



RESPONDING TO THE ROADBLOCKS OF LIFE

Acts 16:1-10

As we open our scripture lesson for today – the Apostle Paul has his Mapquest itinerary laid before him. A new member – Timothy – has joined the team. Paul is about to begin his second missionary journey. Paul was born a type ‘A’ personality – and always wanted to be on the go. Paul and his crew are re-visiting some of the churches they have either started or provided spiritual leadership for. However, as I once shared with you – we who plan weeks and months ahead must be very careful. We must be very careful because we might get only what we plan for. You and I know the great story of the 3 Wise Men. Yes, I know it is ninety degrees outside – and not Christmas time – but the story and truth of the three Wise Men cannot be safely locked away in the church’s liturgical calendar. The three Wise Men were wise because they were willing to be led. God changed their itinerary – and they went in a different direction.

In the 21st century we describe wise persons as those who know how to calculate – measure time – and anticipate the proper response in every circumstance. The ‘wise’ are those who live by the black book – and invite others to do the same. The wise live by clocks – calendars – and clever i-pods. However in the sacred scriptures – God is the source and beginning of wisdom. When our wisdom encounters the Living God – we yield and surrender from leading the way – to being led by the Spirit.

This passage in front of us today has been a tremendous source of wisdom and comfort for me – and countless others – when the roadblocks of life quickly come upon us. The Apostle Paul and team – after a time of prayer and careful thought – wanted to go west to Asia Minor to preach the gospel. The Holy Spirit said, **‘NO!’**

You can’t go in that direction.’ We aren’t given an explanation as to why – but still a resounding NO. God has the audacity to change Paul’s itinerary.

So Paul – while perplexed – tried to enter the territory of Bithynia – and once again another roadblock. Another ‘NO.’ Paul is probably becoming more confused all the time. Why these NOs? So Paul and his crew travel in the only way possible to Troas. Here, Paul is interested in world missions and wonders ‘why in the world can’t I go there and there and there?’ Where will the second missionary journey lead me?

Let us be honest at this point. You and I don't like roadblocks and closed doors. We find closed doors frustrating – and a complete waste of our valuable time. Our itinerary is changed and God did not consult us.

Every one of us here today has known this experience. We apply for a job for which we have trained ourselves – and the response is NO! It hurts.

We invest significant time in a relationship – the relationship is important to us – and the relationship ends. We are crushed. Why? We invest time and effort in medical treatment – but to no avail.

We have our children's lives all planned out for them – and they choose a different direction. We are perplexed.

Your map – your sophisticated Mapquest - must give way to the living God and the power of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide. God declares "I am in charge of this journey." Why do we sing such great hymns like "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah – and when God actually guides and intervenes – we get upset? When God says, "NO!" – it doesn't mean stop everything – park the car. It only means 'stop moving in this direction. Go home by another way.' Keep praying – keep serving – keep searching the scriptures.

If you don't get accepted at Harvard or Yale – go and learn at another college. To this very day – I have never figured out how an inner city boy from Newark, N.J. – wound up attending a small Presbyterian College in Huron, South Dakota. My sophomore year, I fell asleep in Social Psychology class on the shoulder of this quiet and shy girl named Mary and the rest is history.

As Dr. James Boice shares: "When God closes doors – it is **not** because he has nothing for us to do. He does not want us to take a vacation. It is to keep us from getting into a work or position to which we are not called – in order that we might be saved for a work to which we are called."¹

In all honesty, there is a tension between our human planning and divine guidance. In **Proverbs 16:9** we learn "In his heart a man plans his course – but the Lord directs (determines) his steps."

It was **my** plan to serve the Lord as a secondary level history and political science teach – and coach on the side. I would help as a layperson in the local church. To my knowledge – my heart was right - my motives good. However, God changed my itinerary and altered my steps a bit. God had a greater plan. He does for us all.

In one of the writings of C. S. Lewis he shares from his own life experience that "God can take all the wrong roads we take – to get us to the right place!" Growing up in Newark, N. J. – if you lived on this side of South Orange Avenue – you lived on the wrong side of the tracks. However, I was blessed to have a church and pastors who

taught me that – according to the Bible – God lived on all sides of the tracks – and owned all the roads.

Then the book of Jonah and **Psalm 139** counseled me that there is no road I can ever travel to escape his love and grace. The cross teaches me there is no road beyond his redemption.

So, Dr. Boice’s counsel was absolutely right. When God closes a door – it is because he is calling us to another door and mission field. There was a missionary named David Livingstone who wanted to go to China – but God said, “**Africa.**” A missionary named William Carey wanted to go to the South Pacific – but God said, “**India.**” A missionary named Judson wanted to spend his life in India – but God’s Spirit drove him to Burma.²

I don’t know what the roadblocks and closed doors are for you – and for those who you love – I just know they come to us all. Wait on the Lord. The door will open in the Lord’s good time.

In front of us today is the Bread of life and the Cup of blessing. These elements remind us “There is a God that rules above – with hands of power and a heart of love.”³ He closes some doors – only to open others. For Paul the door opened to the entire continent of Europe.

They remind us, “If Jesus leads me – I shall get home someday.”⁴ Not even the door of death can stop his truth and way. So by faith we go on believing and knowing:

“The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.”⁵

Let us go to the Holy Table!

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
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ENDNOTES

¹ James M. Boice, “**ACTS: An Expository Commentary,**” Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997, page 274.

² John Stott, **THE MESSAGE OF ACTS: The Spirit, The Church, The World,** InterVarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, ILL, 1990, page 261.

³ Words of Charles Albert Tindley from hymn, **“Beams of Heaven as I Go.”**

⁴ Tindley, *ibid.*

⁵ **“How Firm a Foundation.”** verse 5.