

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

THE CHURCH ON MISSION

THE GOD WHO SENDS

The Converts: All Kinds of People

John Piper, senior pastor of Bethlehem Church in Minneapolis, said in his sermon, *Treasuring Christ and Loving the Poor*, “There are 195 million non-churched people in America, making America one of the top four largest “unchurched” nations in the world. Each year 3,500 to 4,000 churches close their doors forever; yet only as many as 1,500 new churches are started. There are now nearly 60 percent fewer churches per 10,000 persons than in 1920.” The statistics make it obvious, people need the Lord NOW just as much as they did in the early days of Christianity.

Our lesson this week takes us to Paul’s second missionary trip. He and Barnabas had a disagreement after their first trip together and split up. Yet something good came from their disagreement – two teams went into God’s harvest field instead of one. After visiting the churches he had founded, Paul tried to enter new territory by traveling east but the Lord closed the door. We don’t know how God revealed His will we just know that He did. Everything had been going smoothly and undoubtedly these closed doors would have brought concern. However, for us, it is comforting to know that even in the early days of Christianity God’s will for their ministries was not always immediately clear! God planned for the message to go east at another time. This time they were to go west into Europe.

Paul received his directions from God. *Acts 16:9 (ESV)*⁹ *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”* Scripture is filled with men of God having dreams and visions. However, with the completion of the Bible, God does not have to use dreams and visions as much as He did before. That is not to say that He cannot or does not; God can communicate with us however He chooses. But when we have a decision to make, our first stop should always be the Bible, not a dream. Macedonia today is the northernmost province of Greece.

It is interesting to note that Paul saw a *man* in the vision at Troas, but the first people Paul ministered to were **women!** The Jewish rabbis always said, “It is better that the words of the Law be burned than be delivered to a woman!” But the mission of the church has always been to make converts of all kinds of people and Paul was willing to do just that.

It was a business woman whose heart is opened first in Macedonia!

*Read Acts 16:11-15 (ESV)*¹¹ *So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,*¹² *and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.*¹³ *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the*

gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

The Jewish population in Philippi must have been very small since there was no synagogue. Ten men were necessary to start a synagogue. There was only a place of prayer by the river outside the city. We do not have any background on Lydia’s previous religious upbringing but we are told that Lydia was a worshiper of God. This made her a ‘prime’ candidate to come to Christ. Lydia was a seller of purple dye from Thyatira. Purple was the most valued of the ancient dyes and was used in the coloring of woven materials. The dye was taken drop by drop from mollusks from the Mediterranean Sea. Purple was the color of some of the tabernacle furnishings and priests’ garments in the Old Testament but it was also the color of royal garments and official togas throughout the Roman Empire. By varying the dye-making process, other shades of blue became possible. Purple dye was a product in much demand so Lydia obviously had a lucrative business.

Verse 14 reveals that *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention*. We do not do the work. We share the message. It is God Himself who draws people to Himself. A person who has not yet accepted Christ may not immediately recognize the calling of God through the Holy Spirit. And, that is why the help of other Christians is so vital in bringing lost souls to Jesus. God can speak through us just like He spoke to Lydia through Paul. Lydia is mostly likely the first European to accept Christianity.

Lydia was baptized along with her household. Advocates of infant baptism look to this and other family baptism passages to prove their belief in the need for infant baptism. What occurred was similar to what happens in families still today – one family member shares with another and another and the whole family eventually ends up putting their faith in Christ and being baptized. It is pointless for anyone who does not know Christ to be baptized since baptism simply identifies believers with Christ. Baptizing infants can cause confusion for them later in life since baptism does not save.

Lydia was one of those wonderful people who would not take ‘no’ for answer when she invited the missionaries to stay at her house. Often when we offer help and people respond, “I don’t need anything,” we let it go. We should be like Lydia who **insisted** the missionaries accept her offer of help. That is one way to ‘connect’ with others.

Our next person is a slave whose freedom was won.

Read Acts 16:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸

And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

The girl met Paul and his companions in the street and shouted after them that they were *servants of the Most High God*, proclaiming *the way of salvation*. The half brother of Jesus said in **James 2:19 (ESV)**¹⁹ *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!* During Jesus' ministry, demons who possessed men sometimes professed that Jesus was the Son of the Most High God.

Apparently those who knew the girl did not regard her as insane or fraudulent. Rather they viewed her ability to foretell events as genuine. People paid the girl for her divination services, earning her masters a lot of money.

Satan is always at hand to oppose the work of the Lord, and in this case he used this slave girl. Note that her words appeared to be friendly to the apostles as though she was promoting the work of the Lord. Satan often appears as an angel of light. (**2 Cor. 11:13-15**) The slave girl's words would have caused misunderstanding since people in this area believed in many gods. Because the slave girl possessed this spirit of divination supposedly from Apollo, she might cause Jesus to be seen as just another god among the Greek gods.

We encounter the same difficulty today with people who appear to be supporting Christianity and Christian values and yet proclaim that all religions lead to the same God. **John 14:6 (ESV)**⁶ *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

The story does not tell whether the girl became a convert. It is my personal belief that she did. However, because of the freeing of the slave girl from her demons, bad things happened to Paul and his companions.

Read Acts 16:19-24 (ESV)¹⁹ *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.*²⁰ *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city."*²¹ *They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."*²² *The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.*²³ *And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.*²⁴ *Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

The owners had no concern for the girl; they were interested only in the income she provided, and now that income was gone. And yet, when they brought their charges against Paul and Silas, they charged them with public disturbance and said they were advocating non-Roman customs. These men put the blame on Paul and Silas, not because they were Christians, but because they were Jews. Roman citizens were not supposed to suffer in this way. Why didn't Paul and Silas plead their Roman citizenship? Scripture does not say.

The swift beatings show that the magistrates simply assumed the guilt of the missionaries and administered what we might call vigilante justice. Silas and Paul were whipped with rods or canes. Their clothes were literally torn off. These men were put in an inner cell and their feet fastened in stocks. With their backs torn and bleeding as a result of the dreadful beatings, the jailer does not so much as wash their stripes. And yet we are about to see a jailer whose hope is restored.

Read Acts 16:25-34 (ESV) ²⁵ *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,* ²⁶ *and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.* ²⁷ *When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.* ²⁸ *But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."* ²⁹ *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.* ³⁰ *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* ³¹ *And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."* ³² *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.* ³³ *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.* ³⁴ *Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*

In the midst of pain and imprisonment, Paul and Silas displayed joy in the midst of suffering. **James 1:2 (ESV)** ² *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. We should spend our days - the good and the bad - praying and singing to our Lord.* Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by. ... Songs in the night come only from God; they are not in the power of men."

God was in control even to the very shaking of the earth. But the earthquake was not to free Paul and Silas from a physical prison; the earthquake was about a prison jailer who needed to be freed from his sin. The jailer did not yet realize that God was in control. He was so desperate he thought killing himself was the only answer. But, Paul threw him a lifeline when he shouted, *Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.* We must reach out to others and share the good news just as Paul did because people's lives are at stake. Suddenly we hear the jailer asking the right question: *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* This is still the cry of lost people today! And, we need to be ready to give them the right answer: **Acts 2:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*