



## The Power of the Gospel

*Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ*

Acts 16:1-15

July 6, 2014

Pastor Eddie Strickland

---

**-“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. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 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. 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. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 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.” 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. So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.” (Acts 16:1–15, ESV)**

## **-Pray**

**-Intro:** We saw last week the hearts of Paul and Barnabas for the gospel of Christ and their hearts for the church. We continue to see that in our passage for today also. Barnabas takes Mark and they go to Cyprus. Paul chooses Silas, are commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord and they depart going through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches. We don't hear anymore about Barnabas's ministry but Luke continues today to give us some more information concerning Paul's journey. And in this passage today we are going to see some things that will help us cultivate our hearts toward the gospel and living it out. So let's dig in to this.

### **1 – The gospel trumps the non-essentials (1-5)**

**-"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. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 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. 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. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." (Acts 16:1–5, ESV)**

-Ok, so Paul is traveling westward and comes to Derbe and to Lystra. They meet a disciple there named Timothy who we know from the rest of Scripture becomes very dear to Paul and they have a great friendship in the Lord and do ministry together. Here we are introduced to Timothy. Timothy is the son of a Jewish woman and his father was a Greek. It seems by the imperfect tense of the word in the Greek that Timothy's father may have been dead. And a note of importance for us here is that according to Jewish law, Timothy would have been considered a Jew by the Jews due to being born of a Jewish descent. And a male Jew that was not circumcised, which was a sign of the covenant, was considered to be an apostate Jew. So here we have the background of what happens next---something very unusual.

-Paul wants Timothy to join their team and travel with them on their mission. Think about why. Timothy was a believer---a very necessary requirement. But think about the background that we just talked about. Timothy, by nature of his mixed family (Jewish mother and Greek father), would have in roads to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Think about the effectiveness and potential that Timothy would have to reach both groups with the gospel of Christ. He would have knowledge of both cultures and would be acceptable to both. He would, because of his Jewish heritage, be allowed in the synagogues with Paul, which is where Paul would go first to preach the gospel. And because of his Gentile father, he would be able to relate to the Gentiles in a way that others that were strictly Jewish may not be able to. Timothy would be a great fit for this mission. AND, he was already well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. The fact that he was well spoken of speaks to the fact that he has been growing in Christ and he has matured in his faith and in his relations with people. Paul would later write to Timothy concerning the qualifications for elders that one should be well thought of by outsiders and Timothy fit the bill. So Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on the mission. And that Timothy wanted to go speaks to his character and desire for the gospel. Timothy would have been present when Paul was stoned and left for dead because that happened at Lystra. Timothy would automatically know that being a part of this mission could subject him to the same treatment but he was willing to go anyway. Timothy was willing to suffer for the gospel. Paul would remind Timothy later that anyone who sought to live a life of godliness would be persecuted for it.

-Paul wants Timothy to come and Timothy is willing to go.

-But Paul does something next that if we don't stop and think about it could easily be misunderstood. Paul takes Timothy and has him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places. Ok, wait a minute here. What's going on Paul? What are you doing Paul? Have you lost your mind? Paul had just come out of the Jerusalem Council meeting where he fought tooth and nail against circumcision as a requirement for the gospel and now he is backtracking and having Timothy circumcised. Paul had vehemently disagreed with the circumcision party and now he is compromising the gospel and agreeing with them and having Timothy circumcised. Do you see the great potential for Paul's actions to be misunderstood here by others and especially the church?

-So what's going on here? Is Paul being inconsistent with the gospel? Is his heart not for the true gospel anymore? Not at all---Paul's heart is exactly for the gospel and not to compromise it. That is why he does what he does. Never in this context do we see that he had Timothy circumcised so that he would be saved. Paul would never do that--that's exactly why he refused to circumcise Titus because it would have been seen that way and he would not compromise.

**-“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” (Galatians 2:1–5, ESV)**

-Paul would not compromise the gospel. But here with Timothy, Paul knows that if Timothy is not circumcised then the opportunity for the gospel to go to the Jews in that area would be lost and Paul was not willing to allow a stumbling block over a non-essential, non-salvific issue to hinder the gospel of Christ to go to the Jews that needed it desperately. Although circumcision was not needed for acceptance by God, it was advisable for the gospel to be accepted by some Jews that needed to hear of Christ. So Paul would not fight over the non-essential of circumcision that in this case with Timothy did not compromise the gospel truth and so he would lay aside the freedom and have Timothy circumcised so that the gospel could go forth. For Paul, this was a matter of indifference and to have Timothy circumcised was for a very practical purpose---not to compromise the gospel but to increase Timothy's usefulness in the ministry of it. Paul's concern was for the defense and propagation of the gospel. When the truth and heart of the gospel was at stake, Paul refused any compromise whatsoever. However, when the gospel was not at stake, as was the case here, Paul was willing to lay aside many things in order to win others to Jesus Christ. That's why he would write:

**-“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:19–23, ESV)**

-And so Timothy joins the team and Paul’s hope of the gospel going forth with effectiveness is exactly what happened.

**-“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. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.” (Acts 16:4–5, ESV)**

-Paul and his companions delivered the letter from the Jerusalem Council that gave the good news that salvation is found in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone and the churches were strengthened in their faith and their numbers increased. By not allowing needless offense by fighting over the non-essentials but giving up that liberty and not compromising the truth of the gospel but proclaiming it, people were saved and the church was strengthened and sanctified in their faith. Praise be to our God of salvation!!

-So what many use to question Paul’s heart for the gospel actually reveals his heart of love and trust in the true gospel. And a heart that loves the gospel will seek to proclaim it, which brings us to the next thing we need to see from our passage today.

**2 – A heart for the gospel is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit (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. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 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.” 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.” (Acts 16:6–10, ESV)**

-So Paul is continuing westward which would have eventually led him to the province of Asia where Ephesus was located. But we are told that the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to continue to Asia and speak the Word there. We don't know how the Spirit did this. It could have been a blocked road, it could have been a prophetic utterance, it could have been some inner disposition---we just don't know. But we do know that the Spirit prevented them from going into Asia. So Paul and his team turn northward to Mysia and tried to go into Bithynia but again, the Spirit again did not allow them. So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

-Ok, let's stop here for a minute. Remember that Paul is controlled by the love of Christ and his heart is to proclaim the gospel of Christ everywhere he goes. Remember Paul's words---“Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel.” That is his heart and part of who he is as a child of God---it should be ours too by the way. He has been entrusted with the gospel and his heart is to be faithful in sharing it. And the Holy Spirit has closed the door twice now and kept him from doing that in specific places. So we can't look at Paul and his team and say that they have been neglectful or unfaithful because their heart was to proclaim the gospel. It would be different if they were using the Holy Spirit's leading as an excuse not to share the gospel and using that as a copout. I have done that before. I have been in an awkward situation and not taken the opportunity to share the gospel and convinced myself that it must have been the Spirit not leading me to do that. We have to be careful to search our heart and see if the desire to share is really there or if we are really looking for any excuse not to share the gospel. But this team's heart was to proclaim it---it's what the mission is all about. So it would have been easy for this team to get frustrated. It could have been easy for them to question what was going on and what is God doing with them. What's the deal here?

-We know that it is God's heart for us to share the gospel and we know that the Spirit is eager to glorify Christ. And so we see that God is leading them to the place that He has ordained for them to speak at that particular time---that's God's will for them. It is not like God didn't want the gospel to go to Asia---He did and we see Peter write to the churches in Asia and we know that Paul ended up in Ephesus but only in God's timing. And so we learn a good lesson here about negative guidance or closed doors. The guidance we get in our lives is often like this. We speak of closed doors and generally, we don't always them. We can find closed doors frustrating. We may pray, "God what do you want me to do" and then we look in a promising direction and God closes the door. We ask again, "God what do you want me to do" and we look in another direction and God closes the door again. And if this goes on long enough, we think that God is not listening or that He doesn't care and we may even get angry at God. But what we need to understand is that closed doors, even though they may be negative guidance, is still true guidance. What we can learn from Paul and his team here is that negative guidance keeps us from where we are not called to be at a particular time so that in God's time we might come to where He is actually calling us to be so that we will enjoy the blessings of being in His will for us. We learn that when God closes doors it is not because He doesn't have anything for us to do. It is to keep us from a work that we are not called to in order that we might get to the work to which we are called to do. This is what we learn here. Be patient and wait upon the Lord and trust Him and let His Word together with His unfolding providence be the guides that enable us to discern His will (Romans 12:1-2).

-Paul and his team did just that and the positive leading came at last.

**-“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.”” (Acts 16:9, ESV)**

-Yes, finally an open door. And look at the response of the team because we need to learn from this too.

**-“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.” (Acts 16:10, ESV)**

-Paul shares this vision with the team and they discuss it. That word for concluding in the Greek means to come to a decision by the process of bringing together different aspects of the information available. Paul discusses this with the team and they determine that it is from the Lord and that it is His will that they go and preach the gospel in Macedonia. And coming to this conclusion, they **immediately** obey and they seek to go there and preach the gospel in obedience. And this brings us to the last thing we are going to look at today.

### **3 – A heart for the gospel goes in obedience, speaks the gospel and trusts God for the results (11-15)**

**-“So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.” (Acts 16:11–15, ESV)**

-So Paul and the team conclude that it is God’s will for them to go and preach the gospel in Macedonia and so they immediately act upon that and begin their travel to that area. They set sail from Troas and travel with intent until they reach Philippi, which was a leading city of Macedonia. They remained there for some days and then comes the Sabbath. Usually Paul would go to the synagogue to proclaim the gospel but Philippi must not have had one because Paul and the others had to go outside of the city to where they supposed was a place of prayer. In order for a synagogue to be



formed, you had to have 10 men that were heads of households and so evidently that was not the case in Philippi. So they go to the place where they supposed prayer and worship was taking place. That just so happened to be outside of the gate of the city beside the river. What did they find? They saw a group of women who had come together and so they sat down with them and spoke the gospel.

-If their desires are not right then think about what could have went through their minds. We were not allowed to speak to these other cities where there may have been a synagogue and we would have had a larger audience and there would probably have been some males there. We went through all of this travel and trouble and now the only audience we have is women (who in that culture and day would not have carried much weight). It would have been easy to complain and gripe or even just pass them by and seek somewhere else to share the gospel that suited their expectations better that wouldn't seem like such a waste of their time. We have to fight the pride that is in that thought process beloved. It is never a waste of time to share the gospel no matter how much preparation or trial, even if it's only with one person, even if it's with someone that we would never expect to share it with. This missionary team didn't think that way and they sat down with these women and they shared the gospel of Christ with them.

-One woman who heard was a woman named Lydia. She was from Thyatira. You know what's cool about her being from Thyatira? Thyatira was in the province of Asia. Imagine that! They were prevented from going into Asia and yet, one of the first people that God would save in Macedonia would be someone from Asia! I think that is just awesome. She was a seller of purple goods which spoke to her being well off because royalty wore purple and it was very expensive. And she was a worshiper of God, which spoke to the fact that she had turned from false gods and was looking to the God of Israel but had not yet become a full proselyte of Judaism.

-And what happened? A beautiful thing happened beloved. She heard the gospel of Christ and the Lord opened her heart to receive it. Her heart was opened to receive the truths of Christ spoken of by Paul and she embraced Christ because of the gift of faith given to her by God. Think of the work of God here and what God had promised in the New Covenant.

**-“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (Ezekiel 36:22–28, ESV)**

-Oh beloved, see the beautiful sovereign grace of God here in the salvation of Lydia. It is the same grace that saved us. It is the power of the gospel of Christ being applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit that saves. We don't have to manipulate or have some eloquent presentation or be fluent with fancy words. All we have to do is speak the truth about Christ and trust God for the results. That's what Paul did here. That's why he would write in 1 Cor 2:

**-“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:1–5, ESV)**

-That's what we are to do. Preach Christ and Him crucified and trust God to apply it to the hearts that He chooses to. That's freeing beloved. That means that we can speak

the whole truth (God, Man, Christ, Response). We can talk about God's holiness and about our sin and our desperate need for Christ to save us from the wrath of God that our sins and the breaking of God's law deserve. This is a supernatural work of God here to save Lydia just as it was to save us. And God used the exposition of Scripture, the gospel, to bring new birth to Lydia's and our hearts. God effectually called us to Himself in Christ and it is His work. Lydia heard the truth of Christ and the Holy Spirit enabled her to receive it. Trust in this beloved. Trust that it is God's work to save and let that trust free you and drive you to speak of Christ. Let that trust free you from thinking that it has to be you or your presentation or your words that saves. Just be faithful to speak of Christ and trust God to apply it according to His sovereign grace. The power is in the gospel beloved not us. That is so freeing. And the power of the gospel changes and transforms a person.

-We see that in Lydia.

**-“And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.” (Acts 16:15, ESV)**

-Lydia embraced Christ and in that transformation she now desires to embrace those who belong to Christ. She showed a genuine love for the brothers and she demonstrated a desire for hospitality. Hospitality seeks to minister to others. Hospitality says that this home is not mine but it is a gift from my Master and I am His servant and I will use His blessings in the way He desires so that He is glorified. Hospitality does not seek to impress but seeks to serve. Later in verse 40 we see that her house became a place where the brothers would meet. It became a church for the gathering of the people of God. Lydia was prepared to let the world know what Jesus meant to her. The gospel leads to obedience and service that is rooted in a love for Christ as we see here.

So what do we take away from this passage today? Let's look at these in the form of questions that we need to ask ourselves.

## **Application:**

### **1 - Does the love of Christ control me and is my love for Him cultivating in my heart a desire to speak of Him to others?**

-Can I say with the apostles that I can't help but speak of what I have seen and heard? Is my desire to tell others about Christ because of what He has done for me and in my place? Do I love Him and does His love for me and mine for Him mold and shape everything that I say and do? It should beloved---it should. How can we not sing to Christ for what He has done for us? How can we not tell others?

### **2 – Is my love of the gospel and the desire to speak of it causing in me a greater sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit?**

-The reality here beloved is that if we really don't have a desire to speak of Christ and we really don't want gospel opportunities and if we are really looking for any excuse not to share the gospel, then we will not be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We just won't. But if we really do desire to have those opportunities then the Spirit will lead us to those and we will be sensitive to that.

### **3 – Do I trust in the sovereign grace of God to apply the words of Christ that I speak to the hearts of those who hear according to His will?**

-You know, it is possible to share the gospel out of obligation to relieve guilt and to do that without expecting God to do anything with it---maybe not even caring. Do you believe in the power of the gospel? Do you believe that the gospel has the power to save even your hardest family members? Don't ever lose hope beloved because as we have seen today---the power is in the gospel. Believe it, trust it and share it like you believe it!

**4 – Have I searched my own heart to make absolutely sure that I have truly been transformed by the gospel of Christ and do I know for sure that I belong to Him?**

-Most important question you will ever answer. Please be honest---doesn't matter what anyone else will think. Doesn't matter if you have been in church all your life. Don't let what someone else might think send you straight to hell. Cry out to God for His grace to give you the faith to believe---you can't save yourself.

---

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2014

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.