

The Spirit of Jesus (The Road 8/13/17)

Acts 16:1-15

Introduction

It's good to be back in the book of Acts. In Acts we see Christ the King building his Church. That might sound a little impersonal until you realize that "the Church" is really people. We could just as easily say that Jesus is building a family out of people. Our God is a people person. And he's not just the God of one type of people. Our God is making a family out of every type of person, every color of skin every language, every culture. Racism is the opposite of the gospel

In the book of Acts we meet some very interesting and very diverse people. Of course, the book of Acts references thousands people, most of them are not named. But through these people that God is reaching in the book of Acts, God is showing us his great power and love. And it's through God's power and love in the lives of these people, that we get a glimpse of how power and love toward us.

Timothy

Paul met Timothy 5 years previous in his first missionary journey through Lystra

"My true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), "My child" (1 Tim. 1:18)

Mother was a Jew Father was a Gentile

Paul credits his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) for passing on their faith to him. From childhood they ensured that he was acquainted with the holy Scriptures

Paul wants Timothy to go with him and Silas in their great work of strengthening existing Churches and planting new ones. But before they leave, Paul makes Timothy do something that seems outrageous.

Paul had him circumcised. Why does that seem so outrageous? What would lead Paul to want to do this and what would lead Timothy to voluntarily do something that would be so painful and humiliating? Remember it was just in Acts 15 that people were saying that in order to be saved, a man would have to be circumcised. Paul was the biggest opponent of this lie. The gospel is that we are saved by grace alone, not by works which we do. At the Jerusalem council, it was decisively concluded that circumcision wasn't necessary for salvation. In fact, verse 4 tells us that they still carrying the news of the Jerusalem council on circumcision to the believers in the towns they were headed to.

This presses the question, why would Paul do this and why would Timothy endure something so extreme? Do you know why we are so offended when we hear this? We live in a day and culture that says be proud of who you are and never let anyone question you. We live in an age of entitlement that says, no one has the right to infringe on my rights and my desires. The greatest sin in our culture is to question what someone else feels. If I feel like having sex and then having the baby murdered in my womb, that's my business. If I have been born as male but feel like I'm a female, then no one has the right to question how you feel.

But here's Timothy, half Jew, half Greek... He is not required by God to be circumcised. He doesn't need to be circumcised in order to be saved. But because there were Jews in the towns they were going to evangelize, and because they were such a strategic part of the plan to the advance of the gospel, Timothy willingly placed the needs of others above his own identity, his own needs, his own comfort, and his own feelings. The fact that Timothy has been raised as a Jew by a Jewish mother and had not been obedient to Jewish law would have functioned as a barrier and would have hindered his witness to the gospel. Out of love for people he didn't even know, he humbled himself and did something that God did not require him to do in order to share the love of Jesus and spread the good news of the gospel.

What could cause him to endure such a cost to love others?

Luke

If you study the book of Luke you'll notice we come to a really interesting transition. Look at verse 8: (**read 8-10** – transition from they to we).

* Notice the circumstances leading up to Luke joining Paul's

Paul and Silas, along with Timothy are travelling from Lystra and Iconium up into the area between Phrygia and Galatia.

At first they wanted to go into the Roman province of Asia, but look at what verse 6 says.

“Having been forbidden by the Spirit to speak the word in Asia...”

So they travel a little further and try to turn and go into Galatia. But look at verse 6

“They attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of the Jesus did not allow them.”

A couple of things to notice

1. Even though the Scriptures are very clear, we’re not told exactly how they were forbidden. Local authorities didn’t allow them. Did their camel break down every time they tried to go in that direction? By prophecy? Whatever the case may be, God in his wisdom and providence did not allow them to go in either of those directions.
2. Notice what it says again in v7 – I want you to see the description of the Holy Spirit here, he’s described as “the Spirit of Jesus...” Do you see this? Jesus is building his Church through the Holy Spirit. Everyone of these towns, every single one of these people reached by the gospel, Jesus is personally reaching them through the Holy Spirit.

This is an excellent example of what it says in:

Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

What about you? Are there plans you’ve made in the past, and in spite of all your efforts they just didn’t work out? Instead of getting frustrated, have you stopped to consider that maybe God is guiding you away from your plans because his plans are better for you? Right this moment for some of you, you desperately want something. But if God is shutting the doors on it, if he’s not allowing it... he’s either saying not to it or not yet. The question is, do you trust him. Have you come to the point in your life where you can be content with God’s will for your life. Or, when your own plans don’t work out the way you want them to, do you get angry? depressed?

What resulted from God forbidding Paul, Silas, and Timothy to go to either Asia or Bithynia?

The course God leads them on leads them to Luke, the beloved Physician. Luke becomes one of Paul’s most trusted travelling companions. Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke and of the Book of Acts. Together these two books of the NT are more that 27% of the volume of the NT. One of the great results of these frustrated plans is that we get two major portions of our NT Bible.

Lydia

We’ll this leads us to our third person. First we looked at Timothy and how he was willing to make major personal sacrifices for the sake of the gospel. And then we saw Luke and how God’s providence frustrated the plans of Paul, Silas, and Timothy in order for Luke to join the team. Now we come to Lydia.

After God refuses to allow Paul and his team to go to Asia and Bithynia, Paul sees a vision in the middle of the night. And in the vision a man from Macedonia is pleading with Paul for help.

Acts 16:10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

They sail from Troas to Macedonia and eventually make their way to Philippi which we’re told is one of Macedonia’s leading cities. There was no Synagogue in Philippi. Ten Jewish men were required to form one. But on the Sabbath, Paul found a group of women who were gathered to pray. One of those women was named Lydia. Lydia was a wealthy business woman. She was a sales person who specialized in purple goods that originated from her home town, Thyatira.

Now, this is so awesome! Can you guess where the town of Thyatira was located? Thyatira was back in Asia which is the area that God had forbidden Paul and the other men to go. Listen closely. God’s plan was to get the gospel to Lydia of Thyatira. The only problem was, Lydia wasn’t in Thyatira. So God got the gospel to where Lydia was. I want you to hear this. God’s timing is perfect. He’s on time God. For every believer, if you’re a believer here this morning, God had his perfect time for bringing the gospel to you.

Notice another thing the text says...

Not only had the Spirit of Jesus been guiding the circumstances surrounding Lydia to get the gospel to her, but the Holy Spirit is also going to do a massive work inside her. Look at verse 14 –

Acts 16:14 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.**

Not only had God, by his providence, been directing Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Lydia, but the Holy Spirit opened Lydia's heart so that she could see and respond to the gospel. Do you realize that before anyone can respond to the gospel, the Spirit must first work in our hearts?

Why is that? Because the Bible says that spiritually, we are dead and unable to please God unless he first causes us to be born again. That's what it means in Ephesians 2:1 when it says we "were dead in trespasses and sins." That's what Jason read this morning in Colossians 2

Colossians 2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Do you see why this is so important? If it's up to you to open your own heart to the gospel, then at the end of the day you could give yourself some of the credit for your salvation. But if you are dead in your sins, and it takes the grace of God, from first to last to rescue you from your sins, then all the glory goes to God.

*Often the gospel is presented like this. You're told that you're in trouble and that you're like a person drowning. And the gospel is like someone comes by and throws you a rope, but it's up to you whether you take hold of the rope or not.

Well, what's wrong with this picture? The problem is the Bible doesn't say that we are drowning in our sins. It says we're dead in our sins. That means that, before grace, we are like a person who is dead at the bottom of the ocean, and Jesus not only dives in to save us, but he grabs our lifeless bodies and swims us to the shore and he breathes into our souls the breath of life. And being born again we can see Christ and what he's done on the cross and we believe in him and all that he's done.

Now, you may say, but... Pastor, what about free will? To which, I'll respond, that's fine. I believe as human beings, God has given us the ability to genuinely make choices. But, the Bible also says that sin has so corrupted us that unless God intervenes, we love sin so much, that we don't have the ability to will things that are pleasing to God.

But friends, when the Holy Spirit opens our hearts, like he opened Lydia's, then we have the ability to freely choose to follow Christ. It's the only way.

Conclusion

Ok, so what is the Spirit of Jesus teaching us today through the lives of Timothy, Luke, and Lydia? He's teaching us that we need to be concerned with removing barriers to the gospel and we need to rely desperately on the saving grace of the Holy Spirit for our gospel witness.

Can I just ask you, what are some of the types of barriers that we might have set up that would prevent others from hearing the gospel? Sometimes Churches erect unnecessary barriers through traditionalism. It's very common for Churches, especially here where we live, to say "Hey! we've been doing it this way in this church since the days of the Apostles. And not to mention, my grandfather sang that same song that same way when he was a child. And so out of a sentimental attachment to the past we hold on to our traditions guaranteeing that we won't be used in the present for the spread of the gospel. Of courses in other churches if it's not new, it's not cool. So often the message of the gospel gets drowned out by chasing the latest fads in worship trends and church growth strategies.

You know, sometimes we create personal barriers for the gospel too. For instance, if you claim to be a Christian, but there's no discernable difference in the way you live your life in the world, then your life itself is a barrier to the gospel. If people come to truly know Jesus is will be in spite of you instead of through you.

Here's a tough one. Sometimes, even with our sincere intentions we can set up barriers for our own loved ones, that make it difficult or impossible for them to hear the gospel from us. Maybe you want more than anything for your children or parents to hear the gospel, but they've hurt you or disappointed you so deeply that you've not responded always like a Christian.

What are the barriers

The good news of salvation by grace alone is that there's no case too hard, there's no one too far away, that the Spirit of Christ can't reach them just like he did Lydia. That should lead us to a renewed confidence, and a renewed hope as well at utter dependence on the Holy Spirit to lead us to the lost and to do the work in their hearts that only he can do. And if he's done that work in your heart, today here in this place, we fall on our faces, grateful for the grace that reaches even me.