

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
November 15, 2015

Lesson Text: Acts 16:1-5; 8-15
Lesson Title: Spreading the Word

Introduction

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke were a great missionary team. Luke's eyewitness account recorded in Acts tells us of the amazing things they did as they labored together and spread God's word.

Acts 16 chronicles Paul's second missionary journey which is important because it lays the groundwork for the church in Europe. The second missionary journey began with the purpose of "...*confirming the churches*" (Acts 15:41). In effect, it required two missionary teams to accomplish this. Paul and Barnabas had gone to Cyprus on their first missionary journey. So, on the second journey, Barnabas and Mark apparently visited the churches at Salamis and Paphos, while Paul and Silas visited Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia. However, in the end, the second missionary journey accomplished more than strengthening the churches. It resulted in new servants taking the gospel to new territory.

God's Call to Service (Acts 16:1-5)

The first five verses of Acts 16 show what Paul did when he visited the churches in Derbe and Lystra. Acts 14:8-23 records Paul's first visit to these two cities.

Verse 1

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:"

From Antioch, Paul and Silas travel to "Derbe" which is the seaport city for southern Turkey. They journeyed inland to "Lystra" where they find "a certain disciple, named Timotheus," or Timothy. "Timothy" was the son of a Jewish woman, but also the son of a Greek father. This meant Timothy's mother "was a Jewess," a believer, and "his father was a Greek," an unbeliever. It also meant Timothy was half Jew, half Greek. In other words, all the racial and spiritual cards are stacked against Timothy in the first century world.

Verse 2

“Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.”

In spite of everything against Timothy, he “was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.” Why? Because Timothy was a true “disciple” of the Lord Jesus Christ. Along with many others in Lystra, Timothy was most likely saved on Paul’s first missionary journey to Lystra where he preached the gospel and worked miracles (Acts 14:19-23).

Three years has passed since Paul was at Lystra. The “brethren” have watched “Timothy” grow in faith and know he is a true disciple of Jesus Christ. It was not hard for them to give a good “report” of this young man. Furthermore, Timothy, although raised by Greek father, had a godly Jewish mother and grandmother who taught him the word of God (2 Timothy 3:15).

Verse 3

“Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.”

“Him would Paul have to go forth with him” indicates Paul wanted him as his companion and helper in missionary ministry. Paul may still have had a bad taste in his mouth over the departure of John Mark during the first missionary journey, so he desperately needs a seasoned matured young man like Timothy.

It is interesting how God’s call to service in the life of Timothy unfolds. Paul tells the brethren at Lystra he needs help. Timothy is there and gets a thumbs up from the brethren. Paul is satisfied with Timothy and bang, Timothy is on the missionary team. There is only one problem. No one asked Timothy if he was willing to go! Paul just “took” Timothy!

Obviously the call of God was on Timothy’s life. Paul knew Timothy was the right man. The “brethren” knew Timothy was the right man. “Timothy” was willing to go without question or argument. Serving the Lord is not just an individual decision. Church leadership and the family of God is a vital part of anyone answering God’s call to service.

Paul did not “circumcise” Timothy for salvation (Galatians 5:6). Because Timothy is half Jewish, in the minds of Jewish people he was unclean. In order for Timothy to be useful in Jewish evangelism and to be able to enter Jewish synagogues, he must be “circumcised.”

Spreading the word of God and the message of the cross is never without its difficult issues and difficult decisions. The decisions Paul is making and the choice of this young mixed race Christian would be viewed by some as a compromise on Paul’s part. Paul knows exactly what he is doing because he

has the interest of the Lord at heart. He is called to carry the gospel to both Jew and Gentile and he knows God can use both Jew and Gentile to do the work.

Verse 4

“And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”

The “apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem” accepted the truth that Jews and Gentiles were saved by grace through faith. As Paul and the missionary team traveled “through the cities” which were largely composed of Gentile believers, “they delivered them the decrees for to keep.” These “decrees” was the truth accepted by the “apostles and elders” that salvation was wholly by God’s grace and there were no regulations or restrictions placed on Gentile believers. This was indeed good news to Gentile believers.

Verse 5

“And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”

When you read this verse you get a sense of how God is working in the young growing “churches.” Pentecost brought the great power of the Holy Ghost but it did not prevent persecution, obstacles, and challenges to the faith of the believers.

Sound biblical evangelism and discipleship by dedicated and Spirit-filled evangelists and leaders always result in positive Christian growth. The “increase in number” was occurring “daily” and must be attributed to the teaching, preaching, and decision making of these men of God. There are no secret methods when it comes to church growth. Believers grow as they are taught to obey the word of God. The word of God must be taught and preached by called individuals. God’s people must apply what they learn to the needs of everyday life.

Question: Do you know of any “Timothys” in your church? If so, have they been recruited or asked to serve recently? Is mission work in your church thought in terms of dollars given or people sent?

God’s Call to Europe (Acts 16:8-15)

Paul was not content to just visit the places he had previously visited on the first missionary journey. He wanted to go to “Asia” and preach, but the Holy Spirit would not give him liberty to go in that direction (Acts 16:6). The Spirit also prevented him from taking the gospel into Bithynia (Acts 16:7).

God works in mysterious ways, sometimes He intervenes in our plans and changes what we seem to feel is important at the moment. If we are to faithfully spread God's Word, we must follow the leadership of the Spirit and believe God's will is best.

Verse 8-9

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas." "Troas" was a seaport city on the western edge of Asia Minor, what is known today as Turkey. It is a little south of the city of Troy.

"Troas" is the place Paul received this incredible "vision" from the Lord we call "The Macedonian Vision." Perhaps Paul had not fully understood why the Holy Spirit had forbidden him to preach the word in Asia. This "vision" explains why the Holy Spirit led to "Troas." God had something great in store for the spreading of the gospel.

In this "night vision," Paul sees "a man of Macedonia." "Macedonia" is an area of northern Greece. Have you ever wondered how Paul knew the "man" he saw in the vision was from "Macedonia?" Apparently the "man" had the features and dialect of a Macedonian. Paul saw him and heard him speak.

The mysterious "man of Macedonia" gave Paul an invitation to "come over into Macedonia, and help us." It was an invitation to come and preach the gospel. It was a confession of the need for "help." By using the word "help," the man is expressing *need* more than *desire*. It also suggests *preparation* and *expectation*.

The word "help" means "bring aid or relief." Europe was calling for "help" and the "help" Europe needed is the "help" all lost countries and people need. It is the saving "help" of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 10

"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

Luke (author of Acts) tells us "after he" (speaking of Paul) "had seen the vision," there was urgency and assurance "that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

The change in pronouns in this verse is significant. Luke says, “we endeavoured” and “the Lord had called us.” This is the first time Luke includes himself as part of the missionary team. From this point on Luke is telling us he was an eyewitness, he was there, he recorded what he witnessed, and what we are reading about is the undeniable truth of the gospel going to Europe.

Verse 11-12

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.”

From “Troas,” Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, sailed “a straight course to Samothracia.” To “sail a straight course” means they had a wind blowing them in that direction. “Samothracia” is an island north of Troas. The “next day” they sailed to “Neapolis.” “Neapolis” is the seaport city for Philippi. “Philippi” is the “chief city of that part of Macedonia,” meaning the first city one comes to after leaving “Neapolis.”

Philippi was “a colony,” that is, possessing all the privileges of Roman citizenship. It was a city where the people lived as Romans lived. Paul and the missionary team stayed in Philippi “certain days.” The “days” in Philippi had eternal implications far beyond what anyone can imagine. Without the intervention of the Holy Spirit Paul and his missionary team would be nowhere near Philippi. Thank God for Providence!

Verse 13

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.”

On the first “Sabbath” after Paul’s arrival in Philippi, he and the team “went out of the city by a river side,” where the Jewish people of the city were gathered to pray. God stopped Paul from going to the places he wanted to go and led him to Philippi which did not have a synagogue. To have a synagogue required at least ten Jewish men. Evidently there were not enough Jewish men in Philippi to form a synagogue, so the people met together out in the open by the river.

How is it possible to spread the gospel in a city where there is no synagogue? Had Paul taken a wrong turn somewhere on the road? Is it possible God has purposefully led this great missionary team of Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke to one “woman” by the river?

Verse 14

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke meet a business woman named “Lydia.” It may be the name “Lydia” is a euphemism for “Lydian woman,” which would be her business name. She most likely did business with Rome in selling of purple fabrics. She is a very successful woman.

What you see in this verse is the conversion of Lydia through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. Although Lydia already “worshipped God,” she was only a believer in God at this point in her life. As the missionary team shared the word of God, “the Lord opened” her heart and she “attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” “Attended” means “to pay attention, adhere to.” She realized her need of forgiveness and trust in Jesus Christ.

God speaks through His servants when they speak the word of God. Salvation comes through the faithful exposition of Scripture. It is “the Lord” who “opens” the “hearts” of sinners to realize their sinfulness and need of salvation (Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 10:10).

Verse 15

“And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

Certain evidences emerge that verify Lydia is truly converted. First, “she was baptized.” Believer’s baptism is the outward sign of the individual’s personal trust in Jesus Christ. Her “household” also believed and was baptized. “Household” is a reference to her children, her servants, or both. The Philippian jailor and his household would do the same (Acts 16:33). Second, she demonstrated true Christian love and hospitality by inviting the missionary team to “come into my house.” Hospitality is required of all Christians (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9). Lydia “constrained” the missionary team to come to her house. They “judged” her “faithful to the Lord” and went into her house and stayed with her a while.

Conclusion

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke must have been encouraged as they sat in the home of Lydia. Her salvation and their presence in her home was confirmation the Macedonian vision was truly from the Lord. If God in His grace cared enough about sinners to re-route an entire missionary team in order that one

wealthy woman could hear the gospel and be saved, there is no limit to where the gospel could go.

Believers are called to spread the word wherever God leads. We, like Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, must be available and flexible to God's leadership. There are people like Lydia in our communities and churches. May the Lord help us to renew our commitment to go where the Lord sends, preach and teach His Word, and trust Him to open the hearts of sinners.

Amen.