

Acts 16:1-10 (#25) 10.25.20 (20083)
Following the Lord

I. God's message to all people, all humanity, is that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- A. This message, when it penetrates a person's heart, brings new spiritual life, eternal life, focused on the grace and saving lordship of Jesus.
- B. Acts is the inspired record of the early spread of this life into the Gentile world.

II. The second Journey begins. Acts 15:36-16:10.

A. A different start. 15:36-41

- 1. Not like the first journey. (Acts 13)
 - a) The first one had all this unity and clarity.
 - b) The second (an extension of the first) included some frustration and a change of plans.
 - c) The first one must have had some frustration because John Mark did go home (13:13)
- 2. *By doing what they each sensed the Lord wanted for them they each fulfilled their ministries, and they doubled the ministry impact.*

B. A new team. Three new partners. 16:1-3, 10

- 1. **Silas**, an unsung hero. AKA, Silvanus (2 Cor.1:19; 1 Pet.5:12)
 - a) Gifted, prophetic, bi-lingual, Roman citizen, Jewish Christian from Jerusalem, highly respected in the Jewish Church, conversant with Gentile mission in Antioch and willing to help with it.
- 2. **Timothy** – Paul's "son in the faith".
 - a) Why did Paul circumcise him? 1 Cor.9:19-23
 - (1) Timothy's mom (Eunice) was Jewish, and the Jews generally considered a child to be of the religion of their mother. Greek culture adopted the religion of the father. So, Timothy, uncircumcised, would have been considered an apostate Jew.
 - (2) This circumcision had nothing to do with salvation. Timothy was already a believer before he was circumcised and his circumcision was a practical matter only, because he was Jewish.
 - b) The principle has been set for the Gentile Christians, Paul is now free to adjust policy to meet the need, which in this case was to witness to the Jews in those parts.
 - c) *Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)*
- 3. **Luke** himself joins the group in Troas. 16:10
 - a) The first of four "we" sections in Acts. (chapters 20, 21, 27-28)

C. A pastoral focus. 15:36, 16:4-5

- 1. See how they are...Strengthening the churches, applying the apostolic wisdom from the Jerusalem counsel, continuing to teach gospel wisdom.
 - a) Unity between the Jews and Gentiles, Patience, love, growth.
- 2. But also pressing into the unreached areas. There is no conflict between healthy church and vibrant mission and evangelism.

D. A flexible schedule. 6-8

- 1. Closed doors, changed plans. (Jas.4:13ff)
 - a) *Can you take no for an answer? It's not a rebuke; it's protection.*
 - b) Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia?
 - c) Spirit of Jesus would not permit them into Mysia/Bithynia?
 - d) *Note who the Holy Spirit is.*
- 2. But consistent trust in the Lord's guidance and missional objectives.
 - a) Paul doesn't turn around and go home, he assumes there is more fresh territory, but just doesn't know exactly where yet.

E. A fresh field: Europe—The Macedonian Vision. 9-10.

1. Dramatic vision. The man asking for help.
 - a) Troas was a port city that had boats going to Macedonia (Philippi)
2. Confirmed by Communal Discernment. Paul sees it, but he apparently talks it over with his team.
 - a) The Greek sentence and wording means: to put together, think about it, conclude together = communal discernment.
 - b) He didn't just get the vision and tell everybody else what to do – *they concluded* together (not that Paul was afraid to make leadership decisions)
3. *Visions and dreams are submitted to communal discernment and the Word of God. This vision fits both perfectly.*
1 Thess. 5:19-22; Jer.24:28-29

III. Observations on Faithful life underway.

A. The Lord has plans that he doesn't tell us about. Rev.10:4 (secret prophetic thunders? Why?)

1. The Lord is ahead of us in every way, guiding us to places we hadn't thought of, bringing things to us we hadn't prepared for, calling us forward in him.
2. He is always doing more than we can see. 2 Cor.5:7.

B. Yet he still uses our initiative, calling and gifts. Phil. 2:12-13.

1. It is perfectly good for us to think, pray, plan, initiate new works as long as we hold loosely how they will proceed and turn out.
 - a) There is an arrogance that sometimes accompanies our strategies and planning sessions. Jas.4:13ff
 - b) Concurrence is the idea that God works in and through human decisions, actions, and prayers.
 - c) Compatibilism is the theological term that highlights God's use of both human and divine decisions "compatibly" in the same actions to bring about his will. Gen.50:20; 45:5; Rom.8:28; Eph.1:11
2. Paul doesn't stop his missionary focus; he just re-directs it according to the Lord's guidance.
3. *He is following the Lord, not just trying to "accomplish his mission."*

C. Because his ultimate purpose is his kingdom rather than ours.

1. His primary work is the spread of the gospel and the health of the church.
2. When these things are happening, there is salt and light in our fallen culture, which then can change and improve the culture.

D. And he is ultimately in control of everything. 6-8

1. Paul believed this, which is why he didn't argue with the Lord about the new direction, the closed doors, or anything else. Rom.8:28

IV. Discerning the Lord's direction in life (7 thoughts). There is no map...

A. It grows out of a lifestyle of personal loyalty to Christ.

1. *We are following the Lord himself, not our idea of the mission or ministry.*
2. The Lord is your personal Lord – His priorities are your priorities (not the other way around) (Col.3:1-4)

B. It clarifies as we grow in the word of the Lord. 15:36, 16:5

1. *Gospel wisdom actually becomes direction in many cases.*
2. The gospel revealed in the Scriptures, lived in ever deeper ways.
3. The health (strength) of the church; the proclamation of the gospel to those who have not heard.
4. *Many of our guidance questions don't have much to do with God's purposes, but with our desires.*

C. It fits with our gifts and calling. 5. (1 Cor.12; Eph.4:11-16)

1. *It is within our "wheelhouse" our basic, created, redeemed self.*
2. No new "calling" in this journey, but a logical extension of the existing one.

D. It becomes our desire. 15:36. Psalm 37:4

1. Verse 36. Paul's desires were to teach, preach, strengthen the churches. The Spirit planted these desires and fulfilled them.
2. *In my life it never occurred to me that I would want to stand in front of people and teach.*

E. It relies heavily on providence. 16:6-8

1. *God is already at work everywhere we go.*
2. The Spirit can change our direction, open doors, close doors. Circumstances that shape and limit our options.

F. It listens to wise Christians. 16:10

1. *A healthy, long-term relationship with mature believers is vital for living well as a Christian.*
2. If you hang with wise people, you become wiser

G. It rests in radical grace. 40. Rom.8:31-39

1. All of God's guidance and direction for believers stems from his personal grace in their lives, even when things are hard.