**Calling an Audible**

Are you familiar with the concept of “*calling an audible*”? It’s a football thing in which the QB steps up to start a play, looks over the defense and on the spot changes the play. For example, perhaps in the huddle he called a play for the wide receiver to run a particular route but as he surveys the defense the QB notices that that player is double teamed. So he calls an audible changing to a running play.

The coach has an idea of how he wants the team to go about the game. Often a coach will script the first 15 or so plays before the game even begins. If the defense has prepared well and is taking away the planned plays a good QB will change the plays while still keeping with the overall plan.

Consider the opposite. Maybe you have a friend who makes plans for you all to go to Chicago for the day, but for some reason you have to change your plans. Your plan making friend doesn’t handle the change well. He goes into a funk because the plan isn’t working the way he thought it would.

What’s the difference?

In the first example, the QB is completely on board with the game over-all game plan. He’s focused on the long term goal, scoring touchdowns and winning the game. Great QBs can see what the defense is prepared for and if necessary can change the play to surprise them but still reach the goal. If a QB insists on following the script, the defense will likely dominate the game and his team will lose.

In the second example, your friend is focused on the immediate rather than the long term goal. He’s focused on what’s happening or not happening right now, the immediate goal, forgetting that your long term goal is simply to enjoy friendship.

Does that make sense? It’s not that one is right and the other wrong. It just is. One tends to make the details work. The other simply wants to accomplish the over-all goal.

Today we’re looking at the first 15 verses of Acts 16. Three things happen: first Timothy joins Paul and Silas on their mission trip; then Paul has a vision calling him to preach in an area known as Macedonia, modern Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania. The third thing that happened is a planned mission trip.

We see that Paul clearly had plans but along the way there were obstacles and distractions. What I want us to understand this morning is that Paul was like that great QB calling an audible. He had a plan for this mission trip but circumstances forced a change.

We read this two weeks ago, *Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.* Acts 15:36 The plan was to go back to Syria and Cilicia and Lystra and Derbe.

Things didn’t go as planned. When something interfered with his plan Paul called an audible. He was on board with God’s over-all plan of taking the Gospel to the Gentile world. Rather than being dissuaded, he adjusted on the fly, continuing on his mission.

Paul was certain of his calling. Eight times in his letters Paul stated clearly that God’s plan was for him to preach the Gospel to Gentiles:

         *God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.* Galatians 1:15f

         *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of His power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.* Ephesians 3:7f

How many people do you know who are so absolutely certain of their call?

As we read the record in Acts 16 we learn that, although he had an immediate plan, Paul was committed to the over-all plan of preaching the Gospel to Gentiles. Whenever something interfered with or changed his plan, he called an audible and continued his mission.

He had as a companion on this mission trip, Silas. Silas was good choice for Paul. He was one of the men the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem sent with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch after the council decided that Gentiles can be Christians. He was highly regarded as a preacher and a leader, AND he was a Roman citizen.

That would prove to be valuable. When Roman citizenship rescued Paul from abuse at the hands of authorities; can you imagine if Paul got a pass but Silas didn’t?

In Lystra they met Timothy*, a disciple…whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.* Acts 16:1f Paul already had his team but there was something about Timothy that he wanted to take him along on the journey (Vs. 3a).

It was a good plan but there was a problem. Timothy was an uncircumcised Gentile. Paul called an audible. This might be confusing. Speaking of Timothy, Paul *circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.* Acts 16:3b

I’m sure you’ve already made the astute observation that this seems like a contradiction. The church settled the debate that Gentiles didn’t have to follow Jewish customs in order to be Christians. In fact, this mission included delivering*…the decisions reached by the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.* Acts 16:4

So they were telling Gentiles officially, *You can be Christians without following the Jewish customs*, and at the same time committing Timothy to one of the basic traditions.

Understand, Paul was primarily a preacher to Gentiles, still he didn’t want anything to impede his ministry to Jews he would meet along the way. He didn’t reject the customs and laws of the Jews but he was free in Christ. He didn’t have to make a big deal out of the fact that the Council in Jerusalem support his position.

He chose to build bridges to the Jews. Those customs were not required to be justified by faith, but they were helpful in expressing faith. Paul saw the big picture, the over-all plan of God to preach the Gospel to all nations. So he called an audible.

Moving on, verses 6-7, *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. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.*

Notice that Paul met two separate roadblocks to his plan:

         *kept by the Holy Spirit.* Do you remember when children were coming to Jesus but His disciples rebuked them? Jesus said, *Do not hinder them* (Matthew 19:14). That’s this word κωλυω. As the disciples blocked the children from get near Jesus, the Holy Spirit blocked Paul from going to Asia. (BTW, Asia refers not to the East as we know it but to modern day Turkey.)

         *the Spirit of Jesus would not allow.* This time Luke used the word εαω, meaning to “stop”. The Spirit of Jesus stopped them from entering Bithynia.

Paul didn’t see this necessarily as a negative. He didn’t try to determine the activity of the Holy Spirit. He allowed the Holy Spirit to lead him, so if he needed to change his plans he changed his plans. To Paul these roadblocks were part of the Holy Spirit getting him to where He wanted.

When one door closed, he didn’t mope or whine or get angry or quit. He kept moving pursuing the over-all game plan. He continued to preach the Gospel wherever he was allowed to go.

He couldn’t go to Mysia so he went to Troas (Vs. 8). *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.* Vv. 9f

(Did you notice the change from third person “*Paul and his companions*” to first person “*we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia*”? It seems that in Troas Paul met Dr. Luke, called another audible and enlisted him for the mission trip. Luke ultimately became the author of the Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke.

We’re told here that God communicated with Paul through a vision/dream. Οραμα is the same word used of the visions Peter and Cornelius had that got them together in chapter 10.

A subtle thing but important is how this report demonstrated the Trinity.

         Vs. 6, The Holy Spirit kept them from going to Asia

         Vs. 7, The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to enter Bithynia

         Vs. 10, God called us to preach in Macedonia

Father, Son, and Spirit all involved.

Paul had a plan. God blocked and changed his plan. When the Holy Spirit was clear in communicating God’s plan, Paul called an audible, continuing to follow his mission. *From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace.* Vs. 11

There was no blockade this time. They put the wind at their backs and it carried them without interference to God’s intended destination.

They made their way to Philippi, a Roman colony where they stayed for several days. Named after Philip of Macedon, Philippi was inhabited by gold miners since about 356 BC. After the Romans conquered Macedonia they used it as a reward for soldiers who had distinguished themselves. It was like the Congressional Medal of Honor. Such heroes were given land in Philippi.

There was a handful of Jews living in Philippi but not enough for a synagogue. A synagogue required 10 men but they were mostly women. The leader of the group was Lydia, who with open heart responded to Paul’s preaching becoming the first person to accept Christ in that region. She and her household were baptized in Christ.

What we’ve seen in this is that Paul was able to handle distractions and roadblocks because he was tuned into God’s over-all plan. He had no trouble following the leading of the Holy Spirit. As far as Paul was concerned, distractions and roadblocks were the work of the Holy Spirit.

You see, Paul was certain of his call – to preach the Gospel to Gentiles. He was doing what he knew God wanted him to do. When things didn’t go according to his plans, he humbly accepted the Spirit’s lead.

I think there’s a lesson in this for us. Most Christians would like to feel good about following the leading of the Holy Spirit. But how do we know when it’s the leading of the Holy Spirit and not just our own desire?

         Some people say the Holy Spirit opens doors and closes doors.

         Others say He leads through closed doors, or He opens windows.

         Sometimes when God says “*No*” it leads to a greater “*Yes*”. When God told Paul “*No*” to Asia it lead to a greater “*Yes*” in Europe.

So how can we know with confidence what God’s will is? I’ll try to explain it with a three part rubric.

**Part 1:** Do what you know.

Audience participation: What are some things you absolutely know God wants you to do?

         He wants you to worship

         He wants you to pray

         You know certain behaviors He doesn’t want to see in you

You know what God wants you to so. Do it. However simple, do what you know. It makes no sense to expect God give you new direction if you’re not obeying what He already told you. Paul was certain of what God had told him to do and he was doing it.

**Part 2:** Commit to God’s over-all plan.

What is God’s over-all plan? Jesus said, *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* Matthew 28:19f

We should be committed to this plan. That’s the point of our church vision: *Knowing and Growing in Christ*. We’re committed to knowing and growing in Christ and to helping others know and grow in Him. Everything we do is intended to move toward that goal.

Paul was living in the flow of the Holy Spirit. Whatever came his way, he was committed to preaching the Gospel, especially to Gentiles.

I’m convinced that when Christians don’t recognize the Holy Spirit leading it’s because they’re not committed to the plan. They’re so focused on their immediate context they can’t see big picture. If the Holy Spirit says “*No*” they take it as a rebuke instead of recognizing that God has a bigger plan.

If you commit to God’s plan roadblocks and distractions will be much less of a problem for you.

**Part 3:** Trust the Holy Spirit to work in your life. If you’re tuned in with the Holy Spirit He will guide you. If you’re actively making disciples, you can trust the Holy Spirit to lead. Sometimes the Holy Spirit trusts us more than we trust Him.

I’m not a mystical man but I trust that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through both our intellect and our emotions to indicate rightness or wrongness, but as I said in part 2, only if we’re clear on God’s stated will and pursuing His plan.

Except for when he got a vision, οραμα, we don’t know how the Holy Spirit communicated with Paul, but He did and because Paul trusted he accepted the Holy Spirit’s lead without arguing. As a result he enjoyed Holy Spirit guidance.

The Holy Spirit can do a lot with a humble, receptive mind. He’ll open some doors and close others. He’ll say “*Yes*” to some opportunities and “*No*” to others, all leading to His ultimate goal.

We’ll know the Spirit’s guidance with confidence because our over-all purpose is clear. If you’re not experiencing Holy Spirit guidance I suggest you follow this rubric.

Is there a more urgent question for Christians than, *What is the Holy Spirit’s plan for me, for us*?

When the Holy Spirit leads but it’s not your plan, isn’t it better to be in line with Him than to be anywhere else without Him? Isn’t it better to call an audible consistent with God’s over-all plan than to hold stubbornly to your own will?

At a small family bodega in a New York barrio the grocer was selling eggplant with a sign that read: 25 cents each or three for a dollar. Some customers indignantly said the price was unfair and demanded four for a dollar.

         After a while a man from a tailor shop across the street came over and asked, *Aren’t you going to fix that mistake*?

         *What mistake*? The grocer said. *Before that sign I never sold more than one at a time*.

The grocer was committed to the over-all goal of selling eggplants. When he wasn’t selling what he thought he could, he called an audible.

As we’re living for Jesus, *Knowing and Growing in Christ*, if things don’t go the way with think they should or the way we want, let’s trust the Holy Spirit to be leading, call an audible and continue following God’s over-all plan.