

Acts 16:6-10

Have you ever felt that your life was like a mouse in a maze? You try to go one way, but that way is blocked. You go a different way, but you find that it, too, is a dead end. Determining where God is leading you through life can be a little frustrating and somewhat exhausting. The Apostle Paul must have felt like that mouse in our text for today. He wanted to do mission work in Asia but God wouldn't let him. He tried to enter Bithynia to preach the Gospel there, but again God put up a roadblock. It would have been awfully tempting for Paul to question what God was doing. Didn't Jesus say, "Go into all the world and preach the good news"? Didn't God say, "I want all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"?

We may have thoughts along those lines, too. Why are there people out there who have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ? If God wants all to be saved, why doesn't He speed up the work of missionaries and Bible translators? And why doesn't He bring more people to church on Sunday mornings? One thing a mouse should never do, however, when running through a maze is to second-guess the maze's creator. All he can do is to keep looking for doors and ways which are open and not worry about the ones that are blocked.

The maze seemed completely blocked to the Apostle Paul, but in the night God opened for him the way he should go. In a vision He showed Paul a man from Macedonia begging him to come and help him. So Paul and Silas and those with them traveled into Europe to preach the Gospel there.

Now if we read further into Acts 16, we read that these men traveled to Philippi, a city in Macedonia. There they met a woman from Thyatira named Lydia. After speaking to her about Jesus, she believed, and she and her whole household were baptized. In Acts 16 we also read of a certain jailer who was about to kill himself with his sword. But Paul and Silas stopped him in time and told him the good news of Jesus Christ. He, too, along with his whole household were baptized.

In Macedonia Paul went also to Thessalonica and to Berea, and from there he and Silas went down to Athens, Greece and to Corinth. And so we discover that the frustration Paul felt because the way was blocked into Asia and Bithynia was met with the joy of being able to preach Christ to the Philippians, and the Thessalonians, and the Corinthians—and you and I would not have these wonderful books of the Bible except that the maze, for Paul, had become blocked.

What's blocking your maze right now? Is God preventing you from finding a different job? Do you have frustrations because an illness is impeding your way through life? Perhaps you greatly desire to bring Christ to a loved one, but that door is just not open right now. Rather than become frustrated and second-guess what God is doing, let's find encouragement from the maze the Apostle Paul was in. He didn't know the outcome of the story. He didn't know that God had great plans for His people in Macedonia and Greece, and that Paul's maze would lead him there to these people. Even in Philippi, Paul and Silas were thrown into jail. They were chained, hand and foot. But what looked like the end of the road for them became an open door to bring Jesus Christ to the jailer in that place.

If you miss your airplane flight, rather than become upset, there may be the opportunity to speak with a fellow traveler about Jesus. If an illness takes you to the hospital, it may open the door to talk to your nurse about her Savior. If you don't get that promotion, it may give you the chance to finally confess your faith to a coworker.

A mouse in a maze can never see the bigger picture. All he sees is where he happens to be at the time. But God sees the bigger picture. He knows where you are at in life. He knows what sufferings He will allow to come to you. He knows the joys which await you. And just because you're stuck somewhere in a corner of your maze doesn't mean that He has abandoned you—even though you may have abandoned Him.

You see, we're not just mice in a maze; we're selfish mice. And we probably don't even care that much about the bigger picture that God sees. Do we really care about that stranger in a faraway land—Macedonia, Greece, Asia, or wherever, who doesn't know about Jesus Christ? If we did, wouldn't we help support the missionaries who serve in those places? And do we really care if our neighbor comes to church on Sunday mornings to hear the good news of Jesus, or do we just want him to come so he will help us pay off our church debt?

Mice running through a maze can become very selfish. And that's us. But that's not Jesus. He went through a maze, too. But for Him there was suffering at every turn. There was rejection and persecution at every door. And all roads, for Him, led to the cross. And even though He saw the bigger picture—He knew what lay ahead for Him—He didn't quit. He took the abuse, the punishment, the rejection, for you. He suffered the cross in your place. Nothing could deter Him because He thought, not of Himself, but only of you. He died for you to pay the price for your sins.

You see, He doesn't see you as a mouse, but as His dear child. He baptized you. He washed you of your filthiness. You're not a stinking mouse to Him; you are forgiven sons and daughters, beautiful in His sight. And so no matter how frustrating your maze may be, Jesus is with you. You are not alone. Come, He says, to My Table. Come eat and drink... I am here for you. He knows how exhausting life can be. Here He strengthens you with His body and blood so that you can keep going, nourished by your Savior's forgiveness for you.

Our family took a vacation to South Dakota some years ago. Near Rapid City there was an attraction called the Black Hills Maze. We were let in and the door was closed behind us, and for over an hour we struggled to find our way out. That was actually a fun experience. We knew that there was a way out and that if we needed help an attendant would come to our rescue.

You know Jesus Christ, but there are people who do not. You believe that He died to forgive your sins, but there are many who do not have that faith, and they are lost in their maze. And even though you and I can get a little frustrated with all the roadblocks that come into our life, we know what awaits us—the gates of eternal life in heaven; not because we are without sin, but because we trust in Jesus our Savior from sin.

Do you think, therefore, that we can encourage each other as we tread through our mazes here? Do you think we can help each other to remain faithful to Jesus through each turn and corner? I think that with God's help, we can. And do you think we can reach out to

those who are lost in their maze and show Jesus to them? The children in our Sunday School are doing that by sending a cow to a missionary family in Kenya. The ladies who come here each Tuesday make quilts to help support mission work here and around the world. The friend you invite to church is someone Jesus died for, and you are leading them here to where He gives them His eternal gifts.

God may not be calling you to go to Macedonia, but He does call you to proclaim Christ where you are at. And even if where you are at is some boring corner in the maze of life, Jesus is with you and He is for you. He is leading you through life. He forgives you every day of your life. And having a Savior like that, life is truly amazing. Amen.