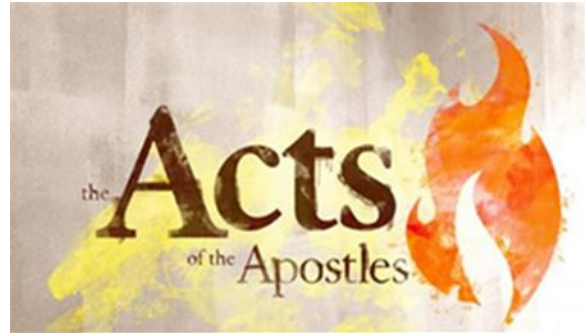


## ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – PART 17

### Boldly Going/Wisely Going: Paul & Silas

#### Acts 16

The process of the Gospel of Jesus as Messiah and Savior continuing to progress was a combination of Divine Direction and human participation. If God had done it all it would have worked perfectly. That said, the world would not have been in the mess it was at that point if the human participation piece had gone as planned/directed, telling us that God stopped going it alone somewhere around Creation.



Imagine if God had left us, humankind, in charge of creation. *Uh, who forgot to put the moon up? Wait, what day is it? Is today fowls of the air or fish in the sea? Sea?! Oh dang, forgot the whole water thing.*

The reality is Divine Direction was forced to overcome human participation. Shouldn't be a shock. We sometimes miss our mark. In some ways it is the "right place – right time" theory of life. Some call it the *perfect world* scenario. I call it the "old blind hog finding an acorn now and then" theory. If we follow God's Will, obviously its His perceived Will, we will live the life God has planned for us. If we don't, we won't.

Ever wonder how you arrived at the place you are presently? Imagine if one or two decisions had not been made. In my life I can isolate a few "what if" possibilities. What if I had resisted a call to ministry and clung to my own career plans and goals? Where would I be today? What if I had not signed on to co-direct a youth/college students summer camp after my junior year of college? I would not have met the blue-eyed beauty with red hair who had the poor judgment to marry me. Right place at the most excellent right time. Or, during my time of discernment over joining this church staff almost 27 years ago I felt that staying put was the best option. Obviously, my discernment was not what God was saying

to me, and in a rare moment I heard God's inner voice asking, "Why don't you allow me to lead the way and make this decision?" Where would I be today if I had not apologized to God and followed his call in my life? The best way to state it is "not where I was supposed to be."

So again, there are times when Divine Direction is forced to overcome human participation. This reality could have totally derailed the Jesus Movement. This was never truer than in the Acts 16 story of Paul and Silas.

Paul and Silas decided to begin the second missionary journey by doing welfare checks and delivering the Jerusalem Council decisions to already started churches. They found healthy, growing churches (16:5).

They were then ready to begin preaching and teaching to new places/new people.

Read Acts 16:6-7

Paul, being Paul, had a plan and he was all fired up about preaching in Asia (in our time this is one half of Istanbul and eastward), but the Spirit told them no, do not travel there at this time. "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (v.7).

I see Paul as a Type-A, go-go-go guy who was in high gear most of the time. If you think about it Paul had a very modern Western mindset. Success is doing, right? Success is checking more and more boxes. For Paul it wasn't "Do I preach in a region," it was "I'm shooting for the whole Continent!" *Asia or Bust!*

Paul, however, pulled up and listened to the Spirit. He could have barged forward and headed into Asia. If he had he would not have landed in Philippi (by way of several places) and not met Lydia and her family. If he hadn't met Lydia, a Gentile who converted to Judaism, she might not have accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Lydia became a force. It was God's plan for Paul to preach in Greece rather than Asia. It was God's plan for Lydia to become a full believer. If say, Paul had ignored God and done what he thought was best... it would not have gone the way it was supposed to go.

Life is preparatory for believers. It may seem quite pedestrian and slow but it's preparatory. The timing will be right one day, but possibly not on the day we pencil in on the calendar.

Read 16:16-24

After the God-Thing encounter with Lydia they moved on to preach. They are followed around by a slave girl who could tell fortunes and who also happened to be filled by a demonic spirit. She would shout, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Hold on. How was this a problem? If someone followed me around and shouted, "This guy is teaching the truth about Jesus and salvation," I'd say thank you. It beats the world out of, "This guy is an awful teacher who doesn't have a clue what he's talking about!?"

But, I'm certainly not Paul and she did have an indwelling demon, which he ordered to come out, which made her owners very mad. She was their cash machine and suddenly she was freed from the demon. The owners filed complaints and officials promptly put Paul (along with Silas) in jail. Are you noticing a trend here? Paul could write a penal travel blog. He had seen the inside of prison life in virtually every city he spent considerable time in.

Read 16:23-40

Luke tells us extra precautions were put into place to keep them in custody. From the "inner-most cell" with bound hands and feet Paul and Silas sang songs of praise. The other prisoners took notice of the intense worship taking place when a sudden earthquake shook the prison to its foundation. The doors were lifted off their hinges, opening wide for escape. In an amazing "earthquake" twist the chains also broke and fell away. Everyone was free but no one chose to leave. The warden assumed he had lost every prisoner, especially the two who would soon be adjudicated, and knowing his fate he decided to take his own life. Paul notices this and shouts to him, "We are all here!" Perhaps this man was swayed by the authentic words and presence of Paul and Silas, or perhaps the true worship of two men who could soon be put to death affected him, or it could have been the supernatural earthquake that all but destroyed the prison but took no lives. Or it

could have been all the above. He became a believer after asking, “what must I do to be saved?”

In an unusual twist the judges decided to release Paul and Silas so they could be rid of them. They sent word to release them, but Paul declined. Citing he was a Roman citizen and he had not been treated with due process he demanded the judges come to him and apologize for not treating them as citizens with rights. They did. The judges came to the cell, what was left of it, and apologized, and asked them to leave as quickly as possible. Did they? Of course not. They went to see Lydia and her family and then they departed. There were more cities to evangelize. Or maybe a continent.

### **Takeaways:**

1. God said no to Paul’s plans and Paul listened and obeyed. That’s amazing in and of itself. It isn’t surprising God said no, it’s amazing Paul listened and obeyed, but maybe I’m judging Paul on my own personal scale. We, or let’s just use “me” here, I, am not known for my patient listening and long-term obedience. *Type-A* Paul did the right thing. Good lesson here.
2. Once again, we see that the Gospel message was open to and applied to all people. Female Gentile Jewish converts found Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Roman Corrections officers did as well and let’s not leave out a demon-possessed fortune telling slave girl. She nailed it with, “These men are servants of the Most High God and they are telling us how to be saved.” Yep, much to be learned here.

Amen and Amen.

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