

Sermon Title: **When God Says No**

Series: Acts- *The Living Tabernacle Jesus is Building*

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Text: Acts 16:1-10

## **Introduction**

*“By your endurance you will gain your life.” -Luke 21:19*

Last week we took a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Endurance** here is a very rich word embodying an **upward**, **consistent**, **contagious**, and **outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought into. This week, our endurance faces another challenge.

*What happens when God says no?* Who we are when God says *yes* is just a part of our identity in Christ that the world sees. Who we are when God says *no* also speaks into who we are in Him, and arguably in greater witness and clarity. Disappointment has been fuel for many to pull their hands out of Christ’s and turn back to swimming downstream with the rest of the world. How can we navigate disappointment and stay the course in Jesus with Kingdom Endurance?

### **I. How Churches Are Strengthened, and Increase Comes (Acts 16:1-5)**

*Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.*

**-Acts 16:1-5**

**Strengthened** here means to make solid, firm, or a maturing strength. This is the goal for every church. However, we must remember that a church is made up of individual followers of Jesus - men and women striving to “come, and follow Me” at His daily invitation. The local church is then a witness to who we both individually and collectively are in Jesus Christ.

We see this dual reality, *individually and collectively strong in Christ*, in this young man named Timothy.

**First**, I want to look at the local church, a collection of believers growing in strength in Christ.

Paul returns to the area of Galatia with Silas to share the results of the Jerusalem Council, that in Christ both Jews and Gentiles are one through faith. The Kingdom God is building, this living Tabernacle, is solely entered by one door- the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. This was incredibly good news, affirming all that the Spirit was doing in the lives of the Galatian believers. Paul would later write to them,

*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. **-Galatians 3:25-29***

To further help illustrate this message, Paul chooses Timothy to accompany him alongside Silas. This was in the same manner Christ called and poured into His Disciples. Here we see the Apostle investing in tomorrow through these and many other young men. Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Luke notes who himself is also a Greek.

The picture of Timothy as one person made up of both Jewish and Gentile heritage is a picture of the Church being inclusive of both Jew and Gentile. Aside from some characteristics common to one's heritage, it would be impossible to divide the Jewish and Gentile DNA of this young man. As a parent it is so much fun to see both myself and my wife in our children- from their appearance to their mannerisms, there is much similarity. And there is much that is different and unique to who they are. Timothy is a beautiful illustration of what God's Kingdom is with Christ as our Head.

*But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." **-Matthew 19:14***

While we see the impact Paul's decision of Timothy had, was this the only reason Paul chose to invest in Timothy? *This brings us to our second point.*

**Second**, let's look at believers being strong in the Lord individually.

Luke writes that Timothy was **well spoken of by the brothers** (believers and followers of Jesus) in both Lystra and Iconium. You'll remember from Paul's first Missionary Journey that these areas were difficult for the early days of the Gospel's witness. Lystra would be the place Paul was stoned and drug outside of the city, left for dead. God had other plans, and when the believers gathered around Paul, arguably praying over him, Jesus healed, and Paul got up and resumed mission.

*But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. -Acts 14:20*

Paul took many hits; fell to the mat many times. Yet, in Christ strength he kept getting up again until the Kingdom Bell rang and it was his time to go home.

That's who Paul was *individually*. This identity is soon to overflow into Timothy. As this representation would flavor Paul's witness, the church would be known to mirror the same strength Paul experienced with Christ! *Be careful who you walk alongside; who they are in Christ, or lack thereof, may be a factor in who you develop into!*

This ***well spoken of***, in the Greek, is the word *martyreo*, where we get our term *martyr* from. It means to bear witness of, or to affirm with our lives what was believed and experienced. In other words, *our entire lives bear the witness of how everything changed because of Jesus*. Timothy encountered Jesus in such a way everyone was talking about it!

*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. -Proverbs 22:1*

As believers, how is our reputation? In our *families*, in our *jobs*, in *circles* outside of the church? Like Paul, I look to who people are outside of this environment when I pursue investing to develop leadership potential. Bearing witness of Jesus with other believers is one piece; the other piece is bearing witness of Jesus with those not following or knowing Jesus. Both senses to this witness are embodied in the term, ***well-spoken of***.

Again, this ties in so much with our understanding of endurance from last week. Paul builds on this with Timothy in his letter to him. I want to look at portions of what he wrote in 2 Timothy 1. Note the journey from the first day we follow Jesus, to every day after answering His call to , *Come, and follow me*.

*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. -2 Timothy 1:5-7*

***Sincere faith*** means the unmasked genuine encounter with Jesus. Paul's encouragement to Timothy and us today is to "kindle up, inflame one's mind, renew continually our zeal and strength." I imagine a fireplace. At times when the flame goes down too low, when we add logs, we need to also add kindle and blow / cultivate the existing heat in order to ignite the new log. That is what is embodied in this encouragement from Paul for our faith.

*Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. -2 Timothy 1:13-14*

**Follow the pattern** means to possess as one's property or richest treasure. Of what value is God's Word to us? The answer is measured by how much time we spend reading, pursuing with fasting and prayer His voice and direction. **Guard the good deposit** means to see God's Word as our treasure in this life from the life to come.

*You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. **-2 Timothy 1:15-18***

And here is the heart of the Apostle's plea. To finish the race; to continue walking with Jesus all the way through this world to that which is to come. There will be times the difference Jesus makes has little presence or value in this life; but please hear me. Following Jesus is to hear the eternal sound of worship and celebration that will one day be ours in Him. Forever.

When we pursue this individually, this overflows into who we are as a congregation. Endurance in this leads to strength in Christ. A witness that matures in faithfulness to Jesus.

But what happens when the challenges come in our walk with Christ? What happens when God says no to us about something in our lives? Who are we in this moment, in this season?

## **II. When God Says No (Acts 16:6-10)**

*And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. **-Acts 16:6-10***

Knowing *what* God wants us to do and *when* God wants us to do it are two different things at times. We have to understand **God's Kingdom** is coming, but not apart from **His will** being done. This can be challenging when God gives us vision of what He intends to do, but not necessarily the timing in which He is going to do it. Or if He is going to do it through us.

And here we see the genuineness of Luke, the author's writings. Paul is without Barnabas, and so far no new ground has been gained. Where do we go now? What do we do now? Paul has been visiting churches started yesterday; he is eager to meet the churches of tomorrow. While a delay in progress hits us as readers today as a negative, it did not audiences then. We are in a hurry in today's culture; then they were not. Waiting then was expected when dealing with a

divine deity among pagans. We today are living in a demand culture- *here and now when we want it*. God doesn't operate like that.

***Forbidden by the Holy Spirit*** means prevent; forbid, deny, or refuse. As Paul and his team desired to go deeper into Asia, the Spirit had forbidden them. What did this look like? It was the unfolding of circumstances that prevented them from moving forward. *How do we determine if something is of the Spirit saying no to this and yes to that?*

*The Spirit of Jesus did not permit* them means the Holy Spirit did not allow or permit- He did not remove His leading of no, not right now, upon Paul. So in tune are the persons of our Tri-une God that one does not operate outside or independently of the other.

***Keep in mind this was 400 miles of no from God.*** That's a lot considering they were walking this journey. City after city was a no go with the Spirit. At what point do they stop and say, maybe we are going in the wrong direction?

*And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them. -Luke 9:5*

This partnership between Jesus' ministry and the Spirit in sync with the Father's Will continues with our ministry today. From Jesus' baptism throughout the whole of His public ministry, Jesus was led of the Spirit. Luke notes a parallel with Paul and Jesus on this in his Gospel account,

*And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place (wilderness). And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. -Luke 4:42-44*

What is the Will of God?

***It is often difficult for us to see or understand God's will or plan, because we are not on the outside looking upon it. We are in God's Plan!***

This portion of the text appeals greatly to me as a Pastor, and I think to most of us if we have any history walking with Christ. *We see the promises of God, the potential God can do, and yet to see doors remain closed, lives remain unchanged, and Jesus left behind can be discouraging for any one of us.* And for some, it's a discouragement that results in walking away from Jesus.

But not Paul. And not for Timothy. And I would argue, not for you and me today!

*Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God!  
Let your good Spirit lead me  
on level ground! -Psalm 143:10*

In this case, God's *no* was for this moment. Paul needed further experience and preparation before he would be ready for the needs of this community. Paul would later be led of the Spirit to minister into this region; however only after he had learned strategy from his ministry among Greeks in Achaia, which would have exposed Paul to a greater breath of rhetoric and philosophy than he had before. *To sit in a classroom is one thing; to gain experience in the field is another. **Both are needed for Kingdom Value!***

**In this moment, Paul's heart and desire for Jesus was ahead of his ability to serve Jesus.** When God says no to us, we are reminded that He is sovereign, and we are not. It is an affirmation that His Kingdom is coming by His Will, not our own regardless the intention of our hearts.

***Here is my testimony regarding this.** God has placed anointing and vision upon my life. At times I thought the season was here, it proved to not be. God has much training to do in my life. Coming here to NJ taught me to see the Holy Spirit and Hear His voice as I never have before. These years here have changed me in ways that I am far more experienced to step into God's vision for my life and reaching into the lives of others I have from visions. I am in school fine tuning my academic sharpness, while in the field learning and being refined.*

I, and each of us has a choice. **Submit or resist.** However, resisting the Holy Spirit is dangerous and grieving. *Submission* implies, or greater implies *trust*. This kind of trust is gained by our consistent, *maturing* walk with Christ, guarding the deposit entrusted to us by faith in Jesus.

If we disregard the Spirit's leading and press onward in our own strength, we may:

- 1) Experience incredible defeat.

*So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. **-1 Samuel 4:10-11***

- 2) Witness God do *despite* our disobedience.

*And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy. **-Numbers 20:11-13***

I've witnessed or been a direct part of such efforts and experienced this side of God in ways that have galvanized my desire to trust and be faithful to his leading. In the end, this is truly what it is all about. *Do we trust Jesus even when His leading is different than our desire or vision?*

Paul and his team continue into Troas, which is a port city chiefly to transport goods into Macedonia. It was here, upon arrival, that Paul receives a vision on their next step. What I want us to note, *400 miles of no from God, uncertainty, and silence.* This was a wilderness experience for Paul and his team. Yet they pressed onward and upward until they arrived to Troas. *Even in the silence, the Holy Spirit is leading.*

*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. -Philippians 4:6-7*

This vision, this divinely shaped invitation, is of a Macedonian man urging Paul to come to Macedonia. **Urging** here in the Greek implies *strengthening in the teaching of truth*. This brings us back to the first portion of our message and text with verse 5. To strengthen with God's word in declaration and demonstration is to see Kingdom Growth. The appeal is for Paul to come and be a part of what God Will's to do in Macedonia, seeing His Kingdom come.

After Paul shares this message with his team, Luke now joining not just writing, agrees with Silas and Timothy that this is indeed of the Spirit for them to set course for Macedonia. It is the *we* portion of Luke's writing that we see he is not a part of the unfolding narrative.

As there had been a sense of spiritual drought, Paul and his team were most likely committed to both fasting and prayer seeking out God's Will. Upon the revealing of this vision, they affirm agreement that this is indeed God's next step for them. A vision that is shared and a team in unity combine to bring forth the labor of the Gospel and Kingdom growth. *Prayer is a huge focus of Luke's both in his Gospel account of Jesus' life and the ongoing lives of His Disciples.*

This vision from God to Paul was a magnetic pull in the affection and energy of this evangelistic team. We need to ensure our leadership is walking in the Spirit for such vision to come, be in prayer to affirm or disregard, and prepared for God to answer and lead. Pray for them; encourage them. A pastor who is not fasting in prayer and meditation of God's word is a leader moving in his own strength or missing the visions God is desiring to give him for congregations.

### **III. Conclusion and Application**

If we truly desire to see the Church, the living tabernacle of Jesus Christ rise and shine we need to be committed to His leading in all areas of our lives individually, and then collectively as the local church. We need to be feasting off His Word for our own lives as we gather to worship and invoke His Hand over our lives and our communities. We need to be in prayer individually and corporately for His Vision over our communities.

*His Kingdom and His Will.* Both are one in His Sovereign leading. It will always come down to trust. Are we walking with God, pursuing Him to such a degree that all in the church and outside of the church know of the difference Jesus has made in the trajectory of our lives?

And finally, most importantly is this. Do we trust Jesus?

Do we trust Jesus enough to obey Him and continue to follow Him when He says no?

*He is not afraid of bad news;  
his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. [-Psalm 112:7](#)*

This is a gage our faith must be measured by. How does yours measure?