

Acts 16A

- Paul has selected his next traveling partner, Silas, and he departs on his second missionary journey
 - The final verse of 15 last week told us Paul departed by heading north by land
 - He first passes through Syria and then Cilicia
 - Antioch was in Syria, so they pass through this region on their way out of town
 - Then Cilicia was next and included Paul's home town of Tarsus
 - The stated purpose of this trip was to reassure the existing churches
 - But of course Paul continues to evangelize as he moves, especially into new areas
 - As we start the journey in chapter 16 today, we notice Paul picks up another traveler

[Acts 16:1](#) Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, [Acts 16:2](#) and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.

[Acts 16:3](#) Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

- After Tarsus, Paul moves westward among the Mediterranean Sea toward the churches he planted
 - Derbe and Lystra
 - In Lystra Paul encounters a young believer names Timothy
 - Timothy was a son of a mixed marriage, Jewish mother and Greek father
 - And Timothy had a good testimony among the brethren in the region
 - As a result, Paul decides he wants Timothy to accompany him from this point

- Character was always the first test for suitability in service to the Lord in Acts, and this moment is no exception
 - Even before Timothy was taught or mature enough for service, Paul evaluated his character
 - And with a good testimony, Paul decided he was an eligible partner in ministry
 - So often, we get this backwards in the church today
- Timothy is a notable character in the New Testament (two of only four books of the New Testament names for someone other than the author)
 - From those two books written by Paul, we can learn much more about Timothy
 - Lystra was Timothy's home
 - Paul says in 1Tim 1:2 that he led Timothy to faith during Paul's first visit
 - Timothy was taught to study the Scriptures from an early age by his Jewish mother, Eunice who was also converted by Paul
 - He also had a Jewish grandmother names Lois
 - We don't know his Greek father's name, and Luke writes about him in the past tense, so he was dead or gone by this point
 - As the son of a Greek, Timothy's identity as a Jew was probably in question
 - This was especially true since Timothy had never been circumcised
 - Timothy was a young man and seemed to suffer from a nervous or weak stomach
 - Paul advises Timothy to drink wine rather than water only to help his stomach
- Because Paul is planning to carry the Gospel to the Jew first and then the Gentile, he tells Timothy he will need to be circumcised
 - As the text tells us, Timothy's mixed family roots were well known among the Jews in this area

- The mixed marriage was probably a bit scandalous and Timothy was never fully accepted among Jews
- Timothy could have identified himself with either camp
 - He could have remain uncircumcised and adopted a Greek heritage, renouncing any claim to Jewishness
 - But with his knowledge of the Jewish scriptures and his potential to assist Paul in Jewish evangelism, Paul persuaded Timothy to side with his Jewish roots
 - Yet if Timothy were to be accepted by Jews as Jewish, he would first need to confirm to that most Jewish of all rituals: circumcision
 - In fact, if Timothy is to call himself Jewish, he MUST be circumcised according to the requirements of the Abrahamic covenant
- So Paul circumcises Timothy prior to taking the trip so that Jews in the area would receive both men as adequate Jewish representatives
 - This is a pointed example of Paul's own statement in 1Cor 9:20 that Paul was willing to become whoever he needed to win men to Christ
 - Here we see Paul asking Timothy to follow the same standard for the sake of reaching Jews for the Gospel
- Later Paul will encounter another man named Titus
 - In Titus' case, Paul prohibits circumcision in the face of demands by Jewish believers who demanded that all believers receive circumcision
 - Paul wanted to debunk their false teaching, and since Titus was a Gentile he had absolutely no reason to submit to circumcision
 - The situations were very different, so Paul's demands were very different
 - This difference by itself proves that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation

[Acts 16:4](#) Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

[Acts 16:5](#) So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- As Paul and Silas and now Timothy move on from Lystra, they deliver the decision of the Jerusalem Counsel
 - Specifically, the relief from following the Law but for the four restrictions asked of the Gentile believers
 - This brought rejoicing all over again in each new location
 - And it allowed the church to grow without hesitation
 - Notice the grow was two-fold
 - The church was strengthened
 - The Greek word means to be made stiff like a strong muscle
 - The church was solidified in its understanding and confidence and boldness to follow Christ
 - And the church was growing numerically
 - The proclamation that salvation is by faith and not works encouraged more growth
 - This is a historical pattern even to today
 - The preaching of the true Gospel and sound doctrine will always strengthen the church in both ways
 - The church will become spiritually stronger as the Gospel is preached boldly and the Word taught consistently
 - And the church will experience some measure of growth
 - But there are other methods that can grow a congregation numerically even faster than preaching the Gospel and teaching the word
 - Slick marketing, games, entertainment, appealing pulpit messages and other nonsense will attract an audience

- While the numerical growth may rocket forward, the spiritual growth will be superficial at best and non-existent at worst
- Seeking numerical growth without spiritual growth is a sin
 - God alone receives credit for the establishing of new faith
 - So we aren't going to receive credit for numeric growth
 - Rather our role as Christ commanded was to disciple believers
 - If we fail to fulfill this mission, disobey the Lord and we sin
- As Paul navigates through Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), Luke describes how Paul came to decide where he should turn

[Acts 16:6](#) They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;

[Acts 16:7](#) and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

[Acts 16:8](#) and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

[Acts 16:9](#) A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

[Acts 16:10](#) When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- As Paul moves out of Iconium, it seems Paul was intent on moving into West Asia Minor, in the direction of Ephesus or Laodicea
 - But before they could move to these cities, the Holy Spirit forbids that movement, sending Paul eastward instead
 - Then Paul reaches Antioch again
 - Directly north lay Bithynia, northern Turkey
 - In Bithynia was a town called Niceae, from where we received the Nicene Creed at the first ecumenical council in AD 325
 - This is also the likely hiding place of Peter after he fled from Jerusalem
 - Both of Peter's letters are thought to have been written from Bithynia

- But again, Paul is prohibited from traveling north
- We see Paul trying to move west and then north, but having his progress blocked each time
 - And he can't move south due to the Med sea
- Take a look at the text of Acts again and notice that the Holy Spirit never tells Paul where to go
 - The Holy Spirit simply tells Paul where NOT to go
 - And each time, Paul had to pick a new direction and then keep moving
- Have we ever considered that this is the usual method the Spirit uses to guide us in following the Lord's will?
 - As we face decisions and questions in our daily walk, we seek God's counsel in one way or another expecting to here Him say, "Here's what you should do."
 - And yet Scripture would suggest that the Holy Spirit is more inclined to say no to bad options rather than simply laying out the right option
 - This process makes perfect sense when you consider the Spirit's purpose
 - He wants us following, moving, acting
 - He doesn't want us evaluating the "rightness" of God's plans
 - And He doesn't want us to obey on a conditional basis, depending on whether we like His plan
 - So the better approach is to encourage us to move out and then teach us to see the world and our choices and priorities from the Lord's point of view
 - With each turn we learn God's perspective more clearly
 - I think of it like the game pin the tail on the donkey
 - We're blind to God's purposes at least at first

- But as we move, the Holy Spirit is guiding us with hints of “getting hotter” or “getting colder”
- And as we see the pattern, we get better and working our way to God’s intended target
 - This is a slower, more error-prone process for God, but it brings Him glory in the way weak vessels testify to His power in the world
- In Paul’s case we don’t know how the Spirit communicated these prohibitions to Paul, but I assume it was in the same way the Spirit communicates to us
 - A feeling, a sense, a closed door in our planning
 - Reading our circumstances and feeling a peace or hesitation in our heart, we discern the Lord’s leading
 - And so Paul moves the only direction he can: West toward Troas on the Aegean Sea
 - And this was God’s purpose
 - For the Lord desires to expose an entirely new region to the Gospel: Macedonia
 - Macedonia is modern day Greece
 - You can see the shores of Greece from Troas and it was a major sea port connecting Asia Minor with Greece
 - Finally, the Holy Spirit gives Paul a positive indication of where to go
 - This specific direction was necessary for Paul at this point because he had reach a limit on land and needed to know how to proceed next
 - It’s a reminder that God will speak with enough details and in a timing suited to His purpose
 - Notice in v.10 that Luke uses the pronoun “us” for the first time
 - From this point forward, Luke will say “we” or “us” to describe the events of Paul’s ministry
 - This tells us that Luke was likely Paul’s convert from Troas

- And at this point, Luke joins Paul's growing traveling party
- From his exposure to Paul, Luke not only writes the book of Acts, but he also pens the Gospel
 - He accounts for 25% of all the New Testament
 - And he was likely a Gentile

[Acts 16:11](#) ¶ So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;

[Acts 16:12](#) and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

[Acts 16:13](#) And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

[Acts 16:14](#) A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

[Acts 16:15](#) And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- As Paul responds immediately to the Spirit's direction, we begin a new section in the book of Acts that takes us through chapter 19
 - We're going to see a number of important developments in the this next section
 - Paul is going to advance the Gospel into three major regions of Greek civilization
 - Macedonia, Achaia, and eventually Asia
 - And each area is dominated by it's respective capital city
 - Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus
 - Each city being preserved in the canon of Scripture by their respective letters
 - The letters to the Thessalonians will be written during this trip while Paul stays in Corinth

- Many scholars remark that Paul's work to plant churches in these major centers of Western civilization represented his greatest achievement
 - These cities and their regions covered the northern, western and eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea
 - And together they represented the cradle of Western civilization in that day
- In fact, when we consider that the events of Acts 11-19 represent only 5 years of Paul's life, it was easily the most impressive evangelistic five-year period in the history of the church
 - If you have a five-year plan for your ministry, this is your gold standard against which to measure your progress
- On the way to Macedonia, Paul makes a stop on an island called Samothrace and then on to Neapolis and finally Phillipi
 - Phillipi is the capital city of one of the four Roman districts in Macedonia region
 - Luke says the Paul waited a few days before beginning their ministry
 - This was because the city's Jewish population was so small that it didn't have a synagogue
 - Therefore, Paul had to wait for the Sabbath to find Jewish prayer groups meeting to observe the Sabbath
 - Remember, Paul would never depart from his call to preach to the Jew first and then Gentile
 - Jews would never be more than a remnant, but they are a critically important part of God's plan
 - Once Paul began to work with Gentiles in a given location, the Jews would have turned off to the message en masse
 - So Paul always began with the Jews
 - On the Sabbath Paul widely heads to a river where he assumed Jews would congregate
 - Jewish customs required at least 10 men age 13 or older in a given city before a synagogue could be established

- So if a town lacked that many male Jews, the Jewish customs required the Jews present to congregate in an open area, preferably near a riverside
 - Paul knew this custom and went to the nearest river by Phillipi
 - There he finds women in observance of the day
 - This makes sense, since if only 10 men were available, a synagogue would have been in operation
- As Paul spoke to these women, Lydia was given the ability by God to receive the Gospel and she believed
 - Notice in passing the emphasis in Luke's narrative on God's sovereignty in salvation
 - Clearly, the actor Who makes faith itself possible is God Himself
 - Lydia becomes the first European convert to Christianity
 - Yet another prominent woman in Luke's account
 - His record in both Luke and Acts highlights the equal importance of woman in God's plan for the church
 - It's interesting that Paul was drawn to Macedonia by a dream of a man in Macedonia who needed to hear the gospel
 - And yet the first convert was a woman
 - Was she the "man" in the dream?
 - It's also notable that she was a seller of purple dyes
 - Purple was the most difficult die color to obtain since natural sources of the color purple are rare
 - Purple was a part of Royal dress for this reason
 - And the most common location for purple fabric production was in Thyatira, one of the cities receiving a letter in Revelation
 - Not coincidentally, Lydia hailed from Thyatira
 - Lydia was likely a successful business woman in her day
 - And she was also a woman who worshipped God

- This means she was a believing Jew or at least a God-fearing Gentile, believing in the promise of a Jewish Messiah
- As a result of her conversion, she was baptized along with her household, probably in that river
 - And she offered the Apostle and entourage a place to stay

[Acts 16:16](#) It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

[Acts 16:17](#) Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."

[Acts 16:18](#) She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

- Later, Paul is returning to this place of prayer, probably because his earlier trip had resulted in numerous women becoming Christian
 - And now Paul has made a routine of going to this place to minister to these early believers
 - On his way he was joined by a slave girl
 - Luke says the girl had a spirit of divination, but the phrase in the Greek is very different
 - The phrase is literally a python spirit
 - The reference to a snake reminds us of Satan in the Garden and tells us this is a demonic spirit
 - Luke uses the word python because of Greek mythology at the time
 - The belief at the time was the girl was occupied by the Greek god Apollo and spoke prophetically by his power
 - The python was a serpent that guarded the Delphic Oracle and was killed by Apollos, who then obtained the Oracle's powers for himself
 - Later, all diviners came to be known as pythons

- So this girl is indwelt by a spirit that can speak prophetically, but we know this spirit is not one of Greek mythology but is demonic
 - All occult practices and beliefs, including those of ancient civilizations trace their power back to Satan, whether they realize it or not
 - This is the sorcery or divination that the Bible warns against
 - As we'll learn next week, unscrupulous men had discovered this slave girl's demonic powers and had trapped her in a money-making enterprise of fortune-telling
 - The girl declares publicly that Paul is preaching the true gospel
 - The announcing continues for several days, and we can assume it helped draw crowds to Paul's message
 - Finally, Paul becomes annoyed by it all and casts the demon out of the girl
- This passage raises two immediate questions
 - First, why does this demon-possessed girl proclaim this God-glorifying truth
 - Wouldn't the demon want to do anything BUT glorify God?
 - The answer is that God will use everything in His creation to bring Himself glory
 - The demons inside this woman could no more resist God's will than we can
 - Remember Balaam in NUmbers 22? He is intent on cursing Israel but ends up blessing them instead?
 - Or the patriarchs who tried to bless the wrong child against God's wishes
 - Or Satan Himself who in dwelt Judas and brought Jesus to the cross only to learn that was God's purpose from the beginning?
 - So God has directed the demon to act in this way to suit God's purposes in Paul's ministry

- This also goes to prove what James says concerning demons
- They know the loving God and they know Jesus, but they do not have the God-given capacity to follow and worship Him
- As Hebrews says, God does not give help to angels (meaning demons)
- This leads us to the second question
 - Why does Paul tolerate the girl's outbursts for a time but then change his mind and run the demon out of the girl later?
 - The text says Paul was annoyed or worn out
 - The answer for why is probably equally simple
 - At some point the woman stopped being an advantage to Paul's minister work and started becoming a hindrance
 - Before Paul's message in the city was widely heard and understood, the heralding was helpful to Paul's mission
 - But once the work of the Gospel has taken hold in the hearts of the people, signs and miracles cease
 - Eventually, Paul doesn't want the truth of God's word to compete with sensational proclamations or sideshows
 - Plus, the woman is associated with pagan religious power and beliefs, so associating too closely with her begins to complicate Paul's message after a while
 - And of course, Paul was human and the prospect of a woman screaming this announcement over and over would have driven anyone crazy after a while
 - The lesson is that while the Gospel can be introduced through sensational, attention-grabbing means, the long-term growth of the Gospel can't depend upon it
 - The growth of the church is dependent on the word of God and the saving work of the Spirit to bring faith

- This story is sandwiched between the quiet saving moment of Lydia and a remarkable story of the jailor's salvation in the second half of the chapter
 - It would seem Luke has linked these events to show that miracles and side shows are merely secondary to the real mover and shaker: the Holy Spirit and the word of God