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ACTS 15:36-16:40

Last week our lesson was about the Jerusalem Council. That council was convened to decide whether or not the Gentiles who were coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ must be circumcised or was their salvation by grace through faith alone. We saw last week that after much debate, the council wrote a letter stating that the Gentiles were not to be encumbered by the Law of Moses. We saw that **their** salvation and **our** salvation is Jesus plus nothing!

Our lesson today picks us after that letter had been delivered to the church at Antioch. After Paul and Barnabas had stayed in Antioch awhile, Paul was eager to revisit the cities in which they had planted churches. Paul was eager to find out how these folks were doing...

Well, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them and Paul didn't. John Mark had left them before and Paul apparently didn't trust him to follow through on **this** trip.

Acts 15:39...tells us there arose a sharp disagreement and the Greek used here indicates "an intense and passionate conflict."

The result of this conflict was that Paul and Barnabas parted company. Barnabas and John Mark left and went to Cyprus and Paul teamed up with Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia.

Now, who was right and who was wrong? Well, we don't really know, do we? We know we have two very driven men. One man, Paul, is absolutely driven to get the gospel out to as many folks as possible. The other man, Barnabas, is driven to get the gospel out too, but Barnabas is also driven to be an encourager to folks. And after all, John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas, so that would mean that Barnabas had an extra measure of compassion for him.

But, the bottom line is that nothing in these verses suggests that Paul was right and Barnabas was wrong, or that Paul was wrong and Barnabas was right.

And you know...we're tempted to feel sad about this until we stop to think that what the devil **meant** for evil and could very well have **used** for evil, **God meant and used for good.**

In fact, there were two good results...

- 1) John Mark got another chance to prove himself faithful... and he did prove himself faithful. Later he would write the Gospel according to Mark and also later, even Paul would say that John Mark was helpful to him in his ministry.
- 2) The Gospel was taken in **two** directions instead of only **one**. God had **four** missionaries at work instead of **two** and **twice** as many folks were destined to hear the Gospel because Paul and Barnabas had parted company.

16:1-5...

This is a very interesting passage of Scripture. **Chapter 15** tells us that folks didn't have to be circumcised to be saved and here we see Paul circumcising Timothy. **What in the world did Paul do that for?**

Well, Timothy was half Jew and half Gentile. Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek. Timothy had never been circumcised and Paul knew for Timothy to be totally accepted by

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the Jews in the places they were going then he would need to be circumcised. The difference in this and what we saw last week is this...

Timothy's circumcision was not necessary for his salvation. Timothy was already saved. However, Paul knew that the Jews would not open their arms to Timothy easily if they knew he was part Jewish but had never been circumcised.

Paul's concern was that the Jews accept them enough to listen to the Gospel and Paul wanted no barriers, no hindrances, no stumblingblocks to be in the way.

This was in no way inconsistent with Paul's stand against the Judaizers at the Jerusalem Council. Paul simply lived by the principle that he must be ***"all things to all people in order to win a few"***.

Timothy had every right to refuse circumcision. But Timothy knew it was important in that day...not for salvation but for his effective witnessing to the Jews. Timothy was willing to set aside his rights in order for others to know Jesus.

And may I say to you, that we must be willing to set aside our personal convenience and our personal rights and we must be willing to deny ourselves for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verses 6-10...tell us that Paul had wanted to go into Bithynia to preach but was stopped by the Spirit of Jesus...

A vision appeared to Paul in the night and Paul saw a certain man of Macedonia saying, ***"Come over to Macedonia and help us."***

This is a good example of how God often guides His children. God often closes doors for us, doesn't He? I don't know about you, but I really don't care too much for closed doors. I find them frustrating.

We pray, "God, what do you want me to do?" And then we look in the direction we think God is leading and we see a closed door. So we ask again, "God what do you want me to do?" Then, we look in another direction and God closes that door, too. Then, we get discouraged and even depressed. We believe God is not answering us and He really couldn't care less what happens to us!

Closed doors, however, are answers to our prayers as surely as opened doors are! And we have a lot to be thankful for in this closed door...

Think about this...

Bithynia is in Asia. Had Paul been allowed by the Holy Spirit of God to go to Asia, the Gospel may not have come to Europe as quickly as it did. Where are your ancestors from? None of them are from Asia are they?

If Paul had not heard and heeded the "Macedonian call", we might be Zeus worshipers or Hermes worshipers or who knows what else...

We should be very thankful Paul went to Macedonia. Later Europe would be become a great center of Christianity and this may not have happened had Paul gone to India or China.

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Let me just say before we go on that **verse 10** introduces us to something new...

Verse 10...Did you notice the little pronoun “**we**”? This is the first indication we have that **Luke** joined up with Paul. Luke is writing this and he has come on the scene and is accompanying Paul here in Philippi

Verses 11-15...

When Paul entered a city he always preached in the synagogue first. Paul did this because he was trained in Jewish tradition and theology and the Jewish people would welcome him at least at first.

Well, apparently Philippi had no synagogue. So, Paul and his evangelistic team went outside the gates to the riverside and there they found some women who had gathered there. Among those women who listened to Paul was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple fabric **and** a worshiper of God...and what happened?

What Paul said found lodging in Lydia's heart. It rang true in her soul. It struck a responsive chord. It was the truth for which she had been searching and her thirsty soul drank it in. Apparently, Lydia had already responded to some sort of truth...After all, she was already a worshiper of God!

But, she knew there was something more and when she heard Paul she knew that Jesus was the “something more” she longed for. She opened her heart to Him. She said “Yes” to Jesus and she was saved and baptized. Her faith must have been a witness to her household, because they came to Jesus, too!

Well, that's one lady Paul met in Philippi...let's look at another...

Verses 16-18...

Lydia was a cultured lady...but here we see a captive slave girl. Lydia was a successful businesswoman, but here we see a demon-possessed girl.

The story here is that this demon-possessed slave girl was really owned by some greedy masters. She made them a lot of money by her gift of fortune telling.

Verse 16 doesn't quite do justice to what the Greek text originally said. It actually says, “**She had a spirit of Pythona.**” That doesn't mean much to most of us, which is probably why it wasn't translated literally. It seems there was a Greek god associated with a snake and this young girl was possessed by a demonic spirit associated with that god.

This girl kept following after Paul and Luke and Silas saying,
“These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.”

Now, let me ask you...was she lying about Paul and Silas?

No, she was telling the truth, but we best be very, very careful when the devil tells the truth. Any time the devil tells the truth we need to see flashing lights and hear warning bells.

If we give the devil an inch, he'll take a mile. Many times the method the devil uses is to associate or ally himself very

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subtly with God's servants.

This is what we see here. The devil was trying to use this demon-possessed girl to associate himself with God's men. If Paul had ignored it, can you imagine what would have happened? All that the demon-possessed girl had done and said under the direction of Satan would have had the same credibility as the things Paul and Silas did and said.

We see this today. The devil has gotten into so many so-called "churches." He belongs to the Jehovah's Witnesses. He belongs to the Christian Science church. He belongs to the Mormon church. He belongs to some churches that have bought into ecstatic experiences...the being slain in the Spirit, the laughing revivals, the barking like dogs...

Well, apparently, Paul hesitated doing anything about her for awhile, but finally Paul commanded the spirit that possessed her to come out of her.

What happened? It came out!! She was set free! Her chains fell off! Her soul was free and her body and mind were no longer in bondage!

But, she could no longer prophesy...her ability to tell fortunes was gone, and I believe this is proof to us that not only was the demon cast out of her, but she had been saved by the grace of God.

The reason I believe this is because Jesus said if an unclean spirit is cast out of a person that unclean spirit will go right back and occupy that same person and bring seven more unclean spirits with it...**but it cannot do that IF the Holy Spirit has come into that person**...the Holy Spirit and a demon spirit cannot occupy and possess the same person!! I believe when we think of the money this young girl was making for her owners that this spirit would certainly have come back into her if the Holy Spirit had not been residing within her.

Verses 19-24...

Well, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. One reason was because they were Jews...**"being Jews"...**verse 20. Another reason was because of the message they preached. But the main reason was because of the greed of the men who owned the slave girl!!

Verses 25-26...

Here are Paul and Silas singing hymns and praising God. I don't know if I would have felt like singing hymns and praising God after having been beaten with rods, do you? In fact, most **normal Christians** of today would probably have said something like this... *"We should never have started out on this trip. It's just too hard to bring the gospel to these heathens in Europe...I believe it would be a lot easier on us to just let them die and go to hell."*

Or if they had been **hyper-Calvinists**, they might have said something like this... *"I just don't think these folks are among God's elect. As soon as we can, we better get out of here and go someplace where God is going to bless our ministry."*

Or if they had been of the **health and wealth** crowd, they might have said something like this... *"You know, God wants us to be happy, and we're not happy here sitting in these stocks. Let's find a place where we can be happy...and a little wealth wouldn't hurt my feelings either!!"*

But, praise God...they didn't say any of these things...instead, they spent the night hours praying and singing praises to God!

Don't you wonder what the other prisoners thought? They surely must have heard a lot of cursing going on from their fellow prisoners, but I bet this was the first time they had ever heard singing and praising going on!

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And then, an earthquake came! One theologian believes this was God applauding their singing! I don't know if they were singing "Amazing Grace" or "The Old Rugged Cross" or "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder", or what, but whatever it was...God heard it and He like it!!

Verses 27-34...

Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached a sermon once in which he referred to the cities of refuge in Israel in Old Testament times. When the Jews conquered Canaan they were told to establish cities of refuge to which a person who had accidentally killed somebody and who was therefore subject to the law "***an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,***" could run to and be safe.

Spurgeon indicated how the Law told the Jews to make sure these roads were well cared for and were unobstructed. If any stones had fallen into these roads, there were to be removed. If any bridges had fallen down, they were to be rebuilt. Furthermore, they were to set up signs to mark the way, so that under the extreme pressure of the moment, a fleeing fugitive, pursued perhaps by an avenger, might by these signs actually make it to the city safely.

Spurgeon said that this is exactly what the Apostle Paul was doing here. He was making the way to the city of refuge plain to the jailer.

Notice that Paul didn't suggest counseling. He didn't say to this jailer as most philosophers and psychologists would, "I realize you're asking a very important question, but before I answer, it's important first of all to understand yourself so you'll know the terms by which you're asking that question. You have to begin with yourself, and after you've done that, we'll talk about salvation."

No, Paul didn't give him a lesson on psychology...

Paul didn't give him a lecture on theology...

Paul didn't explore the "religious" background, or lack thereof of this man...

Paul didn't even talk about the ordinances of the church...baptism or the Lord' Supper.

Paul didn't even talk at all about the church. Those things could be dealt with in time, but this was not the time. The man was asking about salvation, and the apostle replied directly: "***Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...you and your household.***"

Did the jailer understand what Paul meant? Well, I believe he did, because he believed and was baptized. Did he understand all of what it meant? Probably not! I'm not sure **we** do, even with all the teaching we've received. But what he did know he believed, and Jesus saved him. Besides, not only was he converted; in the course of the evening his entire family was converted as well.

When Paul said to this jailer, "***Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...you and your household...***" was he promising what has come to be called in some circles "household salvation"? Was he promising that whenever one person in a household believes everybody else in that household will believe also? Can you count on that all the time? Well, I wish we could, don't you? We wouldn't be so concerned about the salvation of our lost husbands, and sons and daughters and fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters.

I believe Paul had a word from the Lord that this is what would happen in this particular instance...but let me say this...***When God calls one of a family...especially the man of the family...it is often the means by which he draws others into the gospel net!!***

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(Verses 27-34...)

The next morning the magistrates gave orders for Paul and Silas to be released. But Paul told them first of all that he and Silas were Roman citizens. Then Paul told them they had been beaten publicly without trial and they must be released publicly. By the way, the magistrates agreed to do this.

I believe the reason Paul did this was not to call attention to himself or to Silas. I believe Paul had in mind the safety of the church he was leaving behind. He wanted to do everything he could to establish and protect it. He knew he would soon be gone and he didn't want the church at Philippi to suffer any repercussions because of him.

By the way, Luke must have stayed on in Philippi because in **chapter 17** we see the pronoun **"they"** used again. Later we'll see Luke join up with Paul again. Some have suggested that Luke was from Philippi and he stayed behind to minister to the church there.

Well, let me just say a few things in closing.

Paul had a very eventful time on their second missionary journey.

He and Silas met Timothy and brought him into their ministry.

They had a door closed to Asia and one opened to Europe.

They met Luke and allowed him to be a part of their team.

They went to Macedonia where they converted

A successful **fabric merchant...**

A demon possessed **fortuneteller...**

And a **jailer and his household** (and probably a few if not all of the inmates who were in the prison with them)...

Paul would later write, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

May God help us to be willing to witness to all people....as Paul and Silas were. May God give us holy boldness to tell folks what God has done for us and to let them know what a difference He has made in our lives.