

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.

It's a common saying, and you've usually heard it throughout childhood at extremely frustrating times: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again". In my own experience it's usually not received very well. But it does hint at a significant truth of the world. At time, we are going to fail. There are going to be road bumps, and blocks, and things that will force us to reevaluate and rethink and retool some things. And this idea very much permeates the text which we are examining today from the book of Acts.

But first, It's important for us to establish where we are in the process of the spread of the church. Paul had completed his first missionary journey where he had establish Christian churches throughout Asia minor which is modern day turkey. They had had great successes and their fare share of difficulties as well. But then they made their way back to Jerusalem for a very significant meeting. It's called the Jerusalem council. It was at this Council it was established that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to be part of salvation. And in this council the unconditional Gospel had one out over those who thought that there was still something that we as humans had to do according to the law in order to be saved.

It was on the coattails of this council that Paul had decided he was going to go out to spread that unconditional Gospel once again, his second missionary journey. And he has decided that he and Barnabas are going to go out and they are going to visit these churches that they have established. In the hopes of strengthening the believers they're instructing the leaders, and perhaps most likely going to try to win more souls in the area.

It was a great plan. It was a gospel centric plan. It was guided by the right reasons, to strengthen souls with the word of God and also to win more with the preaching about Jesus Christ crucified and the unconditional gospel that has been established at the council. Things really didn't go according to plan did they? As Paul and Barnabas traveled through the regions of Phrygia and Galatea the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching the word there. So they regroup and draft another plan they are going to head north, and they are they will go and spread the word of God. But that plan didn't go according to the way they thought it was going to work either. Because the holy Spirit again would not allow them to continue to travel on their way.

I wonder if Paul was a little confused, perhaps even frustrated on what was happening. I mean they had thought this through. They were guided by what they knew of Jesus Christ crucified and

had made plans to spread it to more people but God is not letting it happen. Not once, but twice mentioned that they were not allowed to go to the places that they wanted. They had the right intentions and for a noble cause, but God didn't let it happen.

It's only after their plans are prevented twice, that Paul receives a vision of what he is to do, and who is to witness to. He sees a vision of a Macedonian man, who is calling, begging for him to come over and help them. And what does Paul do? **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.** They get up immediately to go and share the Gospel, the good news with those people whom God had placed before them.

Paul goes somewhere he had never planned or imagined to. He ends up getting on a boat and setting sail for Macedonia, to Europe, a place that he had not planned on, nor really expected to go at that time in his life.

He had a plan, but God had a better plan. God closed two doors for him and did not tell him why, and he finally opened the one which he was supposed to use. And you know what happened? God blessed it! God presented Paul with his mission and God worked through it to bring new Christians into the invisible church. In Philippi, in Thessalonica, and far beyond into Greece, winning souls with the preaching of the Gospel and establishing churches in an area that he had never anticipated going.

So what does this mean for you and me? This seems to be a very specific instance of an moment in a very specific mans life. I mean I'm not a full time evangelist, I've never been prevented and deliberately told no by the Holy Spirit that I can't go somewhere. I just don't really understand what this has got to with me and my situation at the moment.

Well I think for us, there are a number of lessons that we can draw, but I would like for us to focus on one of them. And it's one that is true regardless of who you are. One of the things that we see clearly here is God's guiding hand through the life of a Christian. In particular his guiding hand the spread of the Gospel.

I think that this is such a beautiful reading that rides on the coattails of Ascension which we celebrated this past Thursday, where Jesus before he ascended to heaven, commanded his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

And this reading really shows us something special and important for us in regards to the great commission and evangelism. Paul had excellent plans on who and where he was going to spread the good news too. But God ends up closing those doors and opening the door to spread the news of Jesus Christ to the Macedonians. And he got up immediately and did it.

The same thing can happen to us in a way. We can make plans of specific people and places to share our faith. With a particular family member, or a certain cultural group, or even in a certain

area of town. And it's not that those things aren't good and commendable, but sometimes God presents people who don't know the Savior to us. People we would have never expected. People who in their own way are crying out, come over and help us!

It could be a coworker whom you have known for years and is dealing with the heartache of a medical diagnosis. It could be that family member who is feels absolutely guilt stricken and hopeless over their actions with no expectation of anyone to forgive them. It could simply be a store clerk, who is worried about the events and craziness of this world.

The Macedonian man symbolizes, not the whole heathen world, but that specific part of it to which God would at any special time send us. They are times and places that come outside of our best plans because God has a better plan in place. God throughout our lives opens doors and closes others for us to spread the news of salvation through his Son Jesus Christ. He doesn't send us visions to direct us but he uses plain providential indications, to bring us into contact with people who are crying out, knowing or unaware, for someone to come and help them. To share the unconditional Gospel, of free and total forgiveness of sins, by grace, through faith, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is such a fitting reading and application for us coming off of our celebration of Ascension on Thursday. Where Jesus Christ blessed his followers and promised to give them the power of the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel all across the globe. And God has promised the same to you and I, he gives us the power of the Holy Spirit though the same unconditional Gospel, to tell to the Macedonian man who is in your corner of the globe.

Dear Christians, the followers of our risen and ascended Lord Jesus. If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again. As we make plans for our lives as witnesses to the salvation won for us by Christ, let us imitate Paul. That when our Lord opens the door to speak, may we be bold like him to get up immediately and go, knowing that our Lord will be there with his power and blessing. Amen.