

Looking Ahead Through The Rearview Mirror Embracing God's Will



Pastor Dave Spate

November 22, 2009

(slide 1)When we entered the town of Yalvac in Turkey (the biblical Pisidian Antioch) we came across this magnificent aqueduct which brought up to 660,000 gallons of water a day down from the mountains 11 km away at consistent 2.6 % grade into the city and the Roman baths. (slide 2)When you consider that this aqueduct was built in the 1st century and has lasted to this day it is no wonder that we wanted to stop and look at it. (slide 3)Here is what is amazing, if you continue down the road which runs beside it, you will find that 500 meters farther down the road is the town dump. The folks of this town have gotten so used to seeing this marvel of engineering that drips with historic importance, that they placed their dump right beside it. Somehow they missed the significance of what was right in front of them. I wanted to mention this because today I want us to look at how we can find, live in, and follow God's will in our lives. And I believe that often we are like the folks of Yalvac, for God places ways to live in his will and ways to know his will for our lives and we can miss them so easily. I believe that God wants to be involved in our lives, for Matt. 28:20 says *"surely I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth"*. Ps. 37:23 takes it even a step farther when it says *"the STEPS of a godly man are ordered by God"* (and I should add that I believe the STOPS of a godly person is also ordered by God). But the problem is that all of us at times struggle with how to know what we are supposed to do concerning some decision we have to make or where we are supposed to go or how to make sure that we are going where we need to be going. As we have been studying Paul's life I think that he has a lot to teach us concerning how to find God's will for our lives. Because Paul is constantly needing to find where God is directing him to go next I think we can see some important patterns of how to stay in the midst of God's will for our lives. So Turn to Acts 16:

Plan to the best of your Ability

From last week you will remember that after their first missionary Journey the issue around circumcising gentile Christians was dealt with, and important decisions were made. Then Paul and Barnabas headed back to Antioch. In Acts 15:36 we read that Paul got itchy feet and wanted to head out on his 2nd missionary journey. There is however 1 subtle difference between this trip and the last one. You will remember that in Acts 13:2 that it says that their last missionary endeavor came out of a prayer

meeting where *'as they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set aside for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'*. I love those kind of situations where I know without a shadow of a doubt that what I am about to do as God directed, and I have no question that it is a God thing. However, if you look at the situation here in Acts 15:36 we find that this time there is no direct call/ no prophet word/ no Charismatic prophecy. Instead, much like what happens in many missionaries' lives, furlough is over and it is time to go back to the mission field.

It is important to begin here, for many people would like you to believe that when it comes to understanding God's will for your life it should be as clear to you, as the nose on your face. Look at this passage, here is the question, *'did they begin the journey by a specific mandate from God?'* The answer is: *we have no evidence of that*. I am not saying they were out of God's will. What I am saying is that in the absence of a Specific Directive from God, they operated out of God's General Direction for their lives. In other words, they knew that Jesus said *'go into all the world and make disciples'*, and they had from Acts 13 an existing call from their local church to be missionaries. So in the absence of a specific call with precise directions given they opted to follow what they knew was *God's general will* for their lives expecting that as they did that, that *if he wanted to*, God could fine tune the specifics of their journey. I think this is very important because I have seen people sitting/ doing nothing and sounding very spiritual when they say *I will do nothing until I know exactly what God wants me to do*. And so they spend their life accomplishing nothing. When all that time they could easily have been involved in what they know is God's general will for their lives. My dad used to always say *'just like it is easier to steer a moving car than one that is parked, it is easier for God to direct a Christian who is already actively involved in God's work'*. As we will see *as they walked God directed their steps*. That goes back to what Ps. 37:23 says, *'The steps of a good man ordered by God...'*. So while you are wondering/waiting for what God's specific will is for your life, keep doing what you know God already has asked you to do and I think you will find it will be easier for God to breath the specifics into your walk with him.

➤ **Paul's Clear Strategy:** I want you to also see that as Paul set out on this journey he didn't just head out with no forethought, instead Paul always planned his work and

then worked his plan. If you study the book of Acts you will see that Paul's strategy is very clear.

i) He always headed to centers of Population, specifically to larger centers around the Mediterranean so that as people become Christ followers their faith could easily spread to smaller cities around them.

ii) He first went to the synagogues using his Jewish connections and Old Testament understanding to speak about Jesus their Messiah. Second, he spoke to the God fearers who wanted to follow God, but this circumcision thing seemed a little to painful to undergo. And then his third step was to preach to the Gentiles in the cities he was in.

iii) He never worked alone. He always had 2 or 3 other young pastor's in training traveling with him who could pastor any churches they would plant. (Titus, Timothy – II Tim. 4:9-12).

➤ **Your Plan** - So as we begin today, understand that if you aren't sure about some of the specifics of what you are called to do, realize that there is still so much about how to daily live your life as a believer in a general way that you can follow. Stay active in what you feel are the doors God has opened for you. As you do that don't discount those areas that you feel passionate about, where your personality seems to fit and where your heart is being tugged. That is what Paul did. And where possible do as much planning as you can on the way.

III: Let me give you an example. A few Sundays ago we set aside an afternoon to discuss many of your hopes and dreams in the area of missions. During that time one of our men shared an idea that he had been praying about concerning raising money for some specific missions. The Elders felt that idea had merit so the other night he present the idea and some well thought out strategies about how this could happen. Hopefully this next week the Elders and some key mission folk are going to get together and pray over this idea and these strategies to see what God wants us to do. We aren't exactly sure what God's will is concerning this right now, but we know generally what His will is. We now have a suggested strategy so we will keep following this idea until God says yes, no, or wait a while. And so, like in the moving car analogy, we are moving in a general way, expecting God to direct. That same thing is possible in all of our lives.

Be open when God says NO

(slide 4) In Acts 16 Paul and Silas head north from Antioch to the Galatia region to towns like Derbe and Lystra. I believe that Paul wanted to head toward Ephesus (the NY of the day) believing that this city could be a key to reaching all of Asia for God. But look what happened. (Slide 5)

Plan A

Acts 16:6

The Holy Spirit of God, through a prophet word or maybe even something like a sickness closed the door to travel the way Paul had been planning. Sometimes God closes doors by a sickness, a job transfer, a money situation, the needs of your children or your spouse. Don't miss that God can use circumstances to direct us.

Plan B

Acts 16:7

The Spirit of Jesus, the way that is worded sounds to me like Paul had a dream in which he felt Jesus was telling him to stop traveling in the direction he was going.

➤ **What I have found is that No's often come in:**

- a. Closed Doors

- b. Shut Windows

- c. Holy Spirit Nudges

➤ **Handling the No's**

One of the problems that I have seen in following God's will is that once we have a plan, once we are heading out like Paul with an idea that we feel passionate about, it is easy to want to keep going even when God closes a door or seems to be saying no. We just close our eyes to what God seems to be saying, put our head down and keep on going. Thankfully that is not what Paul did. So what do you do when you are heading in one direction and God seems to be saying NO?

- a. **Stop** - Remind yourself that either you obey God or you will be left behind.

b. **Deal with the Frustration** - How? Remember that you and I observe what is going on around us, but God has a higher view. Remember God sees everything, for while we can only see yesterday, he can see the future. Remember God sees all things, we don't. Remember God loves us, so we can trust him.

c. **Remind yourself that God has a Plan**

I Peter 1:1,2 Do you see that Asia and Bithynia in the future were evangelized by Peter. Here is what Paul didn't know, God was going to send Paul west toward Macedonia, then Greece and eventually Rome. For God was planning to send Peter North into the Galatia area. And Thomas was going to be taking the gospel farther East to India. God had a plan, a strategy, and part of that strategy was that Paul had to turn west in order to do his part in global evangelism. We need to remember that even when it feels like God doesn't know what He is doing, he does have a plan. I promise you that in all of our lives when the NO's come we will need to hang on to the fact that God has a higher plan, and at times we will have to hang onto that will all our strength.

Be open to God's yes

Acts 16:9-11

God did not leave Paul high and dry (Acts 16:9-11). You see the key to Paul receiving his new marching orders was a willingness to say, *'Lord I had a plan, it is obvious that your answer is no, so I will decide to trust you and I will wait for your leading concerning what I need'*. And soon after that Paul had the kind of dream that seemed to have God all over it and he was given a understanding of God's will for his life.

Ill: Let me give you an example of how this can work. During my time at Bible School when ever I went past First Baptist Church in Moose Jaw for some reason I felt I would someday serve at that Church. I had never been in the church, they had never had a Youth Pastor before. I even told my roommate that is where I would end up pasturing. Fast forward 3 years and I hear they are going to hire a Youth Pastor, so I applied even though I had ½ year left in my degree. Three weeks later my roommate phones me to tell me that he was short listed for the job (not me) and he knew I had always thought I would pastor there, so he graciously asked for my permission to try out for the job. I felt I needed to say yes and they asked him to take the job. Man that was hard, I had a plan I felt it was right, I had to allow God's no to happen. A week later he phoned to say that

because of some theological issues he had turned them down. And guess who the next on the list was? We had 3 glorious years pasturing there. Don't forget that unless we listen when God says No we won't be free to follow where and when he says Yes.

Take time to Make God's Plan Your Plan

Have you ever come across a verse that had something hidden inside of it that blew you away? Turn to Acts 20:13,14 I have read this verse many times and simply skipped over the word Assos (slide 6) and kept reading. I looked it up in commentaries and no one even mentioned it. Let me tell you what is going on here. This happens in AD 57, Paul is returning from his 3rd missionary journey and through some prophetic words he realizes that in his near future probably was imprisonment and death in Rome. Now despite the fact that Paul is tough, after being on the road for the past 18 years preaching, I think knowing that his freedom will be exchanged for a cell which will lead to death is hard to not only get your head around, but hard to embrace. So at Troas he gets off of the boat which he shared with a number of traveling companions and it says he walked to Assos. No big deal right? Well it meant he had to walk through fairly mountainous country (slides 7-9) a distance of 61 km, that is a long walk (slide 11). Why? I believe that it was because he needed some time alone, away from his traveling companions. So he could get by himself and get quiet enough to process what God wanted him to do. So he could decide to make it his own. It was a place (Slide 12) where he could choose which road he would walk. Where he could choose to make God's will his will. And once he did that he walked down from the Roman fortification which surround Assos (slide 10,13,14) to the harbour, re-joined his friends, got on the boat and headed to Jerusalem and his future.

I have found that there have been times when I have been looking for what God wants me to do next, OR in order to 'stay' in God's will I need to find a place where it is quiet enough, where I am alone enough, where I stop long enough to hear his whisper and then choose to follow what God wants for my life. You see I can only have a mystical union with God if I am willing to spend time waiting for him to speak. There will be those times, actually we need to set aside times every day, and periodically in our lives to stop, walk, listen, and decide to follow if we truly want to experience God's will.

Stay with the Plan

Once you know what God wants you to do stay with it. For only then can you live with the wind from the Holy Spirit blowing you on.

In Acts 21:11, someone comes and Paul wraps a belt around him and says I had a prophetic word about you being in prison if you go to Jerusalem. So please don't go there. It was very caring thing to do, but the prophet missed the point. Paul had been for his walk at Assos and he had decided to live within God's will for his life. As we will find out as we look at the "rest of the story" as Paul is obedient to God, he has an impact on government official's in Jerusalem/ Caesarea/ Rome. He will experience miracles on the ocean, plant a church in Rome and witness to the Caesar himself. And so he stays within what he knows is God's will for his life.

III: Back in the 13th century St. Richard of Chichester prayed: "Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits and blessings which Thou has borne for me. O most merciful Friend, Brother, and Redeemer: may I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly." In the latter part of the 20th century part of that prayer was set to music in Godspell's song, "Day by Day." "Day by day, day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray: To see Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly, Day by day, by day, by day

What have we said today? First, when it comes to living within God's will don't forget that all of us need to be living in the middle of God's general will for our lives, for as we do, it is easier for God to direct us. Second, when God chooses to use different means to say NO in our lives we need to trust him, for He has a higher view of things. Third, as He let's us know what his will is, we need to make it our own. And then fourthly, we need to live within the will for it will lead to adventures which are wonderful. But really what it boils down to is, each day as we pray we need to ask that we would see God more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly. For if we live close to God then His will will unfold exactly as we need it in our lives.

For information about Brentview Baptist Church and its ministries, please contact the church office at:
--

3512 Charleswood Dr NW, Calgary, AB T2L 2C3
Phone: 403-284-4691 Fax: 403-284-0132 email: mail@brentviewbaptist.com
Website: www.brentviewbaptist.com