Series: Acts

Message: “Whatever It Takes Wherever It Leads Acts 16\_1-18\_22”

Text: Acts 16:1-18:22

Theme:

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Location: Christ Community EFC

If you would please go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 16.

We have been in a series for some time now, working our way through the book of Acts.

This next big section of the book of Acts begins here in Acts 16 and runs through Acts 18:22. It covers Paul’s second missionary journey in Acts 16:1-18:22.

In chapter 15, where we left off last week, Paul and Barnabas go their separate ways. Paul’s plan was to go back to all the churches that he and Barnabas had visited on their first missionary journey.

But after a dispute over whether or not to take Mark along with them on the second journey Paul and Barnabas split up and formed two teams.

Paul’s second missionary journey began about 49 AD and would last about three years. He starts out visiting these churches but goes on to take the gospel message into Europe.

[Maps]

He would go as far as Athens Greece and even to the island of Corinth. While on this journey Paul writes two of the books in the New Testament—1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Though this section covers a lot miles and details of Paul journey as he advances the gospel I want to focus our attention her on Acts 16:1-10.

As Paul and his team head out they had no idea how long or how far they would go. But what we do see here is that they willing do whatever it takes and go wherever the Spirit leads to share their faith.

What about you!?

When was the last time you shared your faith with someone or went out of your way to serve someone in the name of Christ?

When was the last time you heard the Spirit of God nudge you? Did you respond or did you just ignore Him?

Or…have you ignored the Sprit so long that you don’t even hear Him anymore or recognize the sound of His voice!?

Here is a truth; it is easy to fall into routine Christianity, where we function in the flesh instead of walk in vital dependence upon God’s Spirit.

One of the main lessons of the Book of Acts is that the expansion of the early church was due to the working of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was directing, moving, and empowering the apostles and the early believers as they responded to His leading.

If we want to see God working today in a similar fashion, we need to fight routine Christianity and rather, seek daily to submit to and follow the sovereign Spirit.

Routine Christians know that they should do good, share their faith, serve and love others, but they want to do it when they get around to it, when it’s convenient.

Routine Christians serve in their own time, not God’s timing.

The message of our text is this:

**We must seek to follow the Holy Spirit when we serve the Lord and others.**

By the way ministry is not just for the “professionals”. If you have put your faith in Christ for your salvation you too have been called to minister, serve Christ and others.

God has prepared work, ministry, for you to do and He has given you the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and direct you in that ministry.

The text here assumes that we, with Paul and Silas, are already seeking first God’s kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

If you are not living with that focus, you need to stop and confess it to the Lord, and yield yourself in obedience to His will for your life.

Undergirding and woven through our text is the fact that the Holy Spirit is sovereign, and these men were obediently following His leading as they sought to do His work.

There are four lessons I would like to draw form our text this morning:

**1. The Holy Spirit leads us to the right co-labors for the ministry God is calling you to (16:1-2, 10).**

Chapter 16 begins “1 **Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium**.

It states here that Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra. That was a radically courageous thing to do!

Lystra was where Paul, on his first missionary journey, had been stoned, dragged out of the city and thrown on the garbage heap, left for dead.

If I was Paul, I would not be inclined to go back to Lystra.

But here, where he had suffered so terribly, and while he was still grieving over the falling out with Barnabas, God graciously brought into Paul’s life this young man, Timothy, who would become like a faithful son to Paul.

Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5) were Jewish women who had become believers in Jesus Christ.

Although Timothy’s father was an unbelieving Greek, these women had taught Timothy the Scriptures from his childhood (2 Tim. 3:15).

On Paul’s first visit to Lystra, these women and the young Timothy had come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

By Paul’s second visit, Timothy, who would have been in his late teens or early twenties, had established a good reputation among the believers in Lystra and Iconium.

Just as witnessing of the stoning of Stephen had made an indelible impression on Paul, so watching Paul get stoned had made a profound impression on young Timothy.

As a result, Timothy had resolved to follow Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost.

So now Paul saw Timothy’s commitment and invited him to join the missionary team.

It was the start of a lifelong and life-changing friendship.

Not only Timothy, but the Holy Spirit called Luke, the author of Acts, to join the team. In verse 10, the first of the “**we**” sections of Acts begins.

The “we” passages ends at the end of chapter 16, as Luke stays in Philippi to shepherd the new church there, while the team moves on.

The “we” passages resumes again, six or seven years later, in 20:5 and runs to the end of Acts.

Luke, the beloved physician, a Gentile, also became a co-laborer of Christ with Paul.

These new relationships did not happen by chance.

The Lord knows that we need fellow Christians of a kindred spirit to encourage us and to work with us in the cause of Christ.

We need older believers like Barnabas had been to Paul.

We need contemporaries, like Silas and Luke. And, we should ask God for some younger believers, like Timothy, that we can bring along in the faith.

Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to the right people to be not only your friends, but also your co-laborer in the cause of Christ.

Christian friends are a gift from God!

**2. The Holy Spirit guides us and gives us wisdom in the right strategies for our ministry (16:3).**

Acts 16:3 “**Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek**.”

Paul circumcised Timothy because of the Jews in those parts, who knew that his father was a Greek.

What in the wide world of sports is going on here!? Why did Paul do that?

Many have criticized him for violating his own convictions against keeping the Jewish ceremonial law.

But Paul acted consistently with his convictions, even if it caused his critics to misunderstand him.

In Galatians 2:3, Paul says that Titus, a Gentile, was not required to undergo circumcision. So why circumcise Timothy, but not Titus?

With Titus, it was a question of whether a man is justified by grace through faith alone, or whether he must also keep the Law of Moses.

It would have compromised the very gospel to circumcise Titus.

But with Timothy, who was half-Jewish, it was a matter of causing needless offense to unbelieving Jews.

It was a matter of doing what it takes to build relationships with the lost so that you can share your faith with them.

For Timothy circumcision was not for salvation but for preparation for ministry.

Circumcision would allow Timothy to accompany Paul and Silas into the synagogues where they often preached.

Paul did not want anything to hinder Jewish people from hearing and believing the gospel.

We all need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom from God’s Word so that we know which convictions to take a stand for, and which areas we need to yield out of love to further God’s kingdom.

All too often, we stand firm where we ought to yield, and we yield where we ought to stand firm.

Now I am not saying that we should smoke dope so we can tell drugies about Jesus.

But we should be sit with an addict and love on them right where they are to help them get to the place where they can meet Jesus.

The Holy Spirit will guide you and give you wisdom as you serve God and others in ministry.

**3. The Holy Spirit empowers His workers to strengthen the church (16:4-5).**

Acts 16:4-5 “**As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily**.”

The missionary team traveled throughout the region, delivering the decrees of the Jerusalem Council.

As a result the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily.

Remember the Jerusalem decrees, as we saw, affirmed two things.

First, they affirmed that salvation is not by keeping the Law of Moses, but rather is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Second, they asked Gentile believers, out of consideration for the Jews, not to engage in four things that were especially offensive to Jews: eating things sacrificed to idols; eating meat with the blood, or meat that had been strangled; and, fornication, which was commonly accepted in the pagan culture (15:29).

It strengthens churches to hear the gospel affirmed, that we are saved by God’s grace through faith alone in what Jesus Christ provided for us on the cross.

The aim behind the decrees was to show love and to avoid offending the Jews so that lost Jews could get saved, and believing Jews would not divide from the Gentiles in the churches.

Everyone who has come to saving faith in Jesus Christ should seek to strengthen the church by helping every person, the saved and the unsaved alike, to understand the gospel clearly.

And, we should help each member joyfully submit to God’s Word and to act in loving regard for others so as not to cause needless offense.

Then the church will be strong and increase in numbers.

We’ve seen that the Holy Spirit leads us to the right co-laborers, gives us wisdom for the right strategies in ministry, and enables us to strengthen the churches.

Finally,

**4. The Holy Spirit leads His workers to the right opportunities for ministry (16:6-10).**

Acts 16:6-10 “**And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.**

**7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.**

**8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”**

**10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

I can only touch briefly on each point. Note six things:

1) Opportunities come to those who are already serving, not to those who are doing nothing.

Sometimes people don’t serve the Lord because they’ve never experienced a dramatic “call” to ministry.

But this Macedonian call did not come to people who were doing nothing; it came to men who were actively serving the Lord.

It was not a call to begin serving the Lord or to become a missionary, but rather a clarification of direction in an existing ministry.

You can turn the steering wheel of your car all day long, but if the car isn’t moving, you won’t get anywhere.

You can sit around and pray for God’s direction for service, but you won’t get it if you’re not already serving Him.

Start doing something to serve Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit will redirect you if the Spirit needs to.

2) God sometimes leads us to the right opportunities by hindering us from the wrong ones.

We read (16:6) that these men were “**forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia**” (a province in western Turkey).

Next, they tried to go north into Bithynia (near the Black Sea), but “**the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them**” (16:7).

What’s going on here?

Didn’t the Lord want those in Asia or Bithynia to hear the gospel?

Yes, later He did (18:19-21, 24-19:41; 1 Pet. 1:1), but not now.

3) God’s leading us to the right opportunities is usually a progressive matter, not an instant revelation of the big picture.

Paul was feeling his way along at this point.

After these two hindrances, if you had asked him what his plans were, he probably would have said, “I honestly don’t have a clue!”

Usually, knowing God’s will is like driving in the fog. God just gives us enough light to see the next few feet.

As we follow, He gives us the light we need to keep moving ahead.

4) When God reveals His will to us, we must make sure that it is from the Lord, and then be quick to obey.

The word “**concluding**” (16:10) indicates that the missionary team discussed the meaning of Paul’s vision before taking action.

The word means to join or knit together, or unite.

As they talked, it all came together. As soon as they were sure of what God was saying, immediately they sought to go into Macedonia.

They didn’t form a committee and deliberate for months. They figured out what God wanted and went down to the harbor to buy tickets.

Does God direct us through visions in our day? The answer is, He can, but be careful! There are all sorts of crazy visions that people have that are not from the Lord.

A few years ago one TV preacher told his audience that the Lord had revealed to him that thousands of people from all over the world would be raised from the dead when people put their caskets in front of their TV sets tuned to that station.

On the other hand, Bill Bright (the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) tells of how late one night as he was studying with a friend for a Greek exam in seminary, he suddenly sensed God’s presence in a way that he had never known before.

He had the overwhelming impression that the Lord had unfolded a scroll of instructions of what he was to do with his life.

Specifically, he knew that he was to devote his life to help fulfill the Great Commission by winning and discipling the students of the world for Christ.

When he shared it with his Bible professor, Dr. Wilbur Smith, he paced back and forth in his office, saying, “This is of God. This is of God. I want to help you. Let me think and pray about it.”

The next day, Dr. Smith handed Bill a piece of paper on which he had scribbled, “CCC.”

He explained that God had provided the name for Bill’s vision, Campus Crusade for Christ (Come Help Change the World [Revell], pp. 26-27).

The balance we need is on the one hand not to quench the Spirit, but on the other hand to examine everything carefully and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thess. 5:19-21).

An obstinate apostle Paul could have plowed ahead into Asia or Bithynia against God’s promptings not to do so.

But the obedient apostle obeyed God’s promptings and waited until the Spirit showed him where to go. Then he went immediately. The world has never been the same.

5) Often, when we obey, the reality does not match the vision exactly.

Paul saw a man of Macedonia calling for help. He got there and found a small group of women gathered by the river, and one of these became the first convert.

The second convert was a demon-possessed slave girl.

Her conversion landed Paul and Silas in prison with their backs shredded by whips.

It wasn’t a glorious beginning, to say the least!

But it’s how the gospel began to take root in Europe, and we now know that the history of Europe has been forever different.

Often when we obey God’s leading and launch out into His work, the reality doesn’t match the vision as we saw it playing out or in our timing.

The Spirit of God can take us through many turns and valleys, but if we continue to obey what we know He called us to do the Spirit will build us up in the process and accomplish far more than we could have ever imagined on our own.

6) The greatest help that we can give to people is to proclaim the gospel to them.

“**Come over to Macedonia and help us**” (16:10).

Paul went and gave them the best help in the world: “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved**” (16:31).

That is the most helpful message that we can give to anyone. It is the most helpful thing that we can do for anyone.

We may have to feed a hungry man and provide for his other physical needs, before we can tell him.

But if we only provide for his physical needs and neglect the spiritual, we have not given him the most important help.

If you were walking down the street and heard someone cry, “Help me! Help me!” you would be stirred to action.

If you could not provide help yourself, you would at least make sure that the proper help got to this needy person.

Ask God to burden your heart with the cry of the lost: “Come over and help me!”

If you cannot go yourself, at least you will give and pray for missionaries to go. That’s the best help we can give to a desperately lost world.

**Conclusion**

Let me leave you with the questions I asked at the beginning of this message: Are you seeking first God’s kingdom and righteousness?

If not, you need to do some serious thinking about your priorities.

Would you notice if God withdrew His Holy Spirit from your life this week?

If not, you need to get in tune with Him and seek to follow His leading for how He wants you to labor for His kingdom.