

Today we launch into a study of Paul's second missionary journey – the most significant highlight being that he is led by God to go into Macedonia – what we now know as Europe. Today we will look at Part 1 of that 3-4 year journey: its beginning through Galatia and into Philippi of Macedonia.

Since our passage is long – from 15:36 through all of chapter 16- we will focus on “snapshots” of five important persons that emerge in this narrative. And we will focus on what God might be teaching us today from these five lives brought to life for us in this narrative from Dr. Luke.

1. Silas – the encouraging Jewish prophet from Jerusalem
2. Timothy – the young son of a mixed marriage
3. Lydia – the wealthy businesswomen from Thyatira
4. The fortune-telling girl of Philippi
5. The Philippian soldier/jailer from Rome

### **SNAPSHOT OF SILAS & PRELUDE TO THE JOURNEY (15:36-41)**

In this portion of Scripture we get a snapshot of Silas. (SHOW IMAGE)

We met Silas in v. 22 when he and Judas Barsabbas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to bear the letter from the Jerusalem Council and to strengthen the church there. He was a “leading man” among the brethren, Luke tells us. And in v. 22 we learn that he was considered a prophet as well, and an encourager and teacher.

This was his background, but he comes into prominence in the narrative in today's passage when Silas becomes Paul's travelling companion on this second missionary journey.

**Acts 15:36-41** After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. There occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was travelling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Isn't it interesting how sometimes arguments and splits can be used by God for the greater good? That's what happened here. John Mark was given a second chance by the graciousness of Barnabas, and Mark turned out to be a pillar of the church that Paul later called “of great use to me” (2 Timothy 4:11) and he went on to write the precious gospel of Mark in our Bible. And there emerged two missionary journeys instead of one – God receiving a double witness to the world. And, Silas received the opportunity of a lifetime to become a critical part of reaching to gospel to the “uttermost part of the earth.”

Silas is a wonderful example of how God will use a faithful and tested disciple of His to be given additional honor and privilege in ministry. Remember Jesus' teaching in the parable of the talents? He has the master say this to the faithful servant:

**Matthew 25:23** “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, so I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Our snapshot of Silas reveals a faithful servant who was promoted by God to greater ministry and joy. May this be our legacy and privilege as we faithfully serve our Lord.

### **SNAPSHOT OF TIMOTHY & GOD'S LEADING (16:1-5)**

Paul and Silas travel north and then west from Antioch through Syria and into Cilicia (SEE MAP AGAIN). This takes them through Paul's hometown of Tarsus, and then onto the Galatian cities of Derbe and Lystra. And it is in Lystra that Paul finds Timothy – evidently one of the disciples that had come to faith during Paul's trip to this city some three years before. (SEE IMAGE)

**Acts 16:1-3** Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. And he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Here is another faithful disciple who was granted an enormous privilege. That Timothy was "well spoken of by the brethren" speaks volumes. How important it is that we live our lives such that our fellow Christians speak highly of us (and especially when we are not present). Why? – because God rewards those who are of good reputation and above reproach in the world. Our testimony is better written by those who know us well, than by our testimony of self. Wise Solomon said it this way in the Proverbs:

**Proverbs 27:2** Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

Our snapshot of Timothy also shows that he was the son of a mixed marriage – both culturally and spiritually - with a believing Jewish mother and a non-believing Gentile father. Yet despite the challenge in that culture of emerging spiritually independent from his father, Timothy did so and became an indispensable companion of Paul as well as ultimately the pastor of the church in the capital city of Asia – Ephesus - and all this as a very young man. Of him, Paul would later write:

**1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Never let a potential cultural handicap such as a broken home, mixed marriage or being adopted keep you from being a strong disciple for Christ. Neither let your age, whether young or old, keep you from growing strong on your relation to Jesus.

And Timothy was also a living example of choosing to not be a stumbling block to others. He and Paul decided that he would be circumcised – even though the Jerusalem Council had decided that it was not necessary for salvation. Why? Because of the many Jews that Timothy would encounter on the missionary trail who might find an uncircumcised half-Jew as a stumbling block to their becoming a Christian. May we ever live our lives such as not to come across as a hypocrite to potential followers of Christ – even if it means making choices that we might be spiritually free to make.

In 16:5 Luke gives us his fourth "progress report" on the state of the church and the advancement of God's Word.

**Acts 16:5** So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

**"Strengthened" is our word for this stage of the ministry.** We saw it in 15:32 when Judas and Silas "strengthened" the brethren in Antioch. We saw it again in 15:41 when Paul and Silas were "strengthening" the churches in Cyria and Cilicia. And now we see it as the now trio of evangelists – Paul, Silas & Timothy – "strengthened" the churches along their route.

May we ever seek to strengthen our brothers and sisters in the Lord with our daily words of encouragement, consistent challenges to seek Jesus more and visible lifestyle of trusting God through all circumstances. An interesting side note is that the word here for "stengthen" here is "stereo" in the Greek, from which we get our word "stereo." The Greek meaning? – to solidify or broaden, i.e. strengthen. So the missionaries were "stereo-ing" the churches!

**CLOSED DOORS / OPEN DOOR (16:6-10)**

Our last snapshot of Timothy is that he was a part of a challenging and critical Spirit-led decision. From Galatia, the missionaries sought where next to go. (SHOW MAP AGAIN) They tried south into Asia (toward Ephesus, but the Scripture says they were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit.” They tried north into Bithynia, but the Scripture says “the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”

What was happening? - The Lord was closing doors in order to lead them to the open door of His will.

May this be a reminder to each of us when we are frustrated with closed doors. Closed doors sometimes are God’s protection from dangerous direction. Closed doors are sometimes God’s way of keeping us from second or third best, wanting to give us His best. Closed doors are sometimes God’s way of testing our faith to believe Him for His perfect timing.

For Paul, Silas & Timothy, God was leading them through a wilderness of uncertainty to lead them to the “promised land” of God’s perfect plan – taking the gospel into Europe.

How was it that God closed the doors to the south or north? We don’t know for sure. It might have been literal closed doors of roads impassable. Or it might have been strong inner conviction given to the travelers. Or it just might have been Paul’s illness flaring up again that needed medical attention. What is the clue that this might have been the reason? Because after Paul sees the night vision of the man from Macedonia calling them to “come over to Macedonia to help us” we read in verse 10: “when he had seen the vision, immediately WE sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called US to preach the gospel to them. LUKE COMES INTO THE SCENE AS A FIRST HAND PARTICIPANT. Could it be that it was in Troas that Paul found Luke the physician, who helped him with his illness and joined them on their journey to help Paul in both physical and spiritual ways?

Either way, it is now a quartet of evangelists that take the boat across the Aegean Sea to what we now know as Greece today – then, Macedonia and its influential city of PHILIPPI.

### **3 PHILIPPIAN SNAPSHOTS (16:11-40)**

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was one of the principle cities of Macedonia, second only to the Macedonian capital city of Thessalonica, to which Paul would travel soon after. Philippi was a Roman colony, meaning that it was a “mini-Rome” with Roman order and Roman ways having taken over much of the Greek culture. And this was a city in which there was no Jewish synagogue. It was truly Gentile. Paul was reaching “to the ends of the earth.” And Paul had come that much closer to reaching you and me, who are mostly of European descent. Remember – this is the story of our spiritual heritage!

#### **1. LYDIA - “Down by the riverside” – v. 13-15 (SHOW IMAGE)**

Our next snapshot is of the first convert of Europe! Lydia was a seller of purple, which meant she was a foreigner from Thyatira (way back in Asia, where Paul had been forbidden to go). Thyatira was the city that was known for its purple fabrics, coming from the dye unique to that city, painstakingly extracted from a certain shellfish drop by drop. Thus – the purple dye and dyed fabric she sold was very costly – and Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman.

With no synagogue in Philippi, Paul & company likely inquired where the Jewish faithful were meeting. And they found that it was “down by the riverside” on the Sabbath in the form of a prayer meeting. And they spoke to the women, of which Lydia was one, said to be a “worshipper of God” but not yet a follower of Christ.

Note how far away from Judaism is the Pharisee Paul – in totally Gentile territory, on the Sabbath and not in a synagogue, and talking with women!

And take note also how one can be a “worshipper of God” and yet not a Christian.

But Lydia, the wealthy business-woman had her heart opened by the Lord, and who responds to the gospel presented by Paul. She – and her household – were baptized, undoubtedly there in the river, and she becomes the FIRST CHRISTIAN OF EUROPE.

A visible demonstration of her new-found faith was the act of HOSPITALITY, which should characterize every believer. She welcomed into her (clearly larger, upper-class home) four travelling evangelists.

## **2. PHILIPPIAN FORTUNE-TELLER – “Yes, my sins are gone” – v. 16-19 (SHOW IMAGE)**

Our next snapshot is of a girl (meaning under that age of marriage, or probably under 13) who was a slave-girl (owned by others for profit) and who skimped out a meager living telling fortunes by an evil spirit who lived in her. Luke tells us that she was troubling Paul & company day after day with her (perhaps) taunting words of “these men are bond—servants of the most high God.

Finally, Paul could take it no longer (“greatly annoyed”) and commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl. The actual Greek word for “come out” is “gone” or “begone!” Luke then used a play on words, for in the next sentence he says that her masters saw that their hope of profit was “gone” (same word). Gone, gone. And thought it doesn’t specify, Luke’s intention seems to be to indicate that the girl’s sins were “gone” as well, and that she was made spiritually well. “Gone, gone, gone, gone – yes, my sins are gone” (goes the old chorus).

Have you every thought that even an annoyance to you, or to your ministry, might well be a mission field and “open door” to the gospel? Even a lowly slave-girl taunting your ministry might be a field “white for harvest.” Don’t ever count any soul out!

## **3. PHILIPPIAN SOLDIER / JAILER FROM ROME “What must I do?” – v.27-34 (SHOW IMAGE)**

As a result of the turmoil over the exorcism of the slave-girl, Paul and Silas (being the chief spokesmen) were beaten, put in the inner prison, locked in stocks and guarded securely.

One of the beautiful Biblical pictures is given in v. 25:

**Acts 16:25** But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

**LESSON - It is the Spirit-filled Christian who can sing praises at the darkest point of the night and in deepest circumstances. And remember – others are listening.**

Jail gates and stocks of the era were typically secured with a wooden bar falling into two slots. A severe earthquake (common to that region) could easily have unloosed the gates, stocks and woke the jailer. Even though probably a natural phenomena, it was nonetheless the miracle of God. The Almighty could have freed Paul and Silas, but He had a more spectacular miracle in mind – that is, the conversion of the Roman jailer and his entire family to follow. Conviction of the need of salvation always comes from the prompting of the Spirit – and so it was with the jailer. Seeing these beaten prisoners praising their God, seeing the way cleared for them to escape but not doing so, and knowing the darkness of his own heart, all combined to make him aware of his spiritual need: “What must I do to be saved?” And he learns that a simple faith placed in the Lord Jesus and His provision for his sin is all that is needed.

## **NOTE THE VARIETY IN THE PHILIPPIAN SNAPSHOTS**

3 different nationalities – An Asian oriental, a Greek Macedonian and a Roman

3 different social status - Wealthy, impoverished and middle working class

3 different personal needs - intellectual (Lydia “listened” and opened her heart/mind)

psychological (slave w/evil spirit, w/emotional consequences of inferiority, lack of self-worth and personal identity)

moral (conscience aroused – “what must I do to be saved?” and sense of guilt aroused in not performing job well and in seeing others spiritually sound)

## **TODAY’S KEY ”TAKE-AWAYS”**

**Lives well-lived are rewarded with more ministry opportunities**

**God often leads with closed doors**

**The appeal of the gospel is truly universal**