

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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The Macedonian Vision; Jailhouse Rock!

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1. A Disciple Named Timothy ([16:1-5](#))

a. Paul began this missionary journey having come from Antioch. First, he did the work of strengthening the churches through the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:40-41).

Now Paul arrives in Derbe, where things went pretty well on his first missionary journey, and also Lystra, where things nearly went completely sideways as the crowd thought Paul and Barnabas were pagan gods (Acts 14:8-21).

This is about 5 years after the first missionary journey ended, so Paul was eager – and no doubt anxious -- to see for himself how God’s work continued among these churches that he founded.

A certain disciple... named Timothy: Over the years since Paul had first been to Lystra, this young man Timothy had been serving the church. Timothy had a believing Jewish mother, and a Greek father who is probably identified that way because he was not a believer. Fortunately for the church, it seems Timothy was a momma’s boy!

We’ve previously speculated that Timothy might have witnessed the scene years before, and of course would certainly had heard of it even if he was not a direct witness. In any case, Paul's courage and wisdom in the face of those challenges built a great legacy in Lystrans like Timothy.

Paul was impressed enough with Timothy that Paul wanted to have him join hi, im his journeys. This shows the Holy Spirit at work in and through difficulties, as John Mark and Barnabas had just left Paul (Acts 15:36-41). Every one of God’s children is precious to Him, and yet at the same time, no single worker in His kingdom is irreplaceable. When a Barnabas leaves -- no matter what the reason -- God has a Timothy to put on the team!

He... circumcised him because of the Jews in that region: Paul had Timothy circumcised, not for the sake of his salvation, but so there would be less to hinder their ministry among the Jews.

F. F. Bruce explains: "By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate Jew. If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen to countenance apostasy."

God Sends Paul to Macedonia ([16:6-10](#))

They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia: “Asia” does not refer to the Far East as we know it today. It refers to the Roman Province of Asia Minor, which we know today as Turkey.

After strengthening the churches in the region around Lystra, Paul wants to go west, probably towards Ephesus, which makes perfect sense – Ephesus was an important city. But Paul was “forbidden” go there! Even by way of Bythinia. How could the Holy Spirit possibly forbid the preaching of the word? Because this work was being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, not Paul. Paul wasn't the right person, in the right place, at the right time, to take the gospel to Asia Minor. But Paul of his own accord could not possibly know that. There was nothing wrong with Paul's *desire* to preach the word in Asia. But it wasn't God's timing or design, so it was forbidden by the Holy Spirit.

Exactly how did the Holy Spirit forbid them? We are not told. It may have been through a word of prophecy or wisdom from a fellow believer, by a vision or an inward message from the Holy Spirit, or perhaps even “just” by circumstances (how often must we misread those!) No matter, Paul and company got the message, and complied.

So our friends wind up at Troas. Paul didn't set out to go to Troas. It was the third choice for him at best. But it was the Holy Spirit's plan to lead him there. Paul, in

beautiful responsiveness to the Holy Spirit, is willing to lay aside his own will and plans, instead favoring the direction that the Holy Spirit brings. Paul is being guided by hindrance!

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: In Troas God makes Paul's direction clear. In a vision, Paul is "invited" to the region of Macedonia, westward across the Aegean Sea. This would move Paul and his team from the continent of Asia to begin the first missionary endeavor to Europe. One might say that Paul wanted to reach a few cities in his region, but God wanted to give Paul a continent to reach with the Gospel!

Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go: Paul did not hesitate to answer the call of the Macedonian man. Paul's missionary team did not hesitate to follow him on the basis of this call. This was a strong, godly man, leading a strong, godly team!

Notice the narrative shift from "they" to "we" and "us" in verse 10. This tells us that Luke joined the band of missionaries in Troas. Perhaps he even came as Paul's personal doctor. So now we see another reason why the Spirit did not permit them to go into Bithynia. God wanted Paul and his team to go to Troas and pick up a doctor named Luke along the way. If God wouldn't have said "no" to Paul these two times, **we** might not have a gospel and a Book of Acts written by Luke!

The Conversion of Lydia ([16:11-15](#))

Sailing from Troas: Paul and his missionary team, now including Luke, had to sail across the Aegean Sea, from Asia Minor to the continent of Europe. This was a big step, perhaps bigger than Paul even knew.

From there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia: Paul's general strategy was to plant churches in the major cities. He knew that it was easier for the gospel to spread from these influential cities than to them.

...We went out of the city to the riverside....: The fact that the Jews had no synagogue there and so met by the river tells us that there probably were not a lot of Jewish men in Philippi. According to F. F. Bruce, a quorum of 10 Jewish men was required to establish a synagogue, and no number of women would compensate for the lack of even one member of that quorum.

Lydia... was a seller of purple: One who was a seller of purple dealt in a valued, luxurious product. The dyes used for making purple were expensive and highly regarded. Thyatira was well known as a center for this purple dye and fabric made from it. Later, there was a church in Thyatira also, and it was one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation (Revelation 2:18-29). Lydia was converted by the preaching of the Gospel; she listened, and the Lord "opened her heart". And God had good works for her to do right away, as she invited the missionary team to stay at her house.

The Demon-Possessed Slave Girl (16-18)

This girl, through demon possessed, was a source of profit for her owners as a fortune teller, apparently because demonic power gave her some special insight into the lives of others (the spirit of divination).

There is no evidence in scripture that leads us to believe that demons can read minds, or foretell the future. But they can read and predict human behavior, and can attempt to steer events towards a previously predicted conclusion. This is a manipulative, opportunistic, and evil "gift" from Satan.

This demon-possessed slave girl "preaches" for Paul, giving a demonic "testimony" to their divine credentials and the message that they preach, continuing to do this for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed: Why was Paul greatly annoyed? Didn't he appreciate the free "advertising"? No, because he didn't appreciate the source, and knew that a man is identified by both his friends and his enemies. The Gospel would not be promoted with a demonic "letter of reference"!

In this, Paul follows the example of Jesus, who often told demons to be silent, even when they were telling the truth about Him, e.g. Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 3:11-12. Jesus cast out demons by His own authority. And Paul, knowing this, speaks to demons like this one only in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ. In this case the demon left immediately. But Jesus said that some demons would be more difficult to cast out than others would (Matthew 17:21).

Paul and Silas are Arrested (16:19-24)

The slave girl's masters saw that their profit-maker was gone. They cared nothing for the girl herself, only for their ability to exploit her demonic possession for

money. They were essentially “occult pimps”, prostituting her demonic spiritually.

Paul and Silas were singled out not only because there were the leaders of the evangelistic group, but also, by their appearance, they were the most obviously Jewish. Luke was a Gentile, and Timothy was only half Jewish. There was a lot of bigotry against Jews in the west (some things never change!)

The charges are vague, simply accusing Paul and Silas of being troublemakers. But those vague charges were enough, because both the multitude and the magistrates were biased against Paul and Silas. They were biased because of their Jewish appearance, and because they assumed Paul and Silas were not Roman citizens.

In the Roman Empire, there were two very different laws: one for citizens of the Roman Empire, and one for those who were not citizens. Roman citizens had specific civil rights which were zealously guarded. Non-citizens had no civil rights, and were subject to the whims of both the multitude and the magistrates.

Since they assumed Paul and Barnabas were not Roman citizens, the multitude and the magistrates felt free to abuse Paul and Silas. After being severely beaten, Paul and Silas are imprisoned in maximum-security conditions (commanding the jailer to keep them securely ... the inner prison ... fastened their feet in the stocks). In Jewish legal tradition, there was a maximum number of blows that could be delivered when beating a person, but the Romans had no such limit. We can rest assured Paul and Silas were severely beaten. Paul would later write of his ministry: “In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often”. (2 Corinthians 11:23)

The Philippian Jailer ([16:25-36](#))

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God: Even though they had been arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for doing good, Paul and Silas are filled with joy, and sing praises to God. Wow. Seriously: wow! That’s a level of joy that is supernatural in origin and reach.

And the prisoners were listening to them: I’ll bet! How strange it must have been to the other prisoners, hearing these severely-beaten, shackled men offering prayers and praises unto God at midnight, in the midst of a brutally grim situation.

Their singing must've been pretty good, because it literally raised the roof!
Well....

Suddenly there was a great earthquake: This earthquake was clearly supernatural. This was not only because of its timing and location, but in the way that all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

The keeper of the prison ... was about to kill himself: The jailer's reaction had ample justification. Guards who allowed their prisoners to escape had to bear the penalty of their escaped prisoners. Knowing this, Paul calls to him, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." He assures the jailer that no one has escaped; absolutely the BEST news the jailer could hear at that moment!

It would have been easy for Paul and Silas to escape thinking God had instigated another miraculous jailbreak. But they clearly perceived that there was even more at play, namely the lives of others, which they considered more important than their own personal freedom and comfort. In not escaping, they showed *spectacular* discernment. The circumstances said, "escape." But the love of Christ said, "Stay for the sake of this one soul."

This hardened prison keeper fell down trembling. I think this is every bit as dramatic as it sounds. This jailer may well have participated in the beating these men just hours earlier. Now he was extraordinarily affected by the love and grace exhibited in the words and actions of Paul and Silas – even more than he was affected by the earthquake.

Sirs, what must I do be saved?: The jailer was so impressed by Paul and Silas - by the love they showed to him, and from their ability to take joy even in misery - that he instantly wants the kind of life that Paul and Silas have. Paul's answer to the keeper of the prison is a classic statement of the essence of the gospel: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. This is salvation by grace alone, received by faith alone. Notice that in contrast to some of the sermons we have read in Acts, here Paul never calls for the jailer to repent of his sin. Why not? Because in his question to them, he was already exhibiting repentance, *a desire to be changed*.

You and your household: On its surface this seems to be a specific promise for that Philippian jailer. But it is a promise that the Holy Spirit makes alive to us, as well, helping us to trust Him for the salvation of our families. The jailer's

household was not saved merely because he was; Paul came spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. They were all saved because they all trusted the word of God and the Jesus revealed to us through the word.

And he took them... and washed their stripes: The same jailer who had been punishing Paul and Silas was now ministering to them, caring for their wounds and feeding them. This shows faith and repentance; he is also following the example of love and kindness shown to him by Paul and Silas.

And immediately he and all his family were baptized: It's notable here not only that the jailer *and his family* saw no reason to delay baptism, but also that it was in the middle of the night! No waiting for the next Sunday morning church service. So if you ever find yourself pondering when is the "right" time for someone to be baptized, consider this example. (Hint: the answer is NOW!)

Paul and Silas did leave the prison (in the protective custody of the jailer) to minister to the jailer's household. But they also returned to the prison willingly to spare the jailer certain death.

Let those men go: To arrest, beat, and imprison someone, then to quickly release them is common in societies that recognize few rights for their citizens. It's a power play that effectively terrorizes the population into submission.

So the question is, if Paul and Silas were going to be released the day after their beating, arrest, and imprisonment, *why did God send the earthquake?* We see that the earthquake had absolutely nothing to do with freeing Paul and Silas from prison. But it had everything to do with the salvation of a certain prison guard and his household.

Paul and Silas: Roman Citizens (16:37-39)

They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans: Because Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they had recognized civil rights, which were grievously violated by the Philippian magistrates. Upon learning this, the magistrates are terrified, because it was a grave offense against Rome to treat Roman citizens as Paul and Silas had been treated.

Their mistake here is easy to understand, though; it would have been very rare for someone to be both a Jew and a citizen of Rome. Tarsus, Paul's place of birth, was Roman territory, but that in and of itself does not confer citizenship. It was most likely via a direct family connection (e.g. his father), or the connection of a

family member to a sympathetic Roman prefect or other regional high official. It was not common for citizens to have “papers” or any kind of marker of citizenship as we would expect today. Ultimately the manner of proof of citizenship is not known to us. We do know that it was proven, however. In Acts 26 both Agrippa and Festus are clearly convinced of the fact.

Why didn't Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship earlier? Perhaps they didn't have the opportunity, but it is more likely that the Holy Spirit was directing them to not reveal it until a certain time.

They... and asked them to depart from the city: So the magistrates act like politicians, and try to make their problem go away quietly by sweeping it (them!) under the rug.

They agree to go, but only after they had seen the brethren and encouraged them. Paul and Silas would not be bum-rushed out of town until they had completed their work there.

In Philippi, Paul and Silas left behind two important, and very different converts: Lydia, and their jailer:

- Lydia was a “church-goer”; the guard was not.
- Lydia was prospering in business; the guard was about to kill himself.
- Lydia's heart was gently opened; the guard's heart was violently confronted.
- The guard had a remarkable sign - an earthquake, but all Lydia had was the move of the Holy Spirit in her heart.

Both heard the gospel and believed, and through each of them their whole families – and who knows how many more lives – were touched.