

SERMON 15 — “JESUS, TAKE THE WHEEL”

Acts 16:1–20:38 | August 23, 2026 | Dave Geldart | Tru Community Church

1. INTRO – CHEESY TITLE

a. [1] We're in the final stretch with our Acts series.

i. Just two left!

b. I'll go ahead and admit it: today's sermon might have the cheesiest title in the whole history of this series:

i. [2] “Jesus, Take the Wheel.”

ii. Somewhere out there, a country song is playing right now.

1. Raise your hand if you can hear Carrie Underwood's voice in your mind right now!

iii. Or maybe this is more connecting:

1. [3] (Image of Jesus with the wheels he took)

c. But I'm keeping this title, because underneath the cheese is something we actually need to hear, and it's not what you'd expect.

d. [4] You might expect a sermon called “Jesus, Take the Wheel” to be about people who aren't following Jesus yet, handing him the keys to their life for the first time.

i. That's not this sermon.

e. **The Apostle Paul already handed Jesus the keys, years ago by this point in Acts.**

i. He isn't resistant or disobedient.

ii. He's doing exactly what God told him to do –

1. If that sounds familiar, it should.

2. **About a month ago, James preached about Paul's map getting completely rewritten by meeting the real Jesus on the Damascus road.**

iii. And ever since, he's being led by the Spirit,

1. Obediently taking the Gospel to the Gentiles

iv. **And in Acts 16, Jesus takes the wheel anyway.**

1. Not once, but again and again in chapters 16-20.

2. Paul tries one direction, the Spirit closes the door.

3. He tries another, the Spirit says no.

4. Then, in the middle of the night, a vision calls him toward a continent he never planned to visit.

f. Here's the real question buried in these chapters,

i. Not: **have you given Jesus control of your life?**

1. but something harder:

2. **now that you have, will you let him keep it?**

- g. **It's entirely possible to sincerely love Jesus, sincerely want his kingdom to advance,**
 - i. and still, quietly, start treating your preferred strategy for his mission as if it were the mission.
 - ii. That's not unbelief. That's just a wheel we forgot we were still gripping.
- h. Let's be clear early on something:
 - i. **Jesus taking the wheel doesn't mean we stop planning or working hard.**
 - 1. Paul is one of the most strategic, hardworking people in the New Testament.
 - ii. **It means our plans for following and serving Jesus never get to outrank the Spirit's leading.**
 - 1. We still build the itinerary and study the map.
 - 2. We just hold it loosely enough that when he says "turn here,"
 - a. we actually turn.
- i. Sometimes we picture the Christian life like this:
 - i. God hands us a destination,
 - ii. we build a plan,
 - iii. and if we're faithful enough,
 - iv. we execute it flawlessly.
- j. Acts gives us something different:
 - i. God gives us a mission,
 - ii. we make faithful plans,
 - iii. we take the next step,
 - iv. and we let Jesus keep his hand on the wheel,
 - 1. even when that means redirecting us on a route we didn't choose.
- k. That's where we're headed today.
 - i. **We're picking up speed and covering a lot of ground in Acts 16 through 20,**
 - 1. multiple cities, riots, imprisonments, churches planted, leaders raised.
 - 2. But there's no way to stop at every tree and landmark,
 - 3. so I want us to look at the landscape instead.
- l. We're going to stop at three places along Paul's road:
 - i. Macedonia, Athens, and Miletus.
- m. And in each one, we'll watch Paul let go of the wheel in a different way:
 - i. **where he goes, how he ministers, and who carries the mission after he's gone.**
 - ii. The mission belongs to Jesus. Always has, always will.
- n. Let's start with the first time the wheel gets taken out of Paul's hands.

2. [5] God Decides WHERE WE GO

- a. Acts 16:6-10 -- 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. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 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.
- b. Luke doesn't tell us how the Spirit stopped them from preaching in what's modern western and northern Turkey.
 - i. Maybe practical circumstances.
 - ii. Maybe an internal conviction so unmistakable it needed no explanation.
- c. What Luke does say is this: Paul had a plan (not necessarily a bad one!),
 - i. but the Holy Spirit had a different one.
- d. **Has that ever happened to you?**
 - i. **Good plans, even godly ones, and the Spirit takes you somewhere entirely different. How did you respond?**
- e. So what does Paul do?
 - i. He doesn't conclude God must not want him doing anything at all.
 - ii. He keeps moving, because Spirit-led Christianity was never meant to be passive Christianity.
 - iii. So he plans with open hands.
 - iv. And when he reaches Troas, in the middle of the night, he sees a man from Macedonia pleading with him: Come over and help us.
- f. Then Luke does something subtle. You may have noticed it:
 - i. **In v10, the pronoun shifts. It stops being "they."**
 - ii. It becomes "WE got ready at once to leave for Macedonia."
 - iii. The author, Luke, joins the team mid-sentence.
- g. And so the gospel crosses into Macedonia - Greece. Into Europe.
 - i. It all begins with a closed door that Jesus himself shut.
 - ii. One of the most consequential turns in Christian history begins with Paul being told no.
- h. **We tend to assume God's guidance will always feel like an open door.**
 - i. **But sometimes it looks like a door slamming shut in your face.**

- ii. And sometimes the most spiritual sentence you can say is, “I guess that wasn't where the Spirit was leading us.”
- i. **That's hard, isn't it!?**
 - i. Because we tend to grade our plans by whether they succeed.
 - 1. Plan works, God must have blessed it.
 - 2. Plan fails, we must have failed.
- j. But Acts hands us another category:
 - i. **sometimes a faithful plan fails because God sees something better**
 - 1. That's not failure. That's redirection.
- k. **Maybe you've been staring at a closed door recently,**
 - i. a relationship, a career, a ministry you thought was yours to carry,
 - ii. quietly assuming it means you failed.
- l. **PERSONAL: I've shared before, how years ago in a previous ministry role, I hit a closed door I didn't see coming.**
 - i. It led me through a season of real confusion and hurt,
 - 1. seriously wondering whether it meant I was a failure at ministry and supposed to give it up entirely.
 - ii. But God saw far more than I did.
 - iii. He used that season to root my identity and my calling much more deeply in him,
 - 1. not in ministry production, not in visible effectiveness,
 - 2. not in circumstances lining up the way I wanted
 - 3. or how much approval I got from others.
 - iv. That closed door is part of what eventually led me here, to Tru, as your pastor.
 - 1. I'm exceedingly grateful for it now,
 - 2. even though I wouldn't have chosen it.
- m. **Now, I want to be careful here: because not every closed door is automatically God's redirection.**
 - i. Sometimes doors close because we made foolish choices,
 - 1. or simply because we live in a broken world.
 - ii. Wisdom and patience should come before we slap God's name on a closed door.
 - 1. But sometimes he really is behind it, redirecting.
- n. That's the first lesson from Paul's experiences, buried in these chapters:
 - i. **we make plans, the Spirit gets to change them.**
- o. It's worth asking ourselves too:
 - i. **have I made a plan and told God to bless it,**
 - ii. **or made a plan and genuinely surrendered it to him?**

- p. Those sound almost identical. They are not.
 - i. One says, God, here's what we're doing, please help make it happen.
 - ii. The other says, here's what I believe is wise and faithful, but if you want to redirect me, I will follow.
- q. That's not just personal, it's ours as a church too.
 - i. **We've spent more than a year talking about multiplication,**
 - 1. the ripple of the gospel starting with our small acts of obedience,
 - a. engaging our neighbors, personal discipleship,
 - b. raising up leaders, sending.
 - 2. We need plans for that. Budgets. Strategy. Equipping. Wisdom.
 - ii. **But none of it gets to become the mission itself.**
 - iii. **The mission belongs to Jesus.**
 - 1. And the Spirit still gets to say, "Not that way. I love your heart. Will you trust me enough to let me turn the wheel right instead of left?"
 - 2. Even when you don't understand"
- r. So far, the Spirit of God has redirected where Paul goes.
 - i. But something else happens once he arrives:
 - 1. the Spirit doesn't only move his feet,
 - 2. he reshapes how Paul opens his mouth.
 - ii. Nowhere is that more visible than in Athens.

3. [6] God Decides HOW WE MINISTER

- a. Athens is where the landscape changes under Paul's feet.
- b. Luke tells us Paul is deeply provoked by what he finds there,
 - i. a huge city crowded with idols.
- c. **If we're serious about saying yes to Jesus' call for each of us to live lives on mission,**
 - i. **We have to learn to love and relate to people who don't share our vocabulary,**
 - ii. **don't carry our assumptions about marriage or politics or Scripture or God**
- d. So Paul does what Paul does: he starts talking about Jesus.
 - i. But watch how.
- e. He doesn't walk in and recycle the same sermon he'd give in a Jerusalem synagogue.
 - i. He pays attention. He listens before he speaks.
 - ii. And eventually he's standing in the Areopagus,
 - 1. the public square where the city's leaders debated matters of state and religion,
 - 2. addressing people who don't share his Scriptures, his categories,

- a. or a single one of his assumptions about God.
- f. [7] Acts 17:22-24, 28, 30-31 -- Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship, and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. [8] ... For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring. ... In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."
- g. Paul starts with something he actually noticed about them,
 - i. their altar to an unknown god.
 - ii. He quotes their own poets back to them.
 - iii. He starts where they are. But he doesn't leave them there.
- h. **Paul contextualizes the gospel without compromising it,**
 - i. **a needle very few thread well.**
 - ii. The gospel doesn't change. Jesus doesn't change.
 - iii. The resurrection and the call to repentance don't change.
 - iv. But Paul's approach changes, because the people in front of him have changed.
- i. That's part of what the Spirit is doing across these chapters,
 - i. not just moving the gospel geographically, but also culturally,
 - 1. into rooms full of people who don't look like Paul,
 - 2. don't think like Paul,
 - 3. don't carry his categories.
- j. The gospel keeps moving, and the missionary keeps having to learn how to carry an unchanging message into a constantly changing room.
- k. Critically, Paul doesn't dilute the gospel to make Athens comfortable,
 - i. but he doesn't require Athens to become Jerusalem before he'll say a word about Jesus either.
 - ii. He goes to them, listens, learns their heart language --
 - iii. Then faithfully proclaims Christ.
- l. If we're serious about saying yes to Jesus' call for each of us to live lives on mission
 - i. We have to learn to love and relate to people who don't share our vocabulary,
 - ii. don't carry our assumptions about marriage or politics or Scripture or God

- m. **PERSONAL STORY** – During and after college, I spent time building friendships with Muslim students at K-State,
 - i. and I quickly learned I couldn't just repeat my Sunday school answers and expect them to land.
 - 1. We used similar words,
 - a. God, sin, salvation, even Jesus
 - 2. But we meant profoundly different things by them.
 - ii. **I had to learn how they already talked about God before they could ever hear how I talked about Jesus.**
 - 1. This is same move Paul makes with the altar and the Greek poets:
 - a. Start with the familiar, then lead somewhere new.
- n. **That's exactly what we learned from Dilan's sermon last week:**
 - i. the mission of Jesus was never about getting people to come into our culture.
 - ii. The Holy Spirit didn't want non-Jewish people to become culturally Jewish in order to come to Christ.
 - iii. They could follow Jesus straight into his kingdom. Amen?
- o. **We've often assumed people would become Christians if we just did church a little better,**
 - i. as though everyone outside these walls is basically like us, minus one decision.
 - ii. Acts won't let us keep that assumption.
 - iii. Same gospel. Different doorway.
- p. So Jesus takes the wheel on where Paul goes, and on how Paul ministers.
 - i. But at the far end of this road, the surrender gets even more personal than geography or method.
- q. Eventually Paul has to hand over the wheel of the thing he built with his own hands, sweat, and years.
 - i. That takes us to a beach on the western coast of Turkey, near Ephesus
 - 1. a place called Miletus.

4. [9] God Decides: WHO CARRIES THE MISSION [Acts 20:17-38]

- a. We're in Acts 20, and by now Paul has been on the road for years.
- b. The gospel has crossed into Macedonia, taken root in Corinth, grown deep in Ephesus.
- c. Churches planted. Leaders raised from nothing.
 - i. Now Paul is Jerusalem-bound.
 - ii. But before he goes, he sends for the elders of the church at Ephesus and meets them at the coast as he's traveling through.

- d. This isn't a routine check-in.
 - i. He spent years with these people, taught them, loved them,
 - ii. poured his life into them.
 - iii. And now he's telling them plainly he doesn't expect to see their faces again.
- e. "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace." Acts 20:22-24
- f. Notice the language. Not the ministry I built.
 - i. The task the Lord Jesus has given me.
- g. Paul is a participant in the mission, a steward of it, never the owner.
 - i. **And the Spirit is asking him to trust Jesus enough to release what he's spent years building.**
- h. **This may be the hardest kind of surrender there is.**
 - i. It's one thing to let go of something you don't care about.
 - ii. It's another to let go of something you love.
 - iii. Paul loves these people, these churches,
 - 1. and the Spirit is leading him somewhere else, toward a future he can't map.
- i. So what does he do?
 - i. He doesn't try to make himself indispensable, or build something that collapses the moment he's gone.
 - ii. Instead, he charges the people in front of him with the weight of what's coming:
- j. [10] "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Acts 20:28-32
- k. He warns them. Teaches them. Charges them.
- l. **Then commends them to God, and lets go.**
 - i. **That's multiplication.**
 - ii. We often reduce that word to numbers:

- 1. more people, more churches, more baptisms.
- iii. But underneath it is something more personal:
 - 1. **investing so deeply in other people that the mission can continue without you standing in the room.**
- iv. Paul hasn't merely gathered followers, he's raised up shepherds.
 - 1. **That's success. Full stop.**
- m. **I've served under leaders** who held on too tight, and leaders who let go too much —
 - i. neither one was fun to follow,
 - ii. and neither one multiplies anything.
 - iii. I'd rather help set the goals and guardrails,
 - 1. hand over real ownership,
 - 2. and let it look 60% like what I'd have done myself.
- n. Here's an uncomfortable question for anyone who leads anything:
 - i. **what happens when you're gone, when you're not the one everyone calls first?**
 - ii. **Does the thing you've been carrying stall out, or does it keep moving?**
- o. If everything depends on us, we may have built something impressive.
 - i. But we haven't built something that multiplies.
- p. Paul's ministry was strong enough that he could walk away and it would still stand.
 - i. That's the leadership the Spirit produces:
 - 1. Not indispensable leaders. Multiplying ones.
- q. **That's where this connects to what we've been living out as a church,**
 - i. **and the danger underneath it:**
 - 1. we can build a plan,
 - 2. get the right people in the right seats,
 - 3. and slowly start believing our plan *is* the mission of God.
 - a. It isn't.
 - 4. Jesus is still the one with his hand on the wheel.
- r. Maybe that's why the goodbye at Miletus lands the way it does.
- s. **[11] "When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship." Acts 20:36-38**
- t. They pray. They weep.
 - i. They embrace him one last time, knowing they may never see each other again.
- u. And then Paul leaves.
- v. Paul doesn't say, I'll stay where it's safe and known.

- i. He entrusts them to God and keeps following the Spirit,
- ii. because he's learned something most of us are still learning:
 - 1. I don't have to control the mission for it to succeed.**
 - 2. In fact, I may have to release control for it to multiply.**
- w. Maybe that's the word some of you need this morning.**
 - i. Maybe you're gripping something white-knuckled,
 - 1. A plan, a role, a ministry, a position you've carried so long you've convinced yourself that if you don't do it, it won't get done.
 - ii. The Spirit isn't asking you to quit.**
 - 1. He's asking you to raise somebody up.**
 - 2. Let somebody else try, and stumble, and grow capable,
 - 3. until one day they carry something you once carried.
 - a. That's not losing control. That's multiplication.
- x. So ask yourself:
 - i. who could carry this mission because you invested in them?**
- y. That's not a question just for pastors and elders,
 - i. it's for parents, grandparents, small-group leaders, coaches, teachers,
 - ii. anyone who follows Jesus and has influence over even one other person.
- z. The question isn't only what am I doing for Jesus?**
 - i. It's who am I preparing to do this after me?**

5. (CLOSING: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER)

- a. So here's where I want to leave this:
 - i. The mission belongs to Jesus —**
 - 1. our plans, our methods, even our own place in the story,
 - 2. are to be held with open hands,
 - 3. on a wheel that was always His to begin with.
 - ii. We are not the Savior.
 - 1. We are not the owner.
 - iii. That means ultimately I'm not the one steering this church.**
 - 1. Neither are the elders.
 - 2. Neither are you.
 - 3. Jesus is.**
 - 4. And that is enormously freeing.**
- b. You don't know the whole road ahead
 - i. as we continue to follow the Spirit into our world.

- ii. Neither do I.
 - iii. But you only have to be faithful with the stretch directly in front of you, because the road was never yours to own.
- c. The mission isn't ours.
 - i. This church isn't ours.
 - ii. The people we're pouring into aren't ours.
 - iii. They belong to Jesus —
 - 1. His mission is bigger than our map, our methods, our ministry.
 - iv. **And if He's the one with His hand on the wheel,**
 - 1. **we can trust Him enough to let go —**
 - 2. **when He says not that way,**
 - a. even when He says make room for someone else,
 - b. even when He finally says, it's time to let go completely.
- d. [12] Today it's: Jesus, take the wheel.
- e. Next week, we'll wrap up this Acts series asking the question this one leaves hanging in the air.
 - i. Because letting go of the wheel isn't the same thing as getting out of the car or going to sleep on the dash.
 - ii. **The mission doesn't depend on us. But the mission does include us.**
- f. So next week we ask what it looks like to stay engaged in the mission
 - i. when Jesus' hand is on the wheel
 - ii. and he keeps moving forward no matter what stands in the way.

6. [13] APPLICATION

- a. As we close, I want to give you a few specific ways to actually live this out this week,
 - i. two for you personally, and one for us together.
- b. **Personally:**
 - i. [14] First, name one plan, decision, or ministry you're gripping too tightly right now.
 - ii. **Write it down now**, literally, on paper or in your notes app.
 - iii. Then pray one honest sentence over it:
 - 1. Jesus, you take this.
 - 2. Not, help me with this. Take it.
 - 3. I'll follow wherever you lead.
 - 4. [PAUSE]
 - iv. And a second one, just as personal:

- v. [15] think back over the last twelve months and identify one closed door you never let yourself call redirection,
 - 1. you just called it failure, or bad luck, or somebody else's fault.
 - 2. **This week, journal through it.**
 - 3. **Ask God what he may have opened instead**, even if you can't fully see it yet.

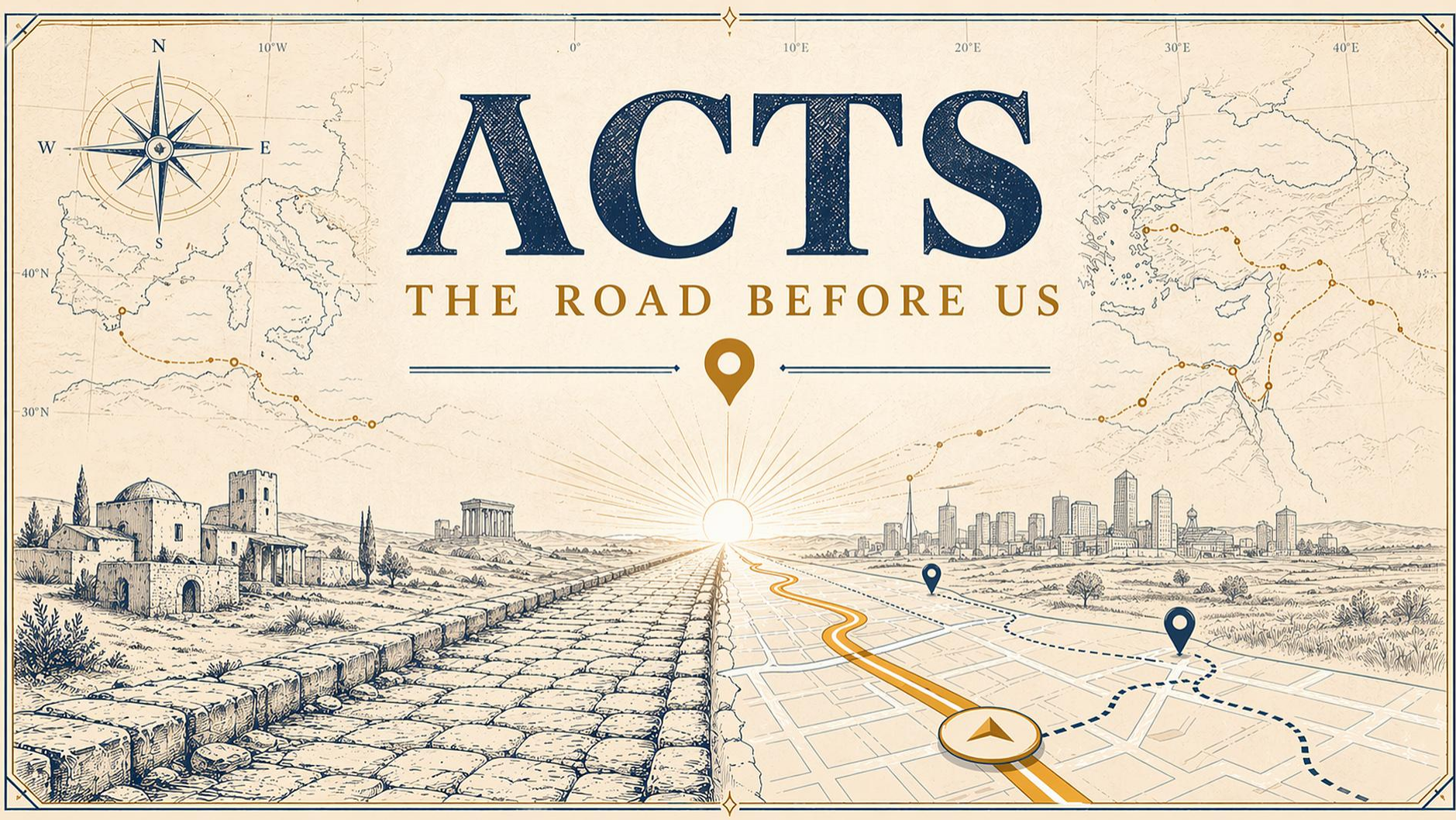
c. [16] **TOGETHER, as a church:**

- i. We've had plenty of definitions of what success at Tru could look like over the years:
 - 1. Bigger numbers. Bigger budgets.
 - 2. An expanded building.
 - 3. Being the go-to church in St. George.
 - 4. A specific new ministry we've dreamed about.
- ii. None of those are wrong to want or plan for.
- iii. [17] But right now, we release the outcomes of those to God's leading,
 - 1. even while we keep dreaming and planning.
 - 2. We just stop insisting the mission has to look a certain size, or a certain way, to count as faithful or successful.

7. **Pray with me** -- as we sit with this teaching,

- a. and commit ourselves and our place in his mission back to the Lord.

b. [18] PRAY



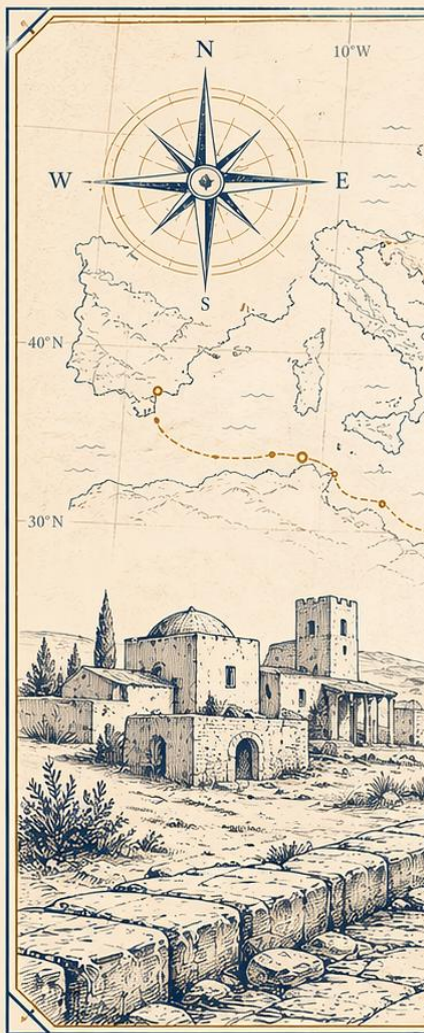
ACTS

THE ROAD BEFORE US

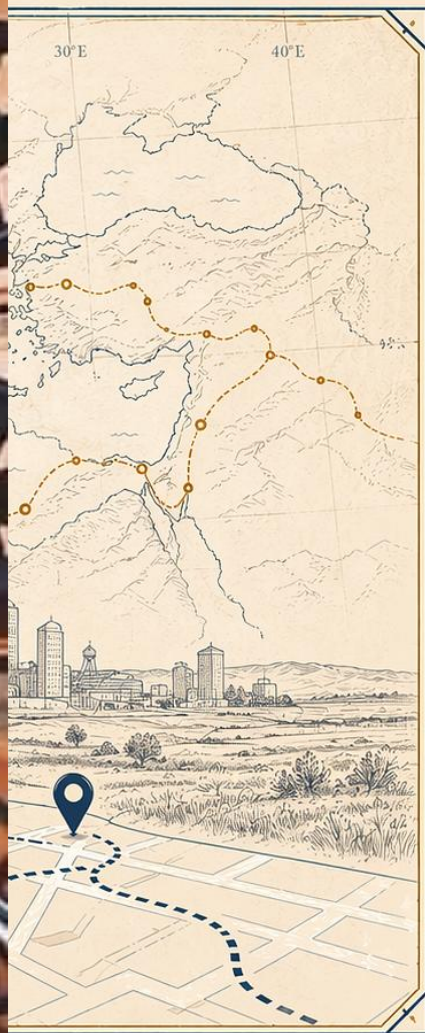
JESUS, TAKE THE WHEEL

ACTS 16-20

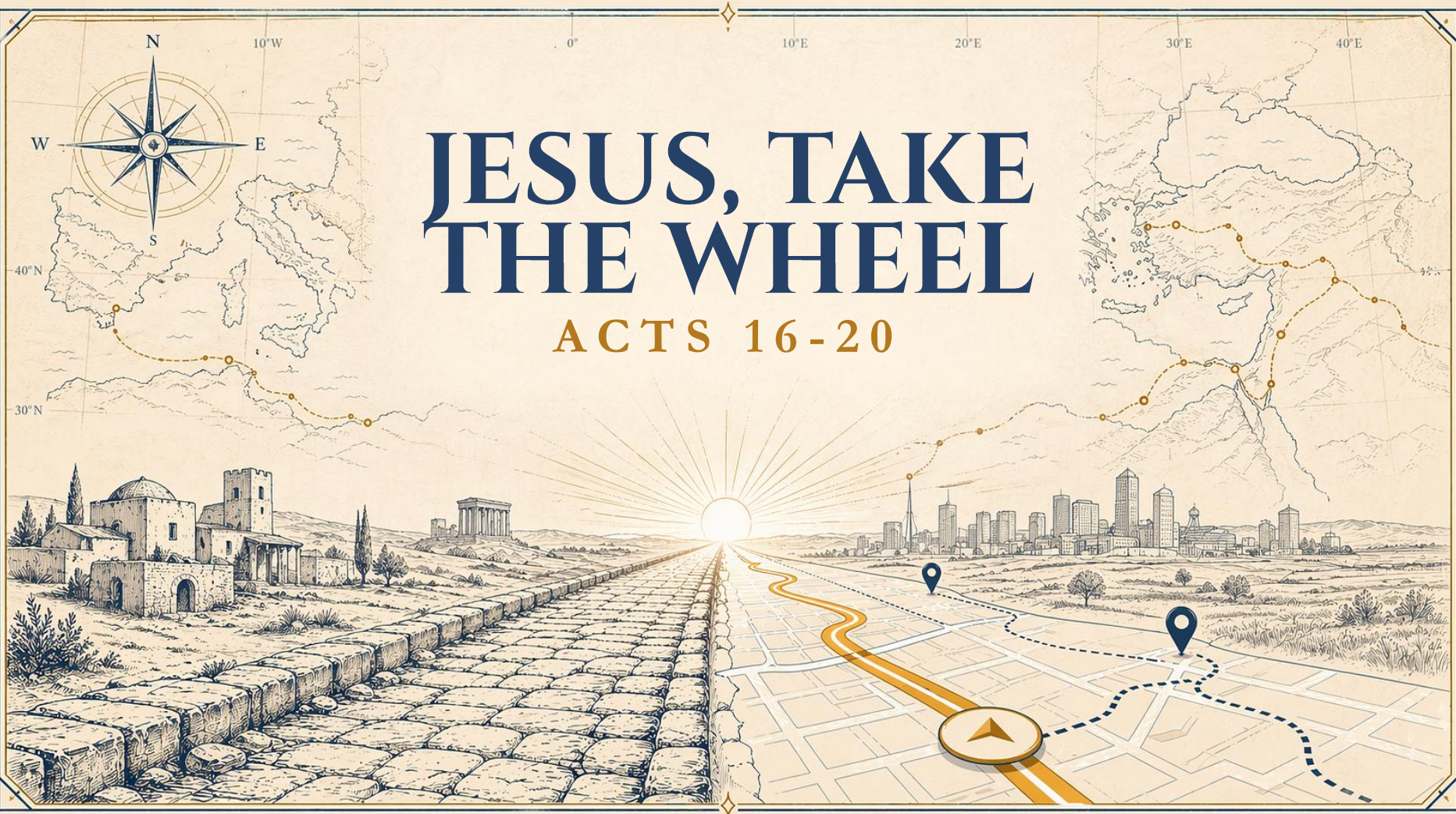




Jesus next to all the wheels he has taken



ACTS 16-20



GOD DECIDES WHERE WE GO

ACTS 16: ⁶ 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. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ 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.



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GOD DECIDES HOW WE MINISTER

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ACTS 20: ²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.



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JESUS, TAKE THE WHEEL



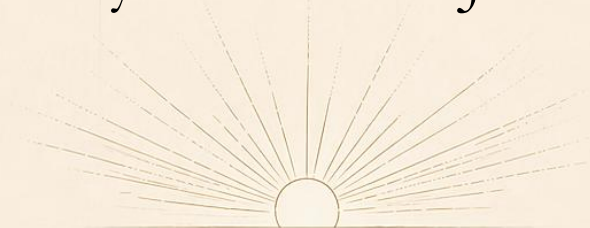
APPLICATION



APPLICATION

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2. **Identify** one closed door you've never let yourself call redirection. Journal through it this week, asking God what he may have opened instead that you can't fully see yet.

TOGETHER



APPLICATION

PERSONALLY

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TOGETHER

3. We **release** the outcomes of our church's ministry to Jesus, including exactly what that should look like.



JESUS, TAKE THE WHEEL

ACTS 16-20

