Spirit Lead Me

## (Acts 16:1-31)

Today I want you to know that the Lord God has more for you and more for our church than you know, because he is not limited by mortal boundaries. There is more than what we see today, more than we can imagine, because he is supernatural, and therefore he is not defined by our finite imaginations. In fact, the Lord our God is far above and beyond what we can think or imagine, and so we need to trust him to lead us.

Now, last week we celebrated Pentecost, the beginning of the church, and we recognize that from that first Pentecost God was doing something new. We read about the Holy Spirit coming down to rest upon each believer and empowering the church. The Spirit of God deposited inside of each believer the gifts, the anointing, and the promise to have power to impact not just the place where they were gathered, but to impact the nations. And there is more today, because the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, but he was not expended, he was not exhausted, because God is limitless, and he is boundless. As Rabbi Neal said last week, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was not like pouring out a glass of water. In other words, it wasn’t poured out to the last drop, but it was like a hydrant, it was a continual flow. It was just as Jesus promised in John chapter 7, verse 38,

“Streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:38).

And yet, what we find today is that many churches are striving for political correctness or wrestling for theological clarity, instead of launching into the fullness of their Pentecostal destiny.

Today’s message is entitled, “Spirit Lead Me” and if you have your Bible or your Bible app would you open it to Acts chapter 16? I want to encourage you that there is more, that we serve a God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20). And so, we are a church that believes in the Word of God, we believe in the promise of God, and we believe in the power of God.

As we turn to the Word of God, we do so in faith, walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we are pressing into the promise, we do so knowing that miracles still happen today, that God still speaks today and just as Jesus said,

“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

And so, we come to the Word of God hungry, expecting to be fed, to be satisfied because it is the Bread of Life. We turn to the Word of God with the anticipation that God is going to speak into our lives because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). And that is why we pray like we do, because we want to see the power of God manifested in our lives, we want to see revival in Emmitsburg. Amen?

The title of today’s message, our prayer this morning is, “Spirit Lead Me” because the Holy Spirit didn’t empower the church to fit in the frame of other people’s expectations. There is more and God desires for you to be who he called you to be, to say what he told you to say, and impacting the world with the gospel. Jesus said,

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14).

You are salt and light because the church was never intended to be just like the world. We are the church, and we are intended to be a catalyst for change, not playing games but going after God, impacting the world with the good news of Jesus. And so, whatever you need to do today to build your faith up, to prepare, whatever it is, we are going to do it; because the Bible says that you and I have the same Spirit, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead living within us.

Today I want to declare to you the power of the Living God, proclaiming miracles and healings in the power of the Holy Spirit. You see, we know that there is so much more available to the church today, unlimited potential that hasn’t been tapped into because the Bible says,

“Nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

And so, if you are here or if you are watching online, no matter where you are or what you are going through, nothing is impossible with God. In other words, anything is possible today, and so if you’re struggling, wrestling with burdens, or facing troubles, you have come to one of the most exciting places you could be right now because God is in this place.

The Bible tells us that God is moving among us, he planned for us to be here so that we would seek him, reach out for him and find him. And that’s exciting because he’s not far from each one of us and without you even realizing it, he can touch you, bless you, and shift something in your situation and in your life. This is what I want to show you in the Word of God, if you have found your place in Acts chapter 16, the apostle Paul had gathered a team to go share the gospel and verse four says,

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (Acts 16:4-5).

“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” (Acts 16:6).

In case you didn’t catch that, let me just say that one more time, “having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word.” In other words, they were stopped, they were hindered, they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in that region. And then verse seven says,

“When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (Acts 16:7).

And so, not once, but twice they were kept from preaching, stopped from going where they wanted to go. In other words, their desire to fulfill the great commission, their plans to fulfill God’s purpose were put on hold by the Spirit of Jesus. Luke continues telling us in verse eight,

“So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 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” (Acts 16:8-10).

And so, Paul and his companions wanted to go to the region which would be modern-day Turkey, but the Lord shut the door. Paul knew that God had sent him and so they turned and tried to go to Bithynia, but the Bible said, “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.”

This message is entitled “Spirit Lead Me” and I want you to understand that just because a door is shut doesn’t mean it’s the devil, because he’s not that powerful, he doesn’t have that kind of authority, but Jesus on the other hand,

“What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open” (Revelation 3:7).

I wonder if there are some of you today who feel like no matter which way you turn the door has been closed? What I hope you will understand is that a closed door doesn’t mean never, you see when God says no it’s usually because things aren’t in place yet.

The apostle was being led by the Spirit, but what happened was that he was getting ahead of God, it wasn’t the right time, and so while he is trying to figure out where to go the Bible says he received a vision. Immediately Paul recognizes that God was changing his travel plans, the closed doors were just helping to get him where God wanted him to be right now, and so the Bible says,

“We put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis” (Acts 16:11).

This is amazing because they had been traveling for months, but once God had everything in place, once they got the go-ahead from God, once they got the vision to go where God was calling them to go, it only took them two days to get there.

You see, Paul had been content with going to new regions and with his limited understanding, he felt like he was doing God’s will but God was trying to give him something bigger. God was trying to get him to Europe, he was giving him a new continent, and I find it to be encouraging to see that even the apostle Paul wasn’t always clear as to the direction that God was taking his ministry. And I wonder if there are some of you who are encouraged, some of you who have been thinking way too small, in fact you may have been about to settle for something that is so much less than what God is trying to give you.

Paul wanted to visit new regions, but the Lord said, “hold on, if you will just wait on me, I’ll give you a new continent.” And in verse 12, Luke tells us,

“From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days” (Acts 16:12).

Now, Paul is in Europe, he’s never been here before, and he’s looking for a synagogue as was his tradition, but this was a city occupied by retired Roman soldiers and so there wasn’t a synagogue. In other words, there weren’t enough Jewish believers in Philippi, and so he keeps looking and the Bible says in verse 13,

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there” (Acts 16:13).

And so, Paul is looking for some believers, he wants to plant a new church, and finally finds this group of women down by the river side. He begins to preach about Jesus, about the Messiah, and verse 14 says,

“One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message” (Acts 16:14).

Suddenly, Paul recognizes his assignment, he has now crossed over the sea, he’s on a new continent, where he finds a businesswoman named Lydia. The Bible tells us that Lydia is not even Jewish, but she is “a worshiper of God”, in other words, she believes in the God of Israel, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. She becomes the very first Gentile that Paul preaches to on this new continent and in verse 15 we read about the birth of the church in Philippi.

“When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us” (Acts 16:15).

Lydia was seeking the truth and God opened her heart to receive it, she believed and was saved. And then the other members of her household, her family and servants were able to hear the gospel as well, they too believed and trusted Jesus, identifying themselves with him and being baptized. Paul and his companions were invited to stay at her house and there they established the first church in Philippi. Things were looking up, everything was falling into place, God’s will had become clear to the apostle.

However, as we come to verse 16, we discover that no sooner than salvation came to Lydia’s house, and the church was planted in Philippi, that the devil begins to hinder the work. Luke tells us,

“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling" (Acts 16:16).

“This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (Acts 16:17).

Paul and his “team” went regularly to the place of prayer down by the river, sharing the gospel and witnessing to those who gathered there and so this distraction became quite annoying to Paul. Verse 18 says,

“She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her” (Acts 16:18).

Paul recognized that she didn’t know God, she didn’t receive the gospel, and that she was only attempting to pervert the gospel. And so, understanding this and knowing that you can’t negotiate with demons, you don’t ask them to get out, but you need to command them to come out in the name of Jesus Christ, that is what he did.

Some of you need to understand that you have that authority in the name of Jesus. In fact, Jesus cast out demons during his entire ministry, and I believe that God is waiting on some of you to stop being okay with demons messing with you. You see, Jesus cast out unclean spirits, spirits of perversion, spirits of divorce, spirits of lust, with the authority that was in his name. He has given you that authority and I hope that some of you will get annoyed with demons messing with you, messing with your children, messing with your house, and you will command them to come out in Jesus’ name.

“When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice" (Acts 16:19-21).

So, the owners of the slave girl were okay with them preaching, they didn’t mind her going down to the river to worship, but they got mad when the demon was cast out of her. They called the Roman authorities and started pointing fingers at Paul and Silas because they took away their source of income, and what they were doing wasn’t okay anymore.

“The crowd then joined in the attack against Paul and Silas,” verse 22 says, “and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:22-24).

In other words, they had shackles around their ankles which were chained to the foundation of the prison. And so, they had some freedom, but they could only go so far. They put them in prison where they were confined, but the gospel cannot be chained, and that’s where the story begins to shift. Because even though they’re sitting in prison, they were still on mission, they still had a divine assignment, and the Bible tells us,

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

I love this, because it says about midnight. In other words, it’s the beginning of a new day, but it’s the darkest moment. That is the place where the psalmist says,

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalms 30:5).

That is the place of transformation and there are some of you that are at midnight moments in your life. It’s in this place that Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God, they are praising God, they’re not complaining, but like Job said, they’re lifting their voices to the God “Who gives songs in the night” (Job 35:10). Or as the psalmist said,

“At night his song is with me” (Psalms 42:8).

And this is the kind of praise that Paul gives, because there is always a place for praise, because praise precedes your greatest breakthroughs. What you need to understand is that this is not a prayer to get out of jail, this is the kind of praise that will rise up over your situation. This is a praise that starts deep down in your spirit, where something is breaking, and something has been set free. The Bible says that everybody heard them praying and singing.

“The other prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

Right now, there is somebody listening, somebody watching on Facebook, somebody in this room, and this praise was not for Paul, not for his situation, but praise for God. And there are people listening, people watching, people assigned to your life, who need to know that this is the praise before your breakthrough.

You see, at this moment, Paul realizes that he is on a divine assignment, and his response to his assignment has the power to impact the lives of everyone who was listening. Not everybody is your assignment, but there are some who are listening, and the Bible says in verse 26,

“Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose” (Acts 16:26).

Paul is frozen, he doesn’t move, because he recognizes the influence he has in this unusual place. I don’t know that he realizes in this moment that he will do his greatest work from a prison cell and that he will write two thirds of the New Testament while in chains. But even though this situation was not his preference, even though he doesn’t want to be in chains, he knows that God allowed it and so he doesn’t move. And even more amazing is the fact that nobody else moves either, this was a jail full of prisoners who were just unchained and not one person moved.

Now, I don’t know what the Holy Spirit led him to pray in that prison, but when God sets you free it’s not a jailbreak, you don’t have to run out of it, because the reality is that you were anointed to stay in it. I know most often we say, “I’ve got to get out of this circumstance, I’ve got to move away from this situation,” but what if your assignment is to stay? You see, Paul recognized that if he does not stay a life could be lost, and so he doesn’t move, nobody moves, but everybody is free. And verse 27 says,

“The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (Acts 16:27-28).

The jailer was going to kill himself because the penalty for losing a prisoner was death by crucifixion. And so, Paul stays even though he had been set free because this man’s life was at stake. It’s really a picture or a foreshadowing of what Jesus did on the cross, because he said I will die so that you can live, I will stay so that your life will be spared, I will remain as a captive so that you can be free. And in verse 29,

“The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:29-30).

Paul says, “We’re all here, don’t harm yourself!” And the jailer falls on his knees, trembling before Paul and Silas, recognizing his need for salvation. Obviously, he had heard enough before falling asleep to know that he needed to be saved and so they replied,

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

And the Bible says that the jailer brought them to his house, where they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his household and each one believed what they heard and was saved from their sins.

My goal for the church this week, in the sharing of this word, that your prayer would be “Spirit, Lead Me.” And that you would recognize that as a follower of Jesus Christ you have a mission, you have a divine assignment. And I know that a lot of you in here are leaders, you are serving, you are the church, but I just want to remind you of the fact that you have a divine assignment, and your is so important. My prayer is that the cry of your heart, the desire of your heart, your prayer at the midnight hour would be “Spirit, Lead Me.”

I believe there are some of you here in this moment whom God is shifting everything and things are falling into place. You may have been stuck, but it’s only for a season, you may have been kept from going where you wanted to go, the door may have been shut, but God wasn’t saying no, he was just saying not yet. And so, I want to encourage you to trust him because things are falling into place, the appointed time is coming, the people and the provision are already in place. Everything you need is there, everything is provided, it may be dark in this moment, but they prayed and sang praises at midnight.

I don’t know who this is for, but I want to encourage you not to stop singing, don’t stop praying and praising God. It may be dark, you may not know how to get out, you may not know what the future holds, but don’t stop praying, and don’t stop praising. It doesn’t even matter whether you can sing, it doesn’t matter whether it’s dark outside, but just don’t stop singing because it’s about to break.

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