

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #37

Acts 16:11-15

We live in a time when most people in the religious world are intoxicated with the idea of mega-churches and mega-programs. They want it big, they want it professional and they want it loud. However, when we actually take a journey through the Word of God we don't find that church idea anywhere in Scripture. For example, when Paul was on his missionary journeys, there was no such thing as a mega-church given to professionally produced programs. What we find is that Paul would go into an area and simply preach the Scriptures and God would save people, and then those people would form a church and the church met and was primarily focused on carefully understanding the words and the doctrines of God.

As we come to this text, Paul is on his second missionary journey. This second missionary journey with Silas, Timothy and Luke will accomplish some major things. By the time this journey is done, there will be churches established in many of the major cities of the ancient world- Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus. But the trip described in these verses, takes us into Europe. There is certainly nothing flashy or gimmicky about what Paul does.

This passage of Scripture is very exciting for us, because this is the moment God directed His grace Gospel to come to Europe and ultimately to the United States. We may remember that Paul had wanted to go south to Asia and then north to Bithynia and the Spirit of God would not let him. As we said, this is the sovereign negative guidance of God. God shuts down doors in Paul's life because He wants Paul somewhere else. When God shuts doors, he doesn't want us to stop or quit, he wants us to keep serving until He opens the right door.

Sometimes you may find that you wonder what God wants you to do or where God wants you to be. You move one way and it doesn't work. You move another way and it doesn't work. Well keep moving and stay faithful because God is still sovereign and He is still directing your life.

Paul ended up in Troas and while he was in Troas he received a direct revelatory vision from God from a man from Macedonia to come over there and help them by preaching and teaching God's Word (**16:9**). By the way, this is what will really help people the most; accurate preaching and teaching of God's Word. This is so foreign to the way most people think- they think counseling helps them the most or social programs help them the most; what actually does help them is accurate preaching and teaching of God's Word.

It would appear from **verse 10** that in view of the pronoun "we" that Luke is now with them. So when Paul got the vision to go to Macedonia, immediately Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke found a ship sailing out of Troas and they got on it and set sail for Macedonia, which is about 130-150 miles to the east (**Acts 16:10-11**). What we see is this:

WHEN PAUL KNEW GOD'S WILL HE IMMEDIATELY PURSUED IT AND GOD USED HIM AND BLESSED HIM, BUT NOT IN THE WAY ONE WOULD THINK.

Now in these verses there are two main historical facts spelled out:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Paul travels to Macedonia . 16:11

To actually get into Macedonia (Europe), Paul needed to cross a narrow strip of the Aegean Sea. **Acts 16:11a** says they ran a “straight course” to Samothrace. Samothrace is a mountainous island in the northeastern part of the Aegean Sea. The Greeks called this island “Poseidon’s Island” because they claimed the great Greek gods of waters, earthquakes and horses lived atop Mount Fengari, which stands 5,577 feet high. According to **Acts 16:11b**, they all sailed to the island of Samothrace in one day, and the very next day they sailed to the port city of Neapolis, which will actually put Paul on “European shores” (modern day Greece).

Now this is intriguing because the goal of Paul is to take that Gospel of grace to Macedonia and there is no hint that he paused for one second to try and take it to this heathen island of Samothrace. It is possible he shared some truth there, but there is no biblical record. There certainly was no focused attempt to evangelize this island. He was in and out of this island in just a few hours. There are times when God’s Word is directed to one place and when it is there, take advantage of it because it may not always be there.

It certainly does appear, from **verse 11**, that they made this trip from Troas to Neapolis in two days, which would indicate they had the wind with them, at their backs. I talked with a sailor recently who told me with the wind at your back a sailboat can cruise along at nearly ten miles per hour. So from Troas to Neapolis would take between 15-20 hours. On their return trip it took five days (Acts 20:6), which would indicate the wind was not at their backs. So God was actually controlling the winds to make sure that Paul and his team got to Europe as fast as possible. This was God’s plan and this was God’s will.

The next day, Paul came to Neapolis, which, according to Horatio Hackett, would take about 7-8 hours even with the wind at your back (*Acts*, p. 184). Actually the Greek reads he came to the Nean polis or Nean city, which means “new city.” Neapolis was a seaport city of Philippi, which was actually called the “port of Philippi.” It was located on what is called the “Via Ignatia” which connects the Adriatic and the Black Seas. Archeologists are not sure where the actual city of Neapolis was located, but most believe it was near modern day “Kavalla,” which today is part of Greece.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Paul travels into Philippi . 16:12-15

Philippi was the most important city in the area. Philippi was a relatively short 8-9 mile walk from Neapolis. To get there one must walk over some hills and then come to a plateau and on the plateau sat this city. We learn three realities about Philippi from Dr. Luke:

Reality #1 - We learn about the city of Philippi. 16:12

Paul was in Philippi and two clear facts are brought out about it:

(Fact #1) - It was the leading city of Macedonia. **16:12a**

The Greek reads it was a “first” city. What this means is that Philippi was the preeminent, chief city of Macedonia. Although Paul didn’t know it at the time, Philippi is destined to become the metropolitan church of all of Europe. Philippi was an ancient town with a lot of military history. It was renamed “Philippi” in 356 B.C. by Philip II of Macedon, who named it after himself. This Philip was the father of Alexander the Great. It was a city that had established itself as a major commercial city. It dealt in agricultural produce, and had gold and silver mines, which were found in the surrounding mountains.

(Fact #2) - It was a Roman colony. **16:12b**

There is no doubt that God directed Paul to Philippi because this would bring His grace Gospel to a key city of the Roman Empire. God wanted His Word reaching high places and one good way to do it was to send Paul and his team to Philippi, a Roman city.

In 167 B.C., the Roman Empire was being expanded and Philippi became a city under Roman possession. This was a prize location and two Roman generals wanted Philippi. Its greatest fame came from the fact that this was the very place where the armies of two Roman Generals changed world history. Mark Antony and Octavian defeated and destroyed Brutus and Cassius in the second Roman civil war in 42 B.C.. Soon afterward, Octavian became the emperor and gave himself the name of “Caesar Augustus.”

Because of this, Philippi was given the status of a Roman colony that answered directly to the Roman emperor. Roman soldiers were encouraged to retire there and all citizens were exempt from taxes.

William Larkin observed in his commentary that preaching in Philippi “was the closest thing to preaching in Rome without actually being there” (*Acts*, p. 235).

Reality #2 - We learn about the Paul’s ministry in Philippi. **16:12c-13**

There are two observations we may make about Paul’s ministry:

(Observation #1) - Paul and his team stayed there several days. **16:12c**

This phrase means just exactly what it says, many days. Now this is interesting because as we will see not everything will be positive here in Philippi. But Paul did not run away or shy away just because there was some opposition. He stayed focused on doing God’s will and staying no matter how long it took.

(Observation #2) - On the Sabbath Day, Paul and his team went outside the city and sat down and spoke to some women. **16:13**

The Apostle Paul always tried to maintain a Jew-first strategy. If possible, he would first try and reach the Jews so naturally the day to do this would be the Sabbath day. Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke went to the riverside on the Sabbath Day, because there was no synagogue in Philippi.

The Jewish customs featured many purification rites and rituals and water was needed so a good guess for Jewish Sabbath Day worship would be outside the city near some water. Apparently there was some “sequestered spot” where Jewish people met by the river and Paul found out about it.

According to Jewish Talmudic tradition, there needed to be a quorum of at least ten male heads of households before a synagogue could be actually formed. If that criterion was not met, the religious people would go to some open sky area such as a river or sea and meet there.

Now the river was probably the Gangites River and Paul and his team went out looking for some fellow Jews. It is speculated that the location was 1 ½ miles west of the city. When Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke got there, they apparently sat down and all who actually came out that day were women. A group of women had gathered to worship the God of Israel in some open air meeting. Some have suggested that these women met to recite the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9) and read the Law and Prophets.

As the women were meeting, Paul took this as an opportunity to begin to speak about Jesus Christ and the Gospel of God’s grace.

Reality #3 - We learn about God’s work in a woman in Philippi. **16:14-15**

This is so ironic. **The vision that Paul received to go to Macedonia came from a man and the first person who realized the need for salvation was not a man but a woman.** There have been inscriptions found in Macedonia that clearly show that women played a very important role in the formation of churches (Acts 17:4,12). **Take a good look at this passage because the Gospel that came to us started with women, not men. All religions of the world degrade women, but biblical Christianity exalts women.** God wants us to know quite a bit about this one woman, because He reveals seven important truths:

(Truth #1) - The woman’s name was Lydia. **16:14a**

Lydia was a common Roman and Greek name. In fact, it is possible that she was named after the state in which she originated, Lydia.

(Truth #2) - The woman was from Thyatira. **16:14b**

Thyatira was a rich commercial city located north of Lydia in the province of Asia. The ancient name of the city of Thyatira was Lydia, which again would seem to indicate that her parents named her from the city of ancient times.

(Truth #3) - The woman was a seller of purple. **16:14c**

There is much historical evidence that Thyatira was the major center of manufacturing of dyed goods. In fact, there have been inscriptions found in the ruins of Thyatira that say “the dyers.” It has been speculated that her husband had moved his family from Thyatira to Philippi and had established a good and lucrative business. It is possible that he had died and the business was very prosperous so his wife kept it going.

One commentator said it is very possible that the ship that brought Paul and his team to port from Troas probably brought a new supply of fabrics. Now purple fabric was not cheap. Lydia dealt in high quality and big money. This is not clothing you will buy at Kohl's.

Lydia was a seller of purple and dyes, which means she was a very wealthy business woman. In this ancient world, dyes were very costly and those who could sell this were involved in a lucrative business. In fact, the purple color was associated with princely royalty. So Lydia did business with a prestigious and wealthy clientele. She is dealing with the upper echelon from society.

In fact, by virtue of the fact that she can house the whole mission team, we know she lived in a very palatial house. Don't ever forget about the fact that God works in commerce and commercial trade. God is not against the business world; He is in it. God does raise up people and entrust them with businesses. He especially will bless those who fear Him. There is nothing wrong with being in business and making a good profit.

(Truth #4) - The woman was a worshipper of God. **16:14d**

We do not know if she was a Jew or a Jewish proselyte. But whatever she was, she went to this river spot to worship God according to external Judaism. She apparently sensed that the Jews really did have a religion that was connected to the true God. It is speculated that those with her were perhaps her family and servants.

(Truth #5) - The woman's heart was opened by the Lord. **16:14e**

Luke's theology- Acts 13:48- "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed"; Acts 16:14- God opens the heart.

Now as Paul was opening up the Gospel of God's grace, God opened her heart and she believed. R.C. Sproul said it well, "conversion takes place not when we open our hearts but when God intervenes and changes the disposition of our hearts. What was true for Lydia is true for every convert in Christian history" (*Acts*, p. 293). William Arnot said this meeting between Paul and Lydia "was arranged in heaven" (*Studies In Acts*, p. 288).

Now I can guarantee us of this fact- the people at this river had never heard anything like what Paul was proclaiming. They strolled out to the riverside, expecting to go through Jewish religious rituals and sitting there was the greatest Grace Age teacher in the world.

The message Paul preached is not recorded, but it isn't too difficult to figure out. In view of the fact that he didn't know if he would ever see these people again, he preached justification by faith alone in Christ alone. When Paul preached it, she believed and the reason she believed is because "the Lord opened her heart." It is the same reason anyone believes. Anyone who believes does so because the Lord opened their heart.

Now the Greek verb "opened" (διανοιγω) is an aorist tense verb. What this means is that this was a specific moment and point of time when God opened Lydia's heart.

The word literally means God completely opened her heart, her mind and her understanding concerning the grace truth about Jesus Christ (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 110).

There is a lot of sovereign mystery in this, but the fact is God must open a person's mind and heart in order for one to be saved. Often times He will open that heart and mind in different contexts and situations of life.

Sometimes he uses some crushing sorrow, crisis catastrophe, family crisis, emotional depression, lack of happiness and joy. Sometimes there is an overwhelming sense of one's sin or the threat of future judgment. In Lydia's case, she was successful in business but she sensed a need to be right with God. But regardless of the circumstances, no one comes to faith in Jesus Christ unless God opens the heart and He did open the heart of Lydia.

(Truth #6) - Lydia and her household were baptized . 16:15a

Now keep in mind that these are Sabbath Day worshippers who were very familiar with ritualistic washings at the river. It would appear, in this case, that she believed and was baptized. Now the verb "baptize" is aorist passive. This could refer to Spirit baptism or it could, as most interpreters think, refer to a believer's water baptism.

Lydia and her house were baptized and whether or not it was somehow connected to the shadow of the baptism of John, we cannot say, but the chronology is that she had her heart opened at a point of time and was baptized at a point of time.

Now the idea of her house being baptized, as I understand the Greek grammar, is all connected to God opening her heart. So I assume that God opened her heart and also the hearts of those in her family.

Here is one other thing to consider. If this is a reference to water baptism, then this is the first water baptism that takes place in Europe, which means the Apostle Paul and his team are the ones who actually were responsible for starting the practice that would come to the United States.

(Truth #7) - Lydia invited Paul and his team to stay at her home . 16:15b

As one writer said "she twisted their arms so they would stay at her home." That word "urge" is the same word that was used to describe the appeal those men on the road to Emmaus made to Jesus Christ. She had the means to house this entire missionary team and she did.

Philippi will become one of the most beloved congregations to the Apostle Paul. He will have such a wonderful relationship with them that he will thank God every time he remembers them (Philippians 1:3).

Powerful things happen when we follow the leading of God. Powerful things happen when we open our mouths and present the truth of the grace of God. God led Paul right to this city, right to this woman and He used him and provided for him in a great way.