes before the post office was to close, he went in, wrote out the telegram, accepted the call, and went to Hobart.”

Give God time. He felt that was clearly God’s guidance to him. It was all right for him to accept that call and to go to Hobart. That is the problem in spiritual guidance. So often, we will not give God time.

The Scriptures say we are guided by the Word of God. Anything that’s contrary to the Word of God is not God’s guidance. If you can, for example, discern that some action is clearly not in the will of God, you can be sure the Holy Spirit’s not going to guide you in that way.

I often tell people who ask me about denominationalism, I often tell people, “I could never join a denomination.” Sometimes people are puzzled by that. It’s very simple. It’s really what I think the Bible teaches; that denominationalism is not of the Word of God; that the body of Christ is one, that we all belong to one body. Why should I be called a Presbyterian? Why should I call myself a Baptist? Why should I call myself an Episcopalian—or, whatever it may be? In that, I am saying something that is contrary to the oneness of the body of Christ. There are many godly people in the denominations—many godly men preaching—many godly churches—but that’s a principle, and I could not do it because it’s principle. And, I think, it’s scriptural.

So, when a person comes to me and says, “God has guided me to join a denomination,” well, if they are very immature in the faith, I can understand that. And so, I’m careful. I don’t always say, “Look, you are going directly against the teaching of the Word of God. You’re rebellious.” It may be they are not able, in my opinion, to accept that testimony yet. But, ultimately, I don’t think anyone can be guided that way.

Now, that’s a more minor matter than some other major matters, but that illustrates the fact that guidance is in accordance with the Word of God, first and foremost; and then, guidance is through the Holy Spirit speaking in the inmost being of Christians. And He is well able to make His will know.

Just as surely as Israel was guided by the pillar of cloud, when it stayed, they were to stay, when it moved they were to move; so, you and I, are guided by the Holy Spirit, on the same basis. In

fact, even more personally, because the Holy Spirit indwells all of us. And, we can be sure, if we give Him time, He will make His will known to us.

So, may God by His grace enable you to learn how to walk by the Spirit. The Apostle learned it. There were many experience they had that, no doubt, kept them puzzled. And, you will be puzzled, too. But, if you give God time, He'll make His will known to you.

If you are here this morning, and you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you do not have anyone who is guiding you. May God in His wonderful grace cause you to see your lost condition; cause you to see what Christ has done for sinners. May you flee to the cross; receive the forgiveness of sins and the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a person to guide you in all of your steps, to the end of your days here and on throughout eternity.

May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous historical descriptions that Luke has given us, of the experiences of the apostles and others in the early church. Lord, teach us what it is to be guided by the Holy Spirit, in our daily life. And, if there should be some without Christ, O Father, speak to them. Bring them to the knowledge of Him, whom to know means everlasting life and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.