

## Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

**16** Paul<sup>[a]</sup> went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. <sup>2</sup>He was well spoken of by the believers<sup>[b]</sup> in Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup>Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. <sup>4</sup>As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.

## Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia

<sup>6</sup>They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup>When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; <sup>8</sup>so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup>When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

## The Conversion of Lydia

<sup>11</sup>We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup>and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district<sup>[c]</sup> of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. <sup>13</sup>On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup>A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>When she and her household were baptized, she urged

us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

## Paul and Silas in Prison

<sup>16</sup>One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup>While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you<sup>[d]</sup> a way of salvation." <sup>18</sup>She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup>But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. <sup>20</sup>When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews <sup>21</sup>and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." <sup>22</sup>The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup>After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup>Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup>Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. <sup>27</sup>When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup>The jailer<sup>[e]</sup> called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup>They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup>They spoke the word of the Lord<sup>[d]</sup> to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup>At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his

entire family were baptized without delay. <sup>34</sup>He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

<sup>35</sup>When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." <sup>36</sup>And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, "The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace." <sup>37</sup>But Paul replied, "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves." <sup>38</sup>The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; <sup>39</sup>so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. <sup>40</sup>After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters<sup>[9]</sup> there, they departed.

**June 2, 2019**  
**Acts 16**  
**Sent to Serve: Paul's Power and Privilege**  
**Kerra Becker English**

Paul is not Jesus.

He has absolutely no qualms about taking his power and his privilege and using it to his own advantage.

Whatever will open doors for the Kingdom is just fine with him.

He has been sent on a mission from God, and he's not going to let something fuzzy, like humility, or something so obviously less important, like other people's feelings, keep him from doing what he's been sent to do.

I've included this whole chapter because I think it really gives a solid sense of how Paul ratchets up his sense of commitment to eleven when it comes to spreading the gospel.

And yet, the steps he goes through in paying attention to God's call and responding with his commitment to serve are rather universal.

- 1) He has to decide where he's going to go.
- 2) He has to determine who will go with him, and to whom he will take his message.
- 3) And then he has to be clear about his purpose.

So let's go through these steps – because I think we take similar steps in our own spiritual journeys.

### 1) Step 1 - Where will Paul go?

Well for certain it isn't Asia. This passage makes it abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit FORBIDS Paul to speak the word in Asia. It kind of makes me wonder why that is. Maybe it was because he wasn't Asian, and would trip terribly over language and customs and values. Or maybe it's because the Spirit was encouraging a different form of religious growth and understanding in Asia. Or maybe it was because Paul ultimately knew that his Roman citizenship would offer him access through *that* world without much question and it wouldn't get him anywhere farther East. They also attempted to go into Bithynia, with its northern border on the Black Sea. Tried it. Didn't work out there. The spirit of Jesus moved them right along. But then in the middle of the night – Paul has a vision, a dream, that a man from Macedonia says to him, “Come on over and help us in Macedonia.” So, Paul pays attention to this vision to decide where it is that he WILL go.

#### 1a) How do we decide where to go?

I find it fascinating that in my coursework on spiritual direction, we not only talked about the importance of vocation (the calling to WHAT we are going to do) but we talked a lot about LOCATION (the calling to a place and certain understanding of the world). Location is almost always what we have to do first. Without context, our best laid plans can come to nothing. Therefore, it is important that we pay attention to where God is planting us – AND to where God is NOT asking to go. When we pay attention to the Spirit's direction – it seems as though our fruitfulness can ultimately be multiplied. I used to feel badly when I was a pastor in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and a sister congregation in Chicago would visit in the summer to bring their troubled youth to our area to spend time in the fresh air and see another part of the world. Their street-smart pastor liked to shock our congregation by talking about gun violence, and crushing urban

poverty, and the dangers of doing ministry in south side Chicago as if we weren't doing it "right" and had it way too easy living just shy of the beauty of the Smoky Mountains, and in an area of relative economic freedom. But I came to realize, as if I hadn't known it all along, that I would be a disaster of a pastor in inner-city Chicago. Even though I can understand the same language – I really don't – because my cultural knowledge of that area is about zilch. I would have been completely inept at what I was doing. In my ministry – God has called me to wander from the Northern to the Southern edges of the Appalachian mountain chain. I get drawn toward the East by the lure of the ocean's waves, but when the mountains start flattening out in the West, it's time for me to call it a "visit" and come home. Let me tell you, THAT geography fits. It's where I tend to find "my people." And then God called me specifically to Ashland – a small town with heart close to a city I already knew from my time in seminary where those mountains are but a short drive away, it seems perfection to me. Again, God has always let me know that the place and the people the Spirit has put in my paths of ministry are spot on. Paul had a similar experience. And he had the experience of whoa, not there, not now too. Something I've also known in examining my life and where it was headed at times. When we say the Spirit moves us, sometimes that means literally as well as figuratively.

2) Step 2 - Who will Paul take with him? And to whom will he go?

Again, another important question about call that we sometimes neglect. Who are our companions? Paul picks Timothy to accompany him – a person like himself who has one foot in the Jewish world and another in the Greek – because of his parents. Paul will use his influence to require something big of Timothy as he accepts this adventure. Paul demands that he be circumcised – to make sure that the decisions reached by the apostles and prophets in Jerusalem won't be questioned when they spread the story through the Greek world. I find it odd that he

won't require this of later Greek adherents. Though he makes Timothy go through it, he'll argue publicly with Peter that it shouldn't be expected. Timothy's thoughts don't seem to matter one bit.

And then, once in Macedonia, Paul has to find his community, the people who will be moved by the gospel message and take it even further. On the sabbath, he goes to a place of prayer, and perhaps humbled just a little, talks to an audience of exclusively women. Was this his first choice? Probably not. And yet, it's there that he meets Lydia who becomes not only a supporter, but a person who is willing to shelter him even after some tough scrapes with the law. God certainly has a sense of both timing and humor as we find out through the people put in our path, perhaps most especially in the ones who will lovingly stand beside us in all of our joys and difficulties.

2a) What about us? Who are the people we are grateful for – either as companions, or as those to whom we are called to share life?

Whether they are like us or quite different from what we expected, the Spirit gives us opportunities to be both guide and companion to others. Paul used his influence to ask Timothy for conformity to his Jewish heritage, but then maybe he learned from talking to the Macedonian women that his circle could be far bigger than he even imagined it to be. We do the same in our encounters. We are supported and loved and known by those who are often similar to us in certain ways, and we grow, and change, and make adjustments to our preconceived notions by joining with those whose life experiences may be “other” than our own. I'm pretty solidly Appalachian – but I may have learned the most from traveling outside my own comfort zones, listening to those whose life experiences are vastly different from my own. Like I said in the beginning Paul is NOT Jesus. And yet, here he is, almost the dead opposite of Jesus at least in

demeanor, making the story of Jesus Christ known far wider than it would have been without his efforts to share the gospel to just about every corner he could reach.

Would Jesus have remained a ‘nobody’ without Paul’s power and influence to spread the gospel outside of Galilee and Jerusalem? Who would Paul have been without Timothy, without Lydia? We may not be able to say for sure. But I know that I’m a better Kerra, because of my husband and children, because of my closest friends like Christy and Patrick, and because I have a faith community that helps me to grow as a pastor.

### 3) Step 3 - What exactly is this purpose that Paul cares so much about?

Well it seems to be telling people about salvation through Jesus Christ. And yet, in the second half of this chapter, some slave-girl fortune-teller is stealing Paul’s thunder. It’s rather comical really. Paul literally is traveling the known world to make this known and he has this person, this GIRL, following him around and proclaiming what he plans to teach before he’s able to say anything. So, he gets annoyed, like really annoyed, and demands that the spirit of divination go out of her in the name of Jesus. Which it does. And which starts him down the path to a world of trouble.

Her owners are none too happy when they find out their money making, fortune telling, slave girl has lost her gift. They report Paul and his companion Silas to the authorities. They get arrested, flogged, and jailed. But as much as Paul snapped at the girl, he seemed to change heart in the jail. He sang hymns and prayed, converted his jailor, and refused to simply walk out of jail when fortune turned his way and an earthquake opened his cell. Ahem, if ever there were a sign Paul, MAYBE this is it.

But no, he uses it as an opportunity to use his privilege to make a difference. He forces the Magistrates to action. He announces his ROMAN citizenship and demands that those who had him flogged and jailed out of political pressure come personally to free him. He knows that they will have to be more apologetic for their actions given his status as a full citizen. As weird as this story is with its plot twists, it highlights that Paul is nothing, if not committed to using his own power to attract attention – be it negative or positive – if it gets the message out.

3a) So how then, do we share the gospel message?

We do so in our own ways, in our own places, with connections to the people in our circles of influence. There really is no other way to do it. It isn't a question of IF you will use your power, your knowledge, and your influence, but HOW you will use the gifts that have been given to you. You have some. I guarantee it. It's about paying attention to the Spirit's work in your own life. Even if you usually think of yourself as someone without a great deal of effectiveness in the world, imagine that slave girl. Her grating irritation on Paul's last nerve got her a mention in scripture. Whatever it was that kept her announcing "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation," her insistence pushed the story to even farther corners where it could be heard, among the Magistrates, in the jail house, and now even we know at least a small part of her story. Where will you spend your time and energy, at work, at home, or through your travels? With whom will you share the journey? To what end? The places, the people, the stories are all yours. Paul used both his Jewishness and his Roman citizenship to speak to people about his faith in Jesus Christ, he used his willingness to travel, and his anger and stubbornness to prove his point.

Today, think about why you are where you are. Consider who you spend your time with. And then ponder what it is you're doing to take the message of Jesus Christ and his love with you.

You have power. Power is simply the strength you have from within. You also have privilege. You have the privilege to choose your own path. That privilege can be maligned of course. Some use their privilege and the weight of who they are to do incredibly self-serving things. But Paul, as crass as I imagine him to be, used his privilege to grow the Kingdom. May we use our own power and privilege to do the same, to share the love of God through Christ in the places and with the people God calls us to love and to serve. Amen.

## **Sacrament of the Lord's Supper**

### Invitation to Discipleship

Minister: If you are hungry for the living bread, if you are ready to trust the Lord of life, if you are called to love your neighbor and pray for your enemies, then you are ready to take on the adventure of faith!

***People: In this adventure, we are not alone. We walk the path of discipleship together.***

### Invitation to be Renewed at the Table

### Prayer of Thanksgiving

Minister: God abounds in love and mercy and welcomes our return.

***People: In Christ, God came to us that we might have abundant life.***

Minister: The Lord be with you.

***People: And also with you.***

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

***People: We lift them to the Lord.***

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

***People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.***

Minister: Holy God, you abound in love and mercy, welcoming our return...