

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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**WHAT IT MEANS TO OBEY**

Acts 16:9-18

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There are three points in today's lesson:

- Paul obeyed, even though information was limited.
- Lydia was saved and immediately had a mission.
- The demon-possessed woman was set free.

**INTRODUCTION:** We could talk about how to know God's will all day long. I've probably discussed this topic with more Christians than any other topic. What is God's will for us as individuals and what is God's will for us as a body of Christ? These are things we must pray about continuously. Let's look at three examples: Paul was a strong believer and very acquainted with learning about God's will. Lydia becomes a believer in this story and immediately discerns God's will. Then the demon-possessed woman had an obstacle removed so she could be open to God's will.

**PAUL OBEYED, EVEN THOUGH INFORMATION WAS LIMITED**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:9-10

*During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** Twice, God delayed Paul and the missionary team. Twice, God refused to allow them to go where they thought they needed to go, sending them to do what God wanted them to do. But when God finally impressed upon Paul the path that he needed to take, Paul and the team did not hesitate.

I want you to notice the lack of details.

- Paul was not given a specific city to visit.
- The man in the vision did not identify himself or give an address.
- God did not tell Paul the best route to travel or the mode of transportation that they should take.
- Paul was not given a list of what he should pack.
- The Lord did not provide an agenda of what to do or a script of what to say when he got there.

Paul went anyway. The path was not clearly defined, but he went anyway. He did not ask questions or try to figure it out. He went. The language that is used in these verses indicates that the team did not hesitate. As soon as was possible, they set out for Macedonia, the large Roman province that was north of Greece.

**APPLICATION:** A mom used to tell her children that obedience is doing what you're told, when you're told, and with the right attitude. How good are we at obeying God?

I'm not talking about the kind of obedience that leads to generally moral lives. That kind of obedience is second nature to many people who know right from wrong. The old saying "don't drink, cuss, or chew or hang around with girls that do!" really means more than just what it says. And I'd say all of you live out the basics of good, moral living. But how good are we at obeying God when he asks us to do things that require a sacrifice, when he asks us to do things that are uncomfortable, when he asks us to do things on faith?

- When you know God wants you to share the gospel with someone, but you are afraid of being rejected or looking foolish, do you speak up?
- When God wakes you up in the middle of the night and lays someone on your heart, do you spend time in prayer, or do you roll over and go back to sleep?
- When God calls you to do a mission, do you step out in faith, or do you rationalize why you cannot do it right away?
- When the Spirit of God whispers to you to give more, but your finances are already tight, do you obey?

- When he wants you to return hurt and pain with love and compassion, what do you do?
- When he asks you to forgive someone who has really done you wrong, how do you react?

Do you do what you believe the Lord is leading you to do when he tells you to do it and with a good attitude? Paul did. Paul obeyed. As we mature in our Christian journeys, we should be more and more willing to follow the Lord's leadership.

## **LYDIA WAS SAVED, AND IMMEDIATELY HAD A MISSION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16: 11-15

*From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup> From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** (Side Note: For the first time, the author of Acts begins using the personal pronouns of "we" and "us". Evidently, this is where Luke joined Paul's missionary team.)

Since the team did not know exactly where to go in Macedonia, they headed for one of the larger cities. Philippi was named after Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. This city in northeastern Greece was important because it was a gateway between Europe and Asia. (Remember, this is the first recorded spread of the gospel message in Europe.)

Paul always made the synagogue his first stop on these preaching tours. So, the lack of a synagogue in Philippi was an indication that there was not a large Jewish

representation there. (At least ten Jewish men were needed to create a synagogue in any given area.) Undeterred, Paul decided to look for God-fearing Gentiles who were honoring the Sabbath. As tradition dictated, they gathered near water.

These women must have been honored and surprised that someone of Paul's reputation would take time to teach them. Most Pharisees thought so little of women they would not have considered them worthy of hearing their message. In fact, when praying, many Pharisees publicly thanked God that they were not a Gentile or a woman, but Paul and his team sat right down among them and started up a conversation. Lydia heard the message, received it as true, and responded by giving her heart and life to Christ.

Lydia is a Biblical example of a powerful and influential woman. Scripture tells us that she was a dealer of purple cloth. The ink to make purple dye was extracted from seashells or roots. It was a time-consuming and labor-intensive process, and, therefore, purple was a color reserved mostly for royals and the wealthy.

Interestingly, it was also used on the fringes of prayer shawls. So, perhaps, that is how Lydia learned of the Hebrew God. As a merchant of purple cloth, she was probably very wealthy. If she was married, her husband is not mentioned, and she did not see the need to consult him before asking Paul and his team to stay at her house.

Other people would have been watching as Lydia stepped forward and made a commitment to Christ. Indeed, the Bible tells us that the other members of her household did the same, and they were all baptized. Lydia's example was an immediate witness to them, but they too had to make a personal decision of whether to receive or reject the gospel message.

When Lydia was saved, she had an immediate mission. She didn't know much about following God's will but that's what she did. Her mission was to house the missionary team!

- Paul obeyed, even though his information was limited.
- Lydia was saved and immediately had a mission.

## THE DEMON-POSSESSED WOMAN WAS FREED

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 16:16-18

*<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She 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." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** After establishing mission headquarters in Lydia's home, the team continued to preach the gospel throughout Philippi. At some point, they were joined by a heckler. A demon-possessed woman shouted at them every time they walked by.

One of the weaknesses of the written language is that we cannot tell the tone or inflection of someone's words just by seeing them written on paper. While this woman was speaking truth in what she said, it's likely that she said it in such a way that she was actually making fun of the preachers. While it is not recorded as such, the gist of her statement may have been "*These men say that they are servants of the Most High God. They say they can tell you how to be saved.*" *Wink, wink.* Her constant berating wore on Paul's nerves and was likely a great distraction to the missionaries as well as those who were trying to listen to the message. Eventually, Paul had enough and cast the demon from her.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The same mother who taught her children about obedience recalled a time when one of her boys got in trouble for calling his brother names. As a discipline measure, the son had to write sentences. He wrote, "I will not call my brother names." When he turned in his paper, the mother noticed that on each line, there was one word that was bolder than the rest. The bold words lined up diagonally across the page to create repeating sentences that read, "I WILL call my brother names." Obviously, the disciplinary sentences were only true if the boy meant them, and, on that day, he did not.

**EXPLANATION:** The demon-possessed woman did not mean what she was saying. Satan is the father of lies, but Satan knows the truth, and he will use it to manipulate you. Satan often takes a little truth and mixes it with a lot of lies. (Think of Eve!) Satan tried to use the demon-possessed woman to derail the gospel message. In the name of Jesus, Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave, and she was freed. Now she was free to know and follow the will of God!

In America, we have easy access to scripture and these incredible stories. In addition, as believers, we—like Paul—have the Holy Spirit living inside us to guide us in the ways we should go. As modern-day believers, how do we compare with early Christians like Paul and this new believer, Lydia?

- When God called Paul to Macedonia, Paul obeyed without hesitation, without question, without thinking about it or trying to find reasons to get out of it. It is amazing to think about. When he arrived at the river outside Philippi, there were only women. Did Paul say, *“Well, I must have gotten this wrong. There was a man in my vision, but there are no men here. Pack your bags boys, we’ll just keep going.”* No! He shared the gospel with Lydia and the other women there, and that group of Christians became Paul’s first European congregation, the one to whom he would later write the letter we know as the book of Philippians. Paul was living out the power of the living Christ!
- When Paul and his team shared the gospel with Lydia and other God-fearing women who had gathered to pray, did she say, *“OK, let me think on that a while. Why do not we meet back here next week, same time and place?”* No! She listened attentively and then obeyed. Immediately, she gave her heart and life to Christ and followed in baptism. Then, she followed Paul and her Savior’s examples by starting a ministry of her own, opening her home to the missionary team. Lydia was living out the power of the living Christ!
- And now, the formerly demon-possessed woman was set free and had the examples of Paul and Lydia to follow.

**APPLICATION:** The people in a certain congregation often complained that they did not know the will of God. One day, their pastor preached, “It’s not about what you do not know. It’s about all the things you know but refuse to do.”

- We all know that God wants us to read his word.
- We all know that God wants us to pray.
- We all know that God wants us to gather with other believers to worship.
- We all know that God wants us to share the gospel with the lost.
- We all know that God wants us to be kind, compassionate, and generous.
- We all know that God wants us to show mercy and grace.

Think about who you relate most to in this story.

- Are you more like the slave woman? Have you become a slave to the world’s way of thinking and doing things?
- Are you like Lydia? Maybe you have been searching for the truth. If so, what will you do now that you know?
- Or are you like Paul, a believer who knows the Lord and loves the Lord? If so, then are you doing his will?

True obedience is not easy for most of us, but the more we grow in our walks with Christ, the more obedient we should be.

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