

**Saturday, November 26, 2022 ▫ Read Acts 16:6–15**

*Questions from the Scripture text: Through what two regions did they go in v6? What didn't they do where? Why? To where do they come in v7? Where do they try to go? Why can't they? Where do they go instead (v8)? What appeared to whom, when, in v9? Who was in this vision? What was he doing? When does v10 take place? Who is now included? Where do they go? What had they concluded (v10)? From where do they sail in v11? To where do they directly come? And where the next day? And where from there (v12)? What is special about that city? What were they doing there? On what day does v13 take place? Where do they go? What customarily happened there? What do they do with whom? Who heard in v14? What was her occupation? What was her spiritual status? How did she come to heed what Paul spoke? Who were baptized upon her heeding the Word (v15)? For what did she beg—what was her privilege as an acknowledged believer? What was the result*

**How did the famous church in Philippi get its start?** Acts 16:6–15 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these ten verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **the Spirit started the church at Philippi thorough several thwartings of the apostle and a humanly inauspicious opportunity.**

**The Spirit is the Lord, and we are the servants.** The Holy Spirit is a person, not a power. We are blessed with His fellowship (2Cor 13:14) and warned against grieving Him (Eph 4:30). As the Father was creating by the Son, the Spirit superintended the creation through the entire process (Gen 1:2). The Lord is the Spirit (2Cor 3:8), and He searches and knows the deep things of God (1Cor 2:10–11).

Throughout the book of Acts, we have been hearing about what the Lord Jesus has continued to do and to teach on earth (cf. 1:1–2), now in His church by His Spirit (cf. 1:4–8). There is a dreadful consequence to a poor doctrine of the Spirit, in which He is viewed as an "it" instead of "Him," or a power instead of a Person: men may think that to have the Spirit is to have a power that is there to serve them rather than to be attended by God, Whom we serve.

But in the first two verses of our passage, the Spirit is clearly in charge. They want to go into Asia (a Roman province in what today is Turkey), but the Holy Spirit forbids them to preach the Word there (v6). They try to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them (v7). He Who hindered them in v6 and v7 is then recognized as "the Lord" who called them to preach the gospel to the Macedonians (v10).

**Providence is personal.** That verse (v10) helps us think about vv6–7. Clearly, the apostle and his team (now including Luke, n.b. "we sought") knew from the Word of Christ that their charge was to preach the gospel (v6, 10, cf. 1:8; Mk 16:16; Col 1:23). The question isn't about whether to preach; that much is decided. The question is where to preach.

But how do they know? It would be a mistake to think that the "forbidden" in v6 (more literally, "hindered") necessarily indicates verbal revelation. Certainly, "permit" in v7 does not. Rather, the indication is that they tried and couldn't. So why does the Scripture say that it was the Spirit Who was doing this? Because the Spirit still rules and overrules all that happens. He is God.

The One by Whom they minister is the One Who rules and overrules in all things, the One Who works all things according to the counsel of His will (cf. Eph 1:11). So, the frustrations of effort in v6 and v7 are not a frustration of mission. They receive the providence as actions of God the Holy Spirit.

This is true for every Christian. Every frustration of effort comes as a personal providence from the same Spirit by Whom we live in the Lord Jesus Christ. He Who is with us as the Helper is the same One Who works in every providence of our lives. Let this remove all frustration from your own spirit, dear Christian. Perhaps it may help you to think of the providence of God as very specifically the Providence of the Spirit.

Life frequently will not go according to your plan, but it will always go according to the plan of God in Whom is your life and help. Some believers are accustomed to saying, "It's a God thing," when something goes surprisingly well. Let them also say, "It's a God thing," when their biblically intended plans are frustrated!

**Providence is puzzling.** What anticipation there must have been! Two different attempts to go preach have been thwarted. Now, Paul has a night vision (v9), they conclude that the Lord is calling them to preach the gospel in Macedonia. So, "immediately," they seek to go (v10). There's no time to stop in Samothrace or Neapolis (v11). It was a Macedonian in the dream, and to the first city of Macedonia they press on (v12). They arrive in the Roman soldier retirement colony, are there for several days, and finally it's the Sabbath (probably not the Lord's Day, since it doesn't say "first day Sabbath" as in places where English translations often say "first day of the week").

But there's a problem. There's no synagogue. Even in such a big city, there either aren't the twelve men required to form a synagogue, or they don't have enough liberty or influence to obtain a building. The Spirit's providence is often puzzling.

They do learn that outside the city, by the river, there are women who meet to pray (v13). But the woman whose heart the Lord opens to heed the things spoken by Paul apparently isn't even married, since she is over her own household (v14). Her household is there with her, to be baptized when she believes, but there is no mention of a husband, who may have died or abandoned them. The first building block of the church in Philippi is a husbandless/fatherless household? The Spirit's providence is often puzzling!

This reminds us of the gospel's first incursion into Samaria in John 4. A woman, by a well, who has no husband, and becomes the initial believer of an avalanche of converts. Praise God for the Spirit's puzzling providence!

**Providence is powerful.** This last—the Lord opening Lydia's heart—shows us how powerful is the God of providence. He has the power to open closed hearts. It's instructive to see what had to be done for Lydia to heed the things spoken by Paul. We are such slaves to our sin that in order to respond to the Word we need our hearts opened.

Even this woman who worshiped God in a general way could not be brought to saving faith in the Lord Jesus apart from the renewing grace of the Spirit. But praise be to God, He knows whom He will save, and He works in almighty power to save them. In His common, restraining grace He had brought this woman to a place where she groped after God, but not because this is some sort of half salvation. Rather, this became the means by which she was there to hear the gospel preached. And He Who would oversee her life to bring her to this day, to hear this gospel, now exerted His almighty power to open her heart. How powerful is the providence of God!

It is this powerful providence that she laid hold of as she brought her household for baptism in v15. He had saved her and made her His own eternally. And in so doing, He had added her household to the visible church of Christ on earth. As her household receives the mark of being set apart into the church, Lydia would lay hold of the hope that He Who had done all of this for them would open each of their hearts as He had hers. As she leads her household in worship, now, she will be doing so in confidence and eager desire, as one who knows God to be the Opener of hearts.

How do you tend to think of the Holy Spirit? How do you tend to think of the providence of God? If you are saved, how did that happen? If you are to be saved, how will that happen? What hope does this give you for others? How does God's providence to covenant children give you more hope for them?

*Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for reminding us that Your personally rule and overrule all things out of personal love for us. Grant that we would trust Your wisdom in everything that happens. We praise You for the mercy and power in which You brought us to faith. And we trust in You to work by that same power in that same mercy in order to bring our dear ones to faith as well. Be glorified forever for Your marvelous salvation, we ask, in Jesus's Name, AMEN!*

Suggested songs: ARP34C "O Sons and Daughters Come" or TPH256 "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

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Acts chapter. 16 verses 6 through 15. These are God's words. Now, when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they had come to Mizia, they Tried to go into Bithynia. But the spirit did not permit them.

So, passing by Missia. They came down to Troaas and a vision appeared to pull in the night. A man of Macedonia, stood and depleted with them saying. Come over to Macedonia and help us. Now, after he had seen the vision immediately, we sought to go to Macedonia concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Therefore sailing from Troas. We ran a straight course to some authors. And the next day, came to Minneapolis. And from there, to fill up high, which is the foremost city. Of that. Part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day, we went out of the city to the Riverside.

Where prayer was customarily made. And we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of the Atira who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart. To heed the things spoken by Paul.

And when she and her household her baptized she begged us saying If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house. And stay. And so, she persuaded us. So far the reading of God's inspired and generant work.

Let's passage teaches us a lot about the Providence of God. We often and the Christian life want to do something, we know we're called to do it generally but some specific actions, some specific active Obedience to the general principles of God. We try to do and we're frustrated. Not meaning.

We have an emotionally incorrect response, but he frustrates the attempt. He blocks us. He prevents us from doing it. We do also sinfully have Wrong. Emotional responses. And so it's good for us to see. That even the apostle who was called to preach to the Gentiles as he tries to go to various Gentiles to preach is frustrated They're not meaning a wrong devotional response but in dirty is In verse 6, forbidden and in verse 7, not permitted.

And it's the Holy Spirit, specifically who has said to do this. This is important because the Holy Spirit is the one who is supposed to be attending the Apostles and helping them, taking them going with them and going before them as they preach, the gospel to all the nations.

The Holy Spirit was the one, the helper who was going to come whom the Lord. Jesus was going to pour out that the Other 11 weren't even allowed to start their ministry. Until the Lord had done. So at the beginning of this book, And so it's helpful to us that this same spirit is carrying Paul, sorry carrying Luke along as he writes for us.

This book of Acts and specifically singles himself out then by Luke's Penn. As the one who is. Forbidding and not permitting. The Apostle to go to various Gentiles to preach the gospel to them. I'm afraid that in our age of Poor doctrine of God and poor doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

That it's necessary for us to notice at this point that the Holy Spirit is a person. He's a he not a net. He's a person. Not a power. And he is the one. Who first forbids and then does not permit and therefore he is the Lord. In verse 10, who has called, Paul, and Timothy.

And Silas. And now Luke. To go preach the gospel. To the Macedonians Philippi being the first, And great city. In the Province of Macedonia. Luke, of course. Probably takes his humility cue from the Holy Spirit himself. The Holy Spirit as a as it were always. As he has from all eternity.

In adoration of the Father and of the Son. Signing the light to making the focus on the other two persons of the Godhead. And, The only way we know that Luke has even joined the party there. As. That he starts saying. We sought to go to Macedonia, after Lord, had called us to preach the gospel to them in verse 10.

Otherwise, we wouldn't even know. When Timothy was picked up, he gave us lots of good words about Timothy being well, spoken of and Paul Desiring for him to come along the same could have been said about Luke but it wasn't said about Luke. Why Humility. The Holy Spirit carrying him along.

And, And forming in Luke, that character that comes also from Christ, even as each person of the Godhead loves to display and bring glory to the other persons of the Godhead. So also, we learn something of humility. And seek that the Lord would make us like the Sun who humbled himself to take the form of a bond slave and was found in appearance as a man and went And suffered death, even the death of the cross.

To have character that is like unto the spirit who loves to display the glory of the Father, and the glory of the Sun, that we would be those who delight for the display of God's glory, and especially the display of God's glory. And others. So, the spirit is a person and he is The most lovely.

Of persons together with the father. And with the Sun, And so the first thing we learn about God's providence in this passage, is that Providence is personal. If you know that it's the Holy Spirit to loves the Father and the Son and loves you for the sake of the Father, and the

Son, who is ruling and overruling all things in God's providence, Suddenly frustrations are not frustrating.

For it, is he who is applying Christ to you. That Christ may be glorified in you and the Father glorified in the Son and you in his church, he's the one. Who hindered you from that thing that you wanted to do? That would have been a good thing according to the Bible.

Would it not have been a good thing for the apostle to go? And Preach. In Asia Minor or what? We now called turkey, would it not have been a good thing for the apostle to go preach, the gospel in Bethany, And yet, since it's God, the Holy Spirit to Rules and overalls all things.

Even what men do? We don't know the mechanism by which they were forbidden or not permitted. We're so infatuated with the spectacular that I'm afraid we come to. A passage like this. And we think that verse 6 and verse 7 are Talking about verbal communication. That's probably not the case in verse 6, the word for forbidden is more prevented or hindered.

It could be Um, verbal. Prevention. The word for permission in verse 7 were translated not permitting here. Is one that is probably not verbal at all. It is. Allowing enabling or not. What's good? Certainly be the Actions of men or logistical difficulties or whatever it is. One of the reasons.

Sometimes on the Bible, doesn't give us a specific. So that we may see that it applies more generally, To Paul and Silas. And Timothy and Luke, it didn't really matter. Why? They weren't allowed to go into that place. As the more important question was, who was it? That wasn't allowing them.

Just like with Joseph, it didn't. Really matter. As much what the human instruments were who were doing him evil. So long as he knew that it was the Lord who was doing good even through what his brothers intended for evil Providence is personal. And so with your health or so with your job or so with your school or so with your marriage or so with how things go with the nation or the economy.

Providence as personal and the Holy Spirit who is ruling and overruling the providence as he has ever since there was such a thing as providence. What was the first moment of Providence? We see in the whole Bible, God, created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void.

And the spirit was hovering over the waters. Using. The language of a mother bird hovering over her chicks. Actually, we get that language from, that's always beard. Is the first of course. So, from the first moment, there was such a thing as Providence it was, especially the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead who has been highlighted to us, as Ruling and overruling everything that happens.

And every place all the time, And so the one who is applying Christ to me, the one who gave me life in the first place as we're about to see with Lydia, he's the one. In whose providence? Everything comes into my life. We mustn't think of him as any less than the father and the son.

It's proper to talk about the providence of the Father. It's profit to talk about the providence of the Lord Jesus. But as proper and perhaps in this case, especially helpful to us, To talk about the Providence of the Holy Spirit. That the one who has brought us to Christ and it's perfecting us in Christ.

Is the one. In his providence, everything comes Providence. Is. Personal. We'll needless to say. Providence is also puzzling. One thing Paul could be certain of is that he was supposed to preach the gospel to Gentiles. If there was anything that he could be certain of, it was the thing that Jesus had personally told him.

And had been prophesied about him. The reason that he was redeemed from being a murderer of the church to especially glorify Christ, that the chief of sinners became the chief of Apostles to the Gentiles. The chief gospel evangelist Chief of Evangelists, sorry, the apostle to the Gentiles And so, it's puzzling to us.

It's not puzzling to God. And, Taught a good lesson when we were puzzled by God's providence, the very important lesson, It's the first lesson that anyone needs to learn Sophia, right? First lesson you are not God. There is a God and you are not. He The first lesson. So when we learn to honor, Father and Mother We're learning that.

The one true, God is the one who rules all things, and things go according to His will and not according to mine and My first couple thousand lessons in his will are that he has given me a father and a mother. Who are to take care of me through whom.

He loves me and to trains me. And for believing children in particular in whom he has set me apart to himself as holy and part of his church given me, the means of grace. Set his gospel. Before me, all those wonderful things. That he has done. He is God and his Providence is good and often what I want is different than what he has welf.

And in those cases, honor, your father and mother and children obey your parents in the Lord. First great lesson. God is God and we are not Well. Surprise. You may be. 46 or 96 and still learning that lesson. Providence is puzzling. We have something that we know from the Bible even as a right and good and great thing to do The sort of thing that when we are confessing our sin before.

God we are saying oh Lord. I should have done more of that but I indulge myself instead. And then we come to do that and God blocks us. In his providence and we learn again, the lesson. God is God. And we are not. And so it's not just the forbidding and the not permitting in verse 7, when they When they finally do respond to the vision by concluding.

That the Lord had called them to preach this gospel to them Again. It's a, it's a dream that apparently. The four of them together and discussion of the dream conclude that this is what God wants them to do and it turns out to be true So, they'd book passage on the ship, and they go to some arthrus and Then the next they get off the ship and the next day, they're in the apples.

And from there on to Philippi, Everything suddenly is going swimmingly, after all of the hindrances. And then they get to Philippi. It's a great big city. It's a Roman colony which means mostly retired soldiers. There Roman had. Tons of soldiers ahead and retire somewhere. And they look for the synagogue.

There's no synagogue. What that almost certainly means is there are less than 12 believing Jews. In the entire city. In fact. When the Sabbath day comes and this isn't the Lord's because it doesn't say first day Sabbath, which in many of our English translations is usually translated first day of the week.

When the sixth day of the week comes, and they want to find Jews who are going to have. A background in Moses. Remember we've already heard at the Council. Moses has in every city. Moses is read every Sabbath. And they. They can't find one on the Sabbath day. They go out outside of the city by the river.

Middle of nowhere. Gentiles only. And, Buy some water. And will reminded that. God's providence is often. Puzzling is very puzzling. In the analogous case, in John chapter 4, When Jesus said he had to go, it was necessary. It says the scripture that he had to go through some area to get to Jerusalem, which isn't true.

But in the eyes of men, because the Jews were only too happy to go round some area. But for Jesus, it was necessary because he had food that has disciples didn't know of he had work to do. There was a woman who didn't have a husband that was going to be by a well, And he was going to speak to her.

And her heart was going to be opened to heed the things that he said. And in that city, there would end up being a thriving church that had started with that one. Does that sound familiar? Here, the Apostle finds no synagogue, no faith. He's in Non-Jewish territory goes outside the city to a water source.

And who are there? Praying, it's the place where prayer is customarily. Made The only place where God has called upon and even that not from necessarily regenerate hearts. As we learn in. Verse 14 because her heart doesn't opened until then, There's a handful of women. Lydia in particular, we don't even know her name.

Just like we don't know the name of the woman at the well, you said, what do you mean? You don't know her name? It says Lydia right there. Yeah, it explains. That she's a seller of purple from a city of Theaterra, Theatero was A city in. In a province or a region there that the Romans had named Lydia.

So, Lydia here means the Lydian woman. The woman from Lydia. Who was from the region of Lydia and the city of Theaterra and sold purple. She's nameless woman. She doesn't have a husband. Her household is there. And yet her husband is not there. How do we know her household is there because The Lord opens her heart to heed the things, spoken by Paul and she believes, and then she in her household are baptized, She's the head of this household.

Perhaps, the husband has died or Abandoned them, Perhaps her husband was a soldier. And she was granted. To stay in the retirement colony. When he lost his life, we don't know. We don't know her name, we don't know her husband's name. We do know that Gordon has mercy had given her some ability to sustain her family selling.

Selling purple was. Lucrative, It was. There's thousands and thousands of mollusks to produce a gram of the purple dye. But the Lord and his providence at especially, Arranged. That she would live in Philippi. And that she would be at the river on the day. When the gospel. Came. Providence is puzzing this great thriving church.

Is going to be started from these most unlikely of circumstances. And so when we are hindered or when the it's a day of small things, we should heat the script or not to despise The day of small things. We should remember that. The Lord Jesus is building his church by His Spirit.

That often the Lord has intentionally used small things. Younger brothers, and Covenant lines that can't seem to get past the number two. For multiple generations. And so forth. The Lord's provenance is puzzling. But in the last place, then of course, the Lord's by the Providence is powerful. The Lord who had arranged all these things.

And Lydia's life had done. So because he was Planning to save her from before the world began. He and his Almighty power had not only orchestrated, the circumstances of her life that got her to that point where in a male-dominated society, she is leading a household by herself. And that's not a glamorous thing.

We may esteem her highly for what the Lord was doing through her. We may esteem, highly the Lord's restraining grace holding back her atheism. So that she is a God fear or god worshiper. Not from the heart, not from renewing grace as of yet. But she's out there at the river groping after God just as In another chapter's timer.

So we'll see an altar to an unknown God in Athens. Because they're all these other gods that are worshiped and trusted and they are not gods.

Their figments of men's imagination and There. They wouldn't even be good men. If they were men. And yet there must be a God who made all of this and there must be a God who can from whom we live and move and have our being.

There must be a God who can help us And so, there's this. This altar in Athens. To an unknown. God. As those who God restraining their flesh. By his restraining grace, even as he does, for every wicked person in this world, They are wicked to the core of who they are, but God's restraining grace keeps them from expressing the wickedness, fully and even enables them to do things that outwardly are commendable and admirable.

And so we may esteem what God has done in Lydia's life, that she is here groping after God. But we are to see is not the goodness of a woman who who's Depravity is being restrained by grace but the goodness and power of the God who is restraining in this case.

Because he's about to give her renewing grace. Is about to bring. The Word of Christ. That hearing and give her that hearing. Through which faith comes. The Lord opened her heart. To heed the things. Spoken by Paul. We are such slaves for our sin to our sin that even in order to respond to the word, We need our hearts.

Opened. She was brought to saving faith in the Lord Jesus. By God, opening her heart. And when he opens her heart, what does he show her? He shows her that he's the one. Who has ruled and overruled. All things not only for her, but for her household. And just as he brought her to the place where she would hear his word, And where he would open her heart.

He's now brought her household by this roundabout way. However, they ended up In that condition. He's brought her household into the church. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so not just she who has believed. Is baptized. But her whole house with her. And she concludes. She's concluded that her household is now devoted unto Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ.

And this baptism would come and hope. Her household. Now are going to be ones, who don't just go out to the river to pray and grow up grope after A god whom they don't know or whom they have an inkling, the Jews probably know. They are going to grout, go out and pray, knowing that God has come And the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood has been shed for sinners and washes them clean, and whose spirit, He has poured out to bring them into faith to faith in Jesus Christ, so that they can be washed clean.

And that he has commanded. That her household as part of the church would be baptized. So, as now day by day, They have the means of grace in the home recounting from Christ's scriptures about Christ's salvation and praying to God through Jesus Christ and praying to Christ Himself. And coming week by week.

To the Apostle. Or with the Apostles. That you would do. So in hope that God who brought them all into the household, Didn't do so for no reason. But did so in a similar arrangement of Providence? As he had deranged her life To save her. And every believer has, That story of how God's providence brought them to the place where they could hear.

And how God was the one who opened their hearts so that they would heed the things that were spoken. And so, When she has believed her whole household. Is baptized and that means not only that they have been set apart to God as holy but that they have been enlisted as servants.

And what's the first thing that she thinks she can do? Well. Pollen company don't have a place to stay. There isn't a synagogue. There aren't believing Jewish men. Apparently, There aren't, there isn't even a competing. Household, where the head of the household has believed. As far as we know, there's a one convert in Philippi.

That means she gets to host. The apostle. And the prophets. And the evangelists. Who have come to her city. She has been enlisted into the service. Of the Lord Jesus. What a difference? A day makes in the power of God's providence. Who powerfully rules an overrules every day of our lives.

But sometimes breaks into Our life on one particular day. How different when she went to bed that night? With Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke. Bunked somewhere on her property. And ready to have the apostle lead her household in family worship through. Jesus Christ at bedtime And then wake up the next morning.

And realize it's true and it's all real. And the apostle is going to lead her family and family worship that morning through Jesus Christ. And, Her home was not going to be the home base. For the evangelism. Of the city of Philippi. How great is the power? Of God's providence.

So, his providence is Personal. And puzzling. And powerful. Prescott. Let's pray.

Our father and heaven. We thank you and praise you. For your goodness to us. Praise you for your wisdom. Which is so far above ours. Your ways are not our ways. Your thoughts are not our thoughts. And we praise you that in your goodness and in your wisdom, you exercise Almighty power To coordinate our lives.

That we would hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. And to open our hearts that we would heed, The things that we hear. So we pray for your spirits work that. He would keep making us to heed. What we hear from your word particularly, This portion that we have just heard.

Grant to us to live with the joy and confidence of those. Who know that even all The hindering providence in our lives. Comes from your redeeming hand. For, we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.