



Sermon – February 9, 2020
Dr. Jimmy Draper

Verses Covered This Week

Acts 16:6 - 10

Well, good morning church. That's pretty good. You're partly awake. So thank you for letting us be here today. Carol Ann and I are delighted to be here. We actually got married 63 years ago and 6 weeks later we were pastor of Steep Hollow Baptist Church out here about three miles. So this is a special place for us. Lots of great memories. I remember that the kids here think you say A&M after your prayers instead of amen. We have a lot of fond memories of people ask me, "You like the Aggies?" I said, "I like the Aggies. When you win I celebrate, when you don't, I cry a lot. Once an Aggie, always an Aggie." So this is where we started. Glad to be home and so thankful for that. Even met some folks, Harvey Weedon here and the Weedon clan from Steep Hollow. Mary Alice McFalls and I went to high school together. My goodness, how did we get old so fast, right? It happens in a hurry. Glad to be here and thank you for giving me the privilege.

I want you to take your Bible. Now I'm hurrying because I don't have any 28-minute sermons. I just want to tell you why I'm kind of rushing here. Because I know you're used to 28-minute sermons. It will not happen this morning. So anyway, alright, Acts chapter 16 and beginning in verse 10, verse 6 to verse 10. Paul now is speaking and he says,

⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, Dr. Luke is actually recording this, they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

Wow! They'd been forbidden to do what they'd been commanded to do. Isn't that strange?

⁷And when they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

There it is again. They couldn't do what they were commissioned to do. Unusual.

⁸Passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, "Cross over into

Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Let me set the stage just a little bit. We already have had the Great Commission. Go into all the world, make disciples of all nations. We’ve already had that. We already have Acts chapter 1, verse 4, verse 8, where it says, you’re to go into all the world and be My witnesses. But there’s an ingredient in here that is inserted that is very important for us. Acts 1:4, Jesus told the disciples after His resurrection, He told the disciples, “Stay in Jerusalem until the fulfillment of God’s promise.” And then in verse 8, He says, “Now after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outer most parts of the earth. Let me just make the point easy. God did not give us the Great Commission and then tell us to go figure out how to do it. It’s not dependent upon our strategies or our plans. God has a plan for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and it’s not what we scheme or what we strategize or what we plan. Early in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is introduced. I appreciate Steve kicking us off this morning with the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit is God’s plan for every one of our lives. The apostle Paul is learning a lesson here. It is a lesson that all of us need to learn. He is obedient. He’s not a rebel. This is not Jonah fleeing from his assignment in Ninevah. He is, he is obeying God and the Holy Spirit is so prevalent up until the 16th chapter. In the fifth chapter, the disciples are told not to preach about Jesus. And the last verse of that chapter says that they told the authorities, “We have to obey God rather than man. We are witnesses of these things as is the Holy Spirit.” In chapter 13, it ends by saying, “And the disciples were all filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” Here’s the Holy Spirit again. The Jerusalem council, wish we had time to talk about that, but the Jerusalem council which was called together to decide how Gentiles could be saved. The early church was a Jewish church. And so when Gentiles start getting saved, then Jewish members thought, “Well something’s missing here.” So they wanted to add rituals or traditions of the Jews to the requirement to be saved. So they called a council of the leaders in chapter 15, the Jerusalem Council, to decide how the Gentiles could be saved. And so they decided that they could be saved just like Jews could be saved; by grace through faith. So they wrote a letter to the churches. And in that letter, James, who is presiding at this conference, said down about verse 26 of chapter 15, he said, “This is the Holy Spirit’s decision and ours. This is the Holy Spirit’s decision and ours.”

Now we come up to the 16th chapter. Apostle Paul’s already been on one missionary journey. It was a short missionary journey. He went with Barnabas. Barnabas is always seen encouraging people. In fact, his name means son of encouragement. Great, great encourager. And at the end of the Jerusalem Conference, Paul tells Barnabas, “I think we ought to go back to the churches we visited and we started back in our first trip.” And Barnabas said, “Hey, that’s a great idea.” He said, “Let’s take John Mark.” And Paul said, “No way. He deserted us on that first trip. I don’t want him on this trip.” And the strife got so severe that they actually split. And Barnabas took John Mark and went on a missionary journey. We don’t know biblically where they went. But historically we can find some evidence of it. And Paul took Silas. So now Paul and Silas are on this second missionary journey. First journey they went by boat over to Cyprus, spent a little time, and then went over to Pamphylia and ultimately up to Antioch and Pisidia. It was a short trip. They just turned around and came back and went back to Antioch of Syria. And now this trip, they stayed on land. And one of the first places they went through was where Tarshish, where the apostle Paul was born. That’s where he grew up. So they went through Tarshish, then went up to Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium, and then Antioch and Pisidia. Now Paul’s plan was to

take a left and go west in Antioch of Pisidia. But the Holy Spirit said, "You can't do that." Paul, see, had a good plan. Nothing wrong with it. And he's obedient. He's not a rebel. His plan was to go up to Antioch of Pisidia and then take a left and go over on the coast of Asia Minor and evangelize. Holy Spirit said, "No." What do you do when you think you're obeying God and He tells you, "No."? It will happen to every one of us. But it's a critical moment for us when that happens. So still being obedient, they traveled north. The Holy Spirit led them north and they came to Mysia which is a real thin strip of land between Asia and Bithynia. And when they came to Mysia, they said, "We desired to go preach in Bithynia." Now you have to understand, Mysia and Bithynia are a lot like Bryan and College Station. You just go across the street and you're out of one and into the other. That's the way it was there. You're in Mysia then you go across the street and you're in Bithynia. And the Spirit of Jesus would not allow. Wow, there it is again. Obedient, passionate, commissioned; God says, "No." So bewildered, no doubt, the Holy Spirit leads them over to Troas. Now Troas is a seaport city and Paul, for some reason, is down by the ocean in the middle of the night. Now people say, "What was he doing?" Don't know, but I'll tell you what I think. I think he was debating with God. I think he was saying, "What's going on? You told us to do this and then you tell us we can't do it. You told us to preach and now you tell us we can't. What's up?" I think he was having a conversation with God. Whatever was happening, he had a vision. And in the vision, there was a man in Macedonia standing up and saying, "Come over and help us." That's all. Didn't tell what he needed. He just said, "Come, help us."

Now they go from Troas over to Neapolis and about 10 miles into Macedonia is Philippi. And so it comes Sabbath day and they decide they want to worship and the early church worshiped mostly in synagogues. And so it's still in that stage and so they wanted to go, they didn't have a synagogue there so he went down by the river, the river there in Philippi, and he knew that God-fearing people always liked to worship by running water. And here were some God-fearers there and the leader of that group that they met down by the riverside, was Lydia. You know where Lydia was from? Thyatira. You know where Thyatira is? Asia. She was a traveling sales lady. And Thyatira produced many products, not an overwhelming focus on anything except they were famous for purple dye. It also was the home of some of the first unions. They had trade guilds there. All the trade guilds, if you were selling pottery, for instance, you had a trade guild for pottery. And it was always attached to a pagan worship. So in order for you to be a member of a trade guild, you had to go through the worship of pagan gods which you could see would be a problem for the Christians and the believers. And so that group, they distributed out of Thyatira, they sent bronze work, linen, and purple dye, and leather goods and all kinds of things were distributed out of there. So here's what happened. Paul's plan was to reach Asian Bithynia. God's plan was to reach the world. Because when they landed in Macedonia and preached the gospel in Philippi, the gospel was introduced to Europe. And we're here today because of God's plan which was led by the Holy Spirit. Oh, by the way, how did Asia and Bithynia get the gospel? In 112 A.D. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, sent a letter to Trajan, the emperor, and he said, "There's not a city, village, or rural area where you cannot find Christians." That's 112 A.D. First pagan report of the Christian mission. And how did that happen? Through Lydia. A traveling sales lady with an entourage of salespeople around her. No doubt in my mind, Paul never went to Thyatira by the way. No doubt in my mind Lydia was one of the founders of the church at Thyatira. People got saved. Salespeople got saved and they scattered all over Bithynia and Asia selling products and sharing the gospel. That's how the gospel got to Asia and Bithynia. Isn't that amazing? God's plan was so much bigger than Paul's

plan. He couldn't understand why he couldn't preach in Asia and Bithynia. He got in on it later. In the 19th chapter of Acts we find that he spends two years in Ephesus and the last verse, verse 10 I think, is the last verse of that chapter says, ever individual in Asia heard the gospel in two years. Wow! How'd that happen? It happened because there were people who understood that it was not their problem to figure out how to serve God. Their responsibility was to have a relationship with God that was so real, so deep, so genuine that they would naturally do what God wanted them to do. That's God's plan. Our plans are not bad. We just need to make sure that they're God's plans. Because the key is our relationship with the Holy Spirit. That's how God operates. And the world can be reached. They told everybody in Asia the gospel in two years without radio, without television, without books, without seminaries and colleges, without churches and things like we have. Two years. Because the Holy Spirit was involved in every one of them. And if every one of us had that kind of relationship with the Holy Spirit, there'd be some way every day of our lives we could share the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit. That's God's plan.

Now when we come to this chapter, stay with me, I want to kind of watch the clock. I had a guy offer to give me signals over here. About 20 minutes, give me signals. Alright, first thing we're confronted with which is, we're confronted with a mystery. Now I know you didn't catch it, because I didn't spotlight it, verse 6, the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia. Verse 7, the Spirit of Jesus said, "You can't preach in Bithynia." Verse 8, God says, "You can go to Macedonia." Which is it? Is it the Holy Spirit? Is it Jesus? Or is it God? Yes. Here's the mystery. Quickly follow me. Don't go to sleep yet. Here is the mystery. There are three distinct personalities that are always assumed in the Bible and never explained: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. They are all three equally God, but they're not three Gods. Now follow me because this will help you in some of your theological studies. If the Holy Spirit seals you within you when you were saved as Ephesians 1 says, then the Holy Spirit planted Himself in you and that is God. Jesus is the Son of God and by His sacrifice, we're saved. God is God. Now we're confused, right. Well, let me show you how it works. In Ephesians 3:17, for instance, Paul talks about, "I'm praying that Christ will dwell in your heart." Verse 19 says that the, that you'll be filled with all the fullness of God. In verse 18 of chapter 5 of Ephesians speaks of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, mentioned, not explained. Now we cannot understand that. It's a mystery to all of us. But listen carefully to me. We're not saved by understanding. We're saved by faith. But faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith is not tossing prayers in the air and hoping someone hears it. Faith is an awareness that God is God, that He dwells within us, and we belong to Him, and He will lead us in our lives if we will give Him the opportunity to do that. Paul was so close to God, in spite of the plans he had, that he could hear the voice of God. I'm just going to ask you a question. I don't want you to answer, not to me. When's the last time God spoke to you? I mean Christianity is not going to church and hearing sermons and teaching lessons and singing songs. That's part of it, but Christianity is hearing the voice of the God who dwells in you, a relationship of love and obedience. We belong to Him. Paul put it this way. You're not your own. You've been bought with a price. So glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His. The relationship with the Holy Spirit, now we'll never understand it. I wish I had time to give you a long illustration. I'll give you a quick one. In September of 1977, NASA launched Jupiter 1. It has been traveling 43 years at 38,000 miles per hour into space. It is still going. It is still sending signals back. It is today almost 15 billion miles in space. Now you say, "That's interesting, but how does that apply?" OK. Let me sneak another verse on you. Isaiah 55, verse 8 and 9, God says, "My ways, My thoughts, are higher

than yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth. That's how much higher My ways and My thoughts are than yours." Now what God's trying to tell us, listen carefully, none of us are God. None of us are inherent. None of us are mistake-free. We're human. We fail. We're frail. We misstep. And that's why the world's in such chaotic condition today. Because we're living through the time of the judges. Last verse in Judges. Last verse in Judges says, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That's the world we live in. That's the world we live in. But Paul was living in a relationship with God who is so much higher. By the way, do you know how much a billion is? Just to give you an idea, there has been only one billion minutes since Jesus died in the last 20 years. One billion. That spaceship is 15 billion miles out there. God's just greater than we are. He wants us to learn to trust Him. He knows the way. Psalm 139 said, before we were ever born, He already wrote our history. He knows what we're going to do and pleads with us, learns, yields, His Spirit to us and longs to have a relationship with us. Even though He knows what we're going to do, He loves us anyway. It's a mystery. Now it would help you, I said it would help you in your theology, some people would have you believe that getting saved is not enough. You've got to get a special blessing from the Holy Spirit. No, no. Listen. Holy Spirit soothes you when you were saved and you've got the Holy Spirit; you've got God. He didn't come in pieces. You got God. God came into your life. Jesus came into your life. God the Father came into your life. You don't need, listen, it's like a baby. Did you know, this will be a surprise to some of you, did you know that babies never grow any new parts? Did you know that? I mean, they don't get an age and grow a leg, grow an arm. No. Everything they need to be an adult's already there. It just isn't developed yet. Same thing is true spiritually. When you got saved, God didn't miss anything. You didn't miss anything. You just need time to grow and mature. That's why your walking relationship to God is so significant. Stop thinking it's about what you do. God's more concerned with who you are than what you do. And if you are who you ought to be, you will do what you ought to do. So there's this mystery. We're confronted with the mystery. Second thing, we're confused by a paradox. Paul wanted to go to preach in Asia. God said, "No." He wanted to preach in Bithynia. God said, "No." Reason was, God had a better plan. Now when God says, "No", He always has a better plan. He knows what is best for us. We can trust Him. You can't trust me like you trust God because I make a mistake and I'll disappoint you. But you can trust God. Jesus came and He experienced everything in this world that that we experienced in the way of the human flesh, the appetites, the temptations, and yet He was without sin. Nobody else is. Why is it we expect perfection out of people who are imperfect? God doesn't use any of us because of us; it's always in spite of us. But isn't it great? God can do that. God said, "No", to Paul not because Paul didn't have a good plan. He was not negative on Paul's ability to preach the gospel. He just had a better idea. Paul had no idea what lay in Europe. He had no idea where the western world would develop. Paul was not, had no ability, inability to understand that. God did. God knew that He could reach Asia and Bithynia. Let Paul come back and enjoy the victories that were being had in Asia. But His better plan was to bring the gospel to us. Aren't you glad that God had a plan to bring the gospel to us? And Paul is learning a wonderful lesson. He is being obedient and God keeps saying, "No" and so, let me tell you how to make decisions. Doubt never means yes. Never means yes. God never leaves us with doubt. If God is God and He is and if He has a plan for our life and He does, then don't you think He's big enough to tell us what it is? So when we have doubt and let me explain doubt. If you have a lack of confidence in something, if you're not sure about something, if you have some doubt, then it either means no, don't do it, or wait. Doesn't necessarily mean no, but maybe wait a while. For Paul, it was wait a while. He wanted to go to Asia and Bithynia. It took him years to get back into Asia. By the

way, do you know what Asia Minor is? It's accepted as a historical location of the missionary journeys of Paul. And it didn't appear historically until 400 A.D. They spelled out the area of Asia Minor, the twelve churches, seven churches in Revelation in Asia Minor. They were, by the way, converted and they were founded during the two years Paul spoke about when he was in Ephesus. God's plan is just so much better than our plan. So here's the challenge we face. We all think we know what we ought to do. And it may not be bad. May not be something illegal, immoral, or unethical. Maybe a good thing. But God always has a way to accomplish a good thing better than we do.

Now it's easy to identify the problem. It's hard to arrive at a solution. And that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. So we are, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. God Himself, in a way we cannot understand, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, come and dwell in us and our Christian walk is not supposed to be coming to church and talking about God and studying the Bible. It's supposed to be having a relationship with God. How do you think my marriage would have gone if I had said to Carol Ann, "I love you, but I don't want to spend time with you." Oh, I know, you would say, "You wouldn't be married at all, right." That's true. I wouldn't be. When you love someone, you want to spend time with them. Let me just be honest. What God wants you to do is not your problem, if you're walking in the Holy Spirit, He'll tell you what to do. And the absence of His telling you what to do means hold tight. Don't do anything. Don't rush out on your own. And we've got a general down here. No private ever said to the general, I'm going to go fight unless you stop me. No, the private waits for orders. Now listen to me. None of us are generals spiritually. We're all privates. We have no business launching out on our own trying to do something God doesn't want us to do. And the only way we can know the difference is if we have a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. That's the thing that confuses, and He said, "No." But He said, "No" because He had a better plan. Now here's the third thing very quickly. I'm getting close. How much time do I have? Ok. That's eleven minutes? OK. Alright. I think that's two thumbs actually. But never the less. Anyway, the thing that we're impressed with here is the obedience of Paul. God kept telling him "No" and he kept obeying Him. Amazing! He didn't complain. He didn't argue with God. He didn't debate with God. Might have gotten a little close in Troas. But he just obeyed God. You see, our part is to be obedient to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. That's what being a Christian is. Listen, being a Christian is not being a Baptist, not being a Catholic, it's not being anything except we have a relationship with God. Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. God wants you to have a relationship with Him just like you have a relationship with those who are close to you. He wants to have a living vital relationship with you. And we're impressed with that. We're grateful. We're challenged by the fact that Paul's obedient. You see, if you don't do what God has already told you to do, why should He tell you to do anything else? And our problem with Scripture is not that we don't understand some of it, it's that we understand it too well, but we don't want to do it. So our problem is not trying to figure out a lot of things that we shouldn't be concerned about, there are a lot of things that belong to God. And what happens in our lives and where we go belongs to God and we need to be obedient and let God lead us to where He wants us to be.

Alright, last thing, very quickly. We're compelled by God's call. The call's simple. Come and help us. Come and help us. Two things. We need to hear the call. Macedonians said, "Just come and help us." I believe that's the cry of a lost world to us today. There are 243 cities in the world of over one million people. Every one of those cities is crying for help. The violence and

the chaos and the terror that exists in the world, behind it all is a cry for help. Help us. We don't know what to do. We're angry. We're hurt. Help us. That's the cry. And we have the answer. There will never be peace until the Prince of Peace comes to dwell in the hearts of individuals and nations across this world. We need to hear the call. Hear the call that is coming to us. But more than hear, we need to heed it. When God calls us, it's not just about information. He wants us to do something. He wants to use us in a special way. And so we need to heed the call. And he says, Dr. Luke, in verse 10, he says, "We immediately assume that God had called us to evangelize." The Greek word is *euangelion* which means to preach the gospel and it speaks of the content of the gospel and the actual act of preaching it. He says, "That's what they wanted." He wants us to spread the gospel, preach the gospel, evangelize. Macedonia, when they got to Macedonia, all heaven broke loose. I mean it was unbelievable. Lydia and her household were saved. A demon-possessed girl was saved. A jailer and his household were saved. All in this chapter! See, God is at work through His Holy Spirit and there is a cry that He gives to us. It's not a call for us to first to do something. It's a call for us to be with Him. Listen, every day we're told there are a thousand different appeals made to every one of us: radio, television, bus stops, buses, sermons, voices. All trying to get our attention. Let me read to you, my favorite author is Max Lucado. Now if you haven't discovered Max Lucado, you need to go and I'll give you a little hint here. If you want to get really good books at good prices, go on abebooks.com (like Abraham Lincoln) abebooks.com. You can buy the books usually for a dollar or a little over. It costs you four times that to ship it to you, but nevertheless. So in one of his books anyway, this last year, Carol Ann was reading one of the books. She came in and said, "You need to read this." Well, this is what she wanted me to read. I'm going to read you what Max Lucado wrote in a book this last year.

Jim O'Neill, 65-year-old pilot, was 40 minutes into a four-hour solo flight from Glasgow, Scotland to Colchester, England when his vision failed. He initially thought he had been blinded by the sun. But he soon realized it was much worse. "Suddenly I couldn't see the dials in front of me. It was just a blur. I was helpless." It gave a new meaning to the phrase, flying blind. Turns out he'd suffered a stroke. O'Neill groped and found the radio of his Cessna and issued a mayday alert. Paul Gerrard, a Royal Air Force Wing Commander, who had just completed a training sortie nearby, was contacted by air traffic controllers and took off in O'Neill's direction. He found the plane and began talking to the stricken pilot. The commander told O'Neill what to do. His instructions were reassuring and simple. A general right turn, please. Left a bit. Right a bit. He hovered within 500 feet of O'Neill shepherding him to the nearest runway. Upon reaching it, the two began to descend and when asked if he could see the runway below, O'Neill apologized, "No, sir. Negative." O'Neill would have to land the plane by faith and not by sight. He hit the runway but bounced up again. Same thing happened on the second attempt. But on the eighth try, the blinded pilot managed to make a near-perfect landing.

Most of us can empathize with O'Neill. We've been struck, perhaps not with a stroke, but with the demands in life. Not mid-air, maybe mid-career, mid-life, or even our golden years. We've lost sight of any safe landing strip and in desperation, we issued our share of mayday prayers. We know the fear of flying blind. Unlike O'Neill, however, we hear more than one voice. Many voices besiege our cockpit. What if we follow the wrong voice? What if we make the wrong choice? In a relationship with God, He's going to speak to you. He wants to guide you just like Gerrard guided O'Neill to land. But you have to listen and be obedient. And our cockpit is flooded with appeals and opinions. I've always said, if you have two Baptists, you have at least

four opinions. I mean, our cockpit, our mind is besieged with voices, “Do this, do that, don’t do this, don’t do that.” What a tragedy if in the midst of all of that, we don’t hear the voice of the God who dwells within us. What do you do when God says, “No”? You just keep obeying. Hang tight. His plan will be better than any you could devise. And He’ll always prove faithful for whatever journey you’re on because He’ll be with you every step of the way. Would you pray with me?

Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to us. Lord, You saved us by grace, but we serve by grace. We could not get saved without Your Holy Spirit working a miracle in our hearts and we could not serve You without an incredible grace that allows us, who deserve absolutely nothing, to receive everything through Your grace and to have the incredible privilege of serving with You in Your kingdom. God help us always to hear Your voice. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.