

## Scripture Reading:

**Acts 15:39** “Then the contention became so sharp that [Paul & Barnabas] parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

**Acts 16:1** “Then [Paul] came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. 6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

# 'The Rocks Would Cry Out'

As always, we have some very practical lessons to learn from the text before us this morning from Luke's orderly account. However, as the Church calendar brings us into the Easter season with Psalm Sunday I hope we can also see some important comparisons from the life of Jesus with how the Spirit glorifies Jesus by filling the earth with His Kingdom.

The most obvious should be that both Jesus and Paul & Silas are on journeys. The appointed time for Jesus to present Himself as the perfect sacrifice in Jerusalem to save His people from their sins has come, and so Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem and now make His triumphal entrance into the city. Jesus appointed Saul of Tarsus to be Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles and the time has come, after many years of preparation for Paul to now make his journeys throughout the Gentile world.

As Jesus comes to Jerusalem we see that His presence opens and closes the hearts of men: We see in the Savior Himself the truth that Paul would later teach the Corinthians that the Gospel is the aroma of life to those who are being saved and the stench of death to those who are lost.

- Jesus is received by crowds singing and shouting loud Hosannas
- Jesus would soon be confronted by crowds crying crucify him, crucify him.
- We have seen Paul greeted by enthusiastic crowds of Gentiles anxious to hear the good news...
- And we have seen Paul run out of town or being stoned.

Many in Jerusalem wanted the Messiah to directly attack Rome and bring political freedom at once to Israel. Jesus had to explain even to His own disciples how this was not going to be the way God would bring about the new heavens and the new earth *[though the reign of Rome & even Jerusalem would be short-lived because Jesus came!]*

This morning we read how Paul and Silas desired to take the Gospel south to Asia minor or north to the Black Sea, but this was not God's plan... Lydia, the Philippian Jailer and many others waited for the arrival of the Gospel in Macedonia which is where Paul and Silas were directed.

And finally, the journey of Jesus would be successful: He would die for the sins of His people and over the following six weeks, Jesus would be raised in power, give His disciples their final instruction, ascend to the Father's right hand and send the Spirit of Power to fill and comfort His Church.

Here in the Book of Acts we will see the Apostle to the Gentiles take various trips establishing and strengthening Churches finally going to the seat of the world's political power Rome itself where he is able to preach the Gospel to all who would listen. The purposes of God will be carried out, and if men try to hinder them, as Jesus told the religious leaders who wanted to silence the children who were praising Him, "if these should keep silent, the rocks would immediately cry out."

- As Mike has been teaching us from the Book of Romans on Wednesday nights, the coming of Jesus has changed everything...

It is Matthew who tells us in his Gospel that when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the entire city was shaken. In the Book of Acts, we will often hear the early disciples being accused of turning the world upside down.

- The coming of Jesus DID change everything!

So with all of that in mind let's begin to consider what is called the second great missionary journey by the Apostle Paul.

He and Barnabas have gone their separate ways and Paul takes Silas with him and journeys north out of the city of Antioch. Just as the first trip took them to the familiar home turf of Barnabas on the Island of Cyprus, now Paul goes to the region of his birth around Tarsus. I am sure that Paul remembered the fruit that was born on the first trip and there were many more cities in Asia minor for them to visit which, as we see from the text, they would not be able to visit at this point. Luke shows us how Paul and Silas had plans and even back-up plans for where they wanted to go and yet the Spirit prevented them from doing so.

- We are not told how the Spirit did this, but it might have been through visions, prophecies or circumstances.

As Paul and Silas return to some of the territory that Paul and Barnabas ministered in, they encourage these new churches and Paul finds young Timothy ready to journey with them. We have the benefit of having in the New Testament two letters which the Apostle Paul would later write to Timothy so we know how close they became! There are two quick lessons that we want to take note of here with Timothy.

- We see once more the importance of a good upbringing...
- And we learn how to handle situations where there seems to be tension between preaching the Gospel and compromise.

We should not be able to read this passage without being a little shocked by the fact that Paul has Timothy circumcised. Timothy had a Greek father and had not been circumcised despite the faithful work of his mother and grandmother.

Now Paul had refused to have Titus circumcised during the trip to Jerusalem and he and Silas were now carrying, and encouraging the new churches with, the letter from the Church council telling the Gentiles that they did NOT have to be circumcised! Luke tells us that Paul had Timothy circumcised for the sake of the Jews: Was this a compromise on his part?

Since if it was they could be challenged with the very letter they were carrying and since I believe the Epistle to the Galatians had already been written and would have circulated in this very region, that does not seem likely.

- So what was Paul's reasoning?

He explains this principle in the ninth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians: Paul has made the point that in Christ all things are permissible and yet not all things are profitable.

He goes on to say how he had refused to take payment for his ministerial work even though he could demand it under the principles in God's Law:

Paul then says, "18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

- Paul is not having Timothy circumcised because he wants to prove that he is saved...
- Or because he thinks that circumcision is in any way required under the Gospel – For Jews or Gentiles

However, because Paul is comfortable in the truth that we are saved by Grace he has no reservation about circumcising Timothy to avoid any unnecessary trouble with the Jews they would encounter here and elsewhere. We must remember that Paul had a heart for his people:

- He tells us in Romans nine that he would be willing to give up his own salvation for the sake of his Jewish brothers & sisters.

So once again we have a road that God wants us to travel where we are to take the Good News to the world:

- We must avoid the ditch on one side where unnecessary legalism and/or liberty causes offense to some that might otherwise have given us a hearing
- And we must avoid the compromises found in the other ditch which destroy the very message we are called to present.

An example of the compromising ditch would be churches that hesitate to talk about sin out of fear that it will make unbelievers uncomfortable.

- If we are unwilling to show a person that they need to be saved, then why would we expect them to want to hear the Gospel?

Our lunch today could be an example of the ditch on the other side! IF God had placed us in a Hindu or Muslim country as a mission work we would still be free to eat BIG pots of roast beef and even the ham we will have next week as a part of our fellowship feasts! Our Liberty in Christ!

- But what if we were in a place where it might be wiser to tailor our lunches to the culture around us even if we know they are being vain or legalistic in their restrictions against eating meat or pork?

We might not enjoy a vegetarian menu anymore than Timothy enjoyed being circumcised, but it would certainly be a way to be all things to all people so that we can reach them for Christ.

The great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor was often ridiculed by other Christians for the long hair and clothes that he wore to make folks in China more comfortable in his presence.

- Prayers for the success of his work would have been more appropriate.

Before we leave young Timothy I want to share an encouraging word for all of us who agree to sponsor our young people each time we baptize a new covenant child and especially the young mothers who are tasked to raise them!

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul does not fondly remember ONLY Timothy:

**“3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, 5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”**

**I bring up these examples of Godly women to encourage all of you because Paul goes on to explain how they gave their son and grandson this faith: “you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

- **Timothy had not been sent to fancy schools and did not even have the benefit of a good Church or a Christian father.**

**So, when motherhood seems overwhelming and the task of raising faithful children seems impossible, please remember that you have one simple task:**

- **Give them a love for God’s Word. A love for God’s Word that leads them to God’s Son and eternal life!**

**Our desire is for these words from Psalm 119 to always be on their lips:**

**“98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.”**

**In closing I want to come back to those two regions that the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and Silas from preaching the Gospel to: The first is referred to in most of our translations as Asia, but was in fact not China or India but what we would call today Asia Minor: Think about the nation of Turkey if you will.**

**Among the cities of that region were two that should be familiar to you: Ephesus and Colossi.**

- **How often we have taken comfort from the Epistles that Paul wrote to these churches?**
- **This is also the region where we find the seven churches that Jesus had John deliver letters to in the Book of Revelation.**

**If we turn to the northern portion where they were also prevented from going we find a town called Nicaea. A town for which one of our great confessions of faith is named:**

- **The Nicene Creed, which was the result of a Church Council held there in 325AD.**

**Then in 451AD another famous church council would be held in Chalcedon in that same region.**

**So obviously the Spirit preventing Paul & Silas from going to these regions initially is not to be understood as preventing the Gospel from ever going there.**

- **It would simply go there at the time that God had appointed...**
- **Just as Jesus went to Jerusalem at His appointed time!**

**In fact we will see Paul going to Ephesus and other cities in that region on his return trip of this very mission journey.**

- **God had great plans for these areas: Great plans!**
- **But they were His plans that would be worked out in His time.**

**Let us take great comfort from this truth!**

**Let us train ourselves to hear the voice of the Spirit as He guides us through this life using God's Word, the local Church, faithful family members and even the events in our lives.**

*[recount how we came to Sacramento 28 years ago this month]*

**Sometimes in the midst of certain circumstances we are tempted to think that our lives are falling apart, just as I am sure Paul and Silas were frustrated by the fact that they could not go preach the Gospel in the regions they thought best at the time! It is often at those very times where God brings us to the place he wants us to be and we discover that we are now right at the center of His will.**

**Such was the case with Paul & Silas: They have been led to Troas where they will be joined by Dr. Luke!**

- **Soon God will reveal in a dream just why they are there, something we shall Lord willing learn more about next week.**

**In the meantime, may we learn to trust those comforting words from Romans chapter eight EVEN more, as we continue our journey with Jesus this week, going where the Spirit wants us to go:**

**“26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”**

**Communion Meditation: Luke 23:26-31**

**“Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.**

**And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him.**

**But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"**