

GOD WITH US

Part 9: ACTS

Message 5 – Paul’s Second Journey

Acts 15:36-18:22

Introduction

While Paul’s 1st journey focused on the Galatian region, his 2nd focused on Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). He planted churches in key cities, some of which would later receive letters preserved in the New Testament: Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth. His efforts to spread the gospel, along with Silas, Timothy and Luke, met with stiff resistance from local Jewish authorities. The leadership team experienced the truth of what Paul would later write to Timothy: *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:12).

Paul and Barnabas Split: 15:36-41

The 2nd journey was inspired by Paul’s desire to check up on the churches planted on the 1st journey. Before they left, however, they had a disagreement over taking John Mark with them.

“Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work” (15:37,38).

Thus, the two longtime friends split up. Barnabas took John Mark and went off to Cyprus while Paul teamed up with Silas and headed off to Galatia.

Failure need not define us. John Mark, under the careful mentoring of Barnabas, went on to become a key player in the story of 1st century Christianity. He became the companion and assistant of Peter; he wrote the “Gospel of Mark;” and toward the end of Paul’s life, the apostle was asking that Mark come to see him, “for he is useful to me for service” (2Tim.4:11). Mark, beset by some early failure, lived a very fruitful and powerful life. Have you experienced a significant failure in life? Let failure refine you, not define you. It can be a stepping stone to greater things, if you press on through it.

Paul Chooses Timothy as his new Helper: 16:1-5

In the city of Lystra, Paul found a young disciple named Timothy, who was well-spoken of by the community. Paul invited him to become his new “assistant,” forming a bond that would last a lifetime. He had Timothy circumcised (he had a Jewish heritage on his mother’s side) to remove any potential barriers in presenting the gospel in Jewish contexts. (Note: Paul would write to the Galatian churches strongly advising them *NOT* to undergo circumcision *IF* they thought it had something to do with guaranteeing their salvation. False teachers later came into the Galatian region teaching the believers that they needed to be circumcised to be saved, an idea that Paul forcefully rejected in his letter to “the Galatians.”)

Timothy was the product of a ‘mixed’ home. His mother and grandmother were devout Jewish believers; but his father is described simply as “a Greek,” implying that he was neither Jewish nor Christian. Yet, under the strong mentoring of his mother and grandmother (see 2Timothy 1:5 and 3:15), Timothy developed into a solid young man of God, worthy of being chosen to join Paul’s team. Are you alone as a parent trying to raise children to know and love Jesus? Be encouraged! The example of Timothy proves that it can be done. Persevere in your efforts to point your children to God, both by your example and your words. Invite the various ministries of the church to partner with you to instill deep faith in your children.

The Macedonian Call: 16:6-10

Paul and his team were following the Spirit’s lead. Having finished their visit with the churches in the Galatian region, they moved westward into Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). But the Spirit kept ‘closing doors’ for them in that region:

“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” (16:6,7).

Once the team had arrived at Troas, on the coast of the Aegean Sea, they were at a “dead end” so to speak, with no place left to go on the mainland of Asia Minor.

Note: The terms “Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of Jesus” are used interchangeably in Acts 16:6,7. Similarly, “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ” are used together in Romans 8:9. The Holy Spirit is part of the triune godhead, as are the Father and the Son.

Closed doors are just as much a ‘sign’ of God’s will as open doors. Notice how Paul and company were moving forward, asking God to show them the way. That’s how it works. By faith, we move out, and trust God to show us His will as we go. The key is: Don’t ever try to ‘force open’ doors that God is closing; and don’t ever try to ‘force closed’ doors that God is opening. Follow His leading! He gives “just enough light for the step we are on.” (Stormie Omartian wrote a great little book with this title.)

Then, at night, God opened a door for the team to walk through:

“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” (16:9,10).

Notice the change in personal pronouns here (“they” in verses 6-8 changes to “we” in verses 9,10). This indicates the place where the story-teller, Luke, joined the story. From this point forward, Luke (the “beloved physician” – Colossians 4:14), would be a lifelong friend and co-worker of Paul. While Luke was travelling with Paul, he would conduct interviews and gather research for what would eventually become his great literary work: The two-volume Luke-Acts narrative.

Imprisoned in Philippi: 16:11-40

Paul & company had a difficult time in Philippi. They had some initial success in presenting the gospel, especially to a business-woman named Lydia and her household (16:11-15). She had moved to Philippi to sell expensive purple fabrics. With Lydia, the church in Philippi found a home base.

The trouble came when Paul encountered a different woman, possessed by a demon that gave her fortune-telling abilities.

“Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the

future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her” (16:16-18).

The owner of this female fortune-teller was infuriated that his business was now compromised. They violently dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities, who had them beaten and imprisoned.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose” (16:25,26).

They were praying and singing hymns to God . . . after being mobbed, beaten and imprisoned illegally! Paul would later write: “Give thanks IN EVERYTHING” (1Thess.5:18). He meant it and he modeled it. So many amazing things happened in Philippi, not because the mission was easy; but because it was infused with the power of God amidst great hardship. Their example is for us to follow. God invites us to praise Him by faith even in our hardships. Praise unleashes God’s power in the direction of our problems.

The Philippian jailer and his household became believers that night. He washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, and then he and his household were baptized. By morning, the city officials ordered that Paul and Silas be released. (They had been shaken by the earthquake and probably believed that it was a ‘sign’ from the gods that Paul and Silas were not to be resisted.) Paul struck more fear in the Philippian authorities by pointing out the *they had violated Roman law* by beating and imprisoning him without a proper trial (which was the right of every person possessing Roman citizenship, as Paul did). The missionary team left town, but only after making a stop at the house of Lydia, to encourage the new believers. (Note again the change in pronouns in the last verse of ch.16. “They” left Philippi; not “we” left. That means Luke stayed in Philippi. He will rejoin the team when Paul comes back through Philippi 5 years later. This may indicate that Luke stayed and became the first “pastor” of the church of Philippi.)

I have had people say to me: Bob, I thought I was following the will of God, but everything that could go wrong did go wrong. My answer, usually, is: What did you expect? (Many times, I have had to remind myself: Bob, what did YOU expect?) Paul and Silas had a clear leading from God into Macedonia, and everything that could 'go wrong' did 'go wrong.' Here is an important lesson: Once you have clearly sensed a direction that God wants you to go in, move out and don't second guess your direction based on how things turn out. Most of God's assignments will involve hardship and trials. Expect things to be stormy, not 'smooth sailing,' yet you will experience God's hand and His peace even in the storms.

Ministry in Thessalonica & Berea: 17:1-9

The next two cities followed a similar pattern: initial receptivity followed by harsh persecution. In Thessalonica, the Jews formed a mob and started a riot, forcing Paul and Silas to leave town. (But not before they planted a church there that would ultimately receive 2 important letters from Paul – 1 & 2 Thessalonians!)

In Berea, before a riot broke out, Paul and Silas had a profitable time sharing the Scriptures with the Jews:

“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men” (17:11,12).

After a riot broke out, Paul was forced to move on. He left Silas and Timothy in Berea to encourage and strengthen the believers.

The Jews in Berea were “noble-minded” in that they sincerely searched out their O.T. Scriptures to see if the things that Paul and Silas were saying were true. Today, we should follow their example. Test everything you hear by the truth of God's Word. Learn to search the Scriptures for yourself, to see if what you are hearing lines up with what God has said. This is why it is so important to become deeply rooted in God's Word – so that you will know the truth and be able to discern the lies that many teachers will present to you. On many questions, you can refer to websites like “God Questions,” or “Bible Hub,” or “Bible Gateway.”

Ministry in Athens: 17:16-34

Paul had a very different experience at Athens. This city was home to the Areopagus, a philosopher's club where wise men spent their days debating the great questions of life. It was also a very pluralistic city, with idols everywhere representing many different gods. Paul's presence quickly became known to the local philosophers as they heard him speaking with people both in the synagogue and the marketplace. They insulted him with this:

“What is this idle-babbling trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods” (17:18).

“Idle-babbling” is literally “scrap-picker.” They saw Paul as an unsophisticated thinker who had picked up various scraps from this religion and that, piecing them together into a confusing system. They brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus and invited him to explain his “new teaching.” (Read the entire message to see how Paul addressed such an audience; first building bridges with them; second appealing to their inherent knowledge of a Creator God; finally, getting specific with regard to Jesus the Savior.)

Paul explained that there was one Creator God Who made all things and all people. We all owe our existence to Him, thus we must not worship “idols made by human hands” (Athens was full of idols). God has given us, through the created order, enough witness to Himself that all people should repent of their idol worship and seek Him earnestly.

“. . . 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” (17:30,31).

They may have been listening intently up to this point, but when Paul mentioned the resurrection (of Jesus), they stopped him. Some mocked him, while others pretended that they would “*hear him another day.*” Luke notes that just a few people from the Areopagus became believers. It was a very abrupt ending to what seemed like a huge opportunity to address an influential crowd. Note: The Areopagus (“hill of Ares”) was named after Ares the Greek god of war. Paul may have felt like he was in a spiritual and intellectual ‘war’ of sorts for the minds and hearts of these philosophers!

Paul would later write: “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (see 1Corinthians 1:19-25). Often, those who have accumulated the most knowledge have the most difficulty accepting the simplicity of the gospel. We need to pray that God would soften hearts so that even the most sophisticated thinkers will have ears to hear the message of Jesus . . . like Dionysius the Areopagite, the woman Damaris and the others who listened to Paul with an open mind.

Ministry in Corinth: 18:1-17

Paul was alone at Corinth, having left Silas and Timothy up in Macedonia to strengthen the new churches. By the grace of God, he found a couple that would become key partners in his ministry – Aquila and Priscilla. They were Jewish Christians who had been living in Rome; but had been expelled by the emperor Claudius (ruled from 41-54 A.D.). Like Paul, they were tent-makers by trade, so they found a common kinship as they worked together. When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself more fully to an aggressive preaching campaign in Corinth. The Jewish community strongly resisted Paul, but the Lord encouraged him to persevere in Corinth.

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (18:9-11).

“Do not be afraid any longer.” How encouraging to read that God had to comfort even Paul! Even the strongest among us are prone to a fear that is seen only by God. Are you wrestling with fear? Place your fear (and your trust) firmly in God’s care. Memorize Psalm 56:3,4. “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you, in God whose word I praise, in God I put my trust. I will not be afraid, what can man do to me”?

Return to Antioch: 18:18-22

Luke overviews Paul's return trip to Jerusalem and Antioch in just a few verses. Instead of focusing on what happened when Paul returned (as he will when Paul returns to Jerusalem after his 3rd journey), he tells how he made a quick stop at Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem, promising them that he would return later (setting up the narrative for the 3rd missionary trip, with Ephesus being central to that part of the story). Clearly it was not Luke's intention to focus on what happened back at the home bases of Jerusalem and Antioch; rather, to keep the focus on Paul's movement outward with the message of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Acts 18:9-11. What sorts of 'feelings in Paul' might have prompted God to give him this vision and these words? What might have caused Paul to feel alone and/or afraid?
2. Read Acts 16:6-10. Luke was an accomplished man. What do you think motivated him to join Paul? Look at Acts 16:40. Notice that it says "they" left town; not "we" left town." What does that tell you about where Luke stayed? Check out Acts 20:6. Who re-joined Paul when he came through Philippi 5 years later?
3. Have you ever had a clear calling from God in a certain direction? If so, did you follow it? What happened as you did?
4. Think about how Paul refused to take John Mark on the 2nd journey, while Barnabas wanted to take him along. How does their difference of opinion hit you? What would you have done if you were making the decision?