



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Acts 15:36-41, Acts 16, Acts 17:1-9

The Second Missionary Journey [AD49-52]

After the split between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41), Paul and Silas revisited the churches of the First Journey, where God's Spirit directed them to take the Gospel to Europe. Here we see the expansion of Jesus' strategic plan (Acts 1:8), stretching out into the world. Opposition dogs Paul the entire way as both Jews and Gentiles opposed him. Jews opposed his beliefs about Jesus, while Gentiles feared the loss of economic benefits derived from their idolatrous cults. The battle was for theological truth as well as for the souls of people. A major premise is now established: As people are transformed by the Gospel, the culture is transformed.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas, 16:1-5

Paul and Silas revisit the churches of Derbe and Lystra, where Paul invites Timothy to join the ministry. Timothy was a man who was approved of and highly regarded in these communities. But since his mother was Jewish (and a believer who had led her son to Christ), Jews would regard Timothy as Jewish (even though his father was Greek). So Paul does something expedient: So that Timothy would not be a source of strife or debate among the Jews, Timothy is circumcised. As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, his view of Christian freedom meant that he was always sensitive to the people to whom he ministered. Paul's cultural sensitivity guaranteed that the Gospel would remain the main topic, not circumcision. Furthermore, as they ministered in synagogues, circumcision ensured Timothy's credibility. Finally, Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy was in line with the sensitivity of the Jerusalem Council's decree of Acts 15. Thus, in 16:4-5, Paul and Silas reviewed the Jerusalem Council letter with the churches of Derbe and Lystra.

The Vision—A Call to Europe, 16:6-10

Paul headed to Macedonia because the Spirit had prevented him from preaching the Gospel in Asia. Paul's plans were interrupted by the Spirit, with the only acceptable response—obedience. The Gospel had invaded Europe!

Philippi, 16:11-40

Philippi was the principal city of Macedonia and a Roman colony. It was also the home of the worship of many gods. It had an autonomous government, freedom from tribute and taxation, and legal ownership rights similar to those in Italy. It was a "little Rome." The Jewish presence was relatively small.

Converts at Philippi:

- Lydia: After several days, Paul and his group intentionally went to the Gangites riverside, where a group of Jewish women (and converts to Judaism) were worshipping and praying on the Sabbath (at a synagogue there?). They met Lydia, a worker of "purple goods," someone who worked in fine clothes for the wealthy. She was probably a convert to Judaism. The text states that "the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." The tension of divine sovereignty and human responsible freedom is evident in this verse. Lydia trusted Christ, was baptized and her home became the first house church in Philippi. [16:13-15]
- A Demon-Possessed Girl: Next Paul encountered a slave girl with a spirit of divination who harassed Paul by announcing his proclamation in a manner that disturbed him. [16:16-18] This woman is portrayed as inspired by the Pythonian god, Apollo, as a soothsayer—a lucrative religious practice in this period. She was continually crying out that Paul and his colleagues served "the Most High God," a phrase polytheistic Greco-Roman people used to refer to God as a great one—the greatest among many. Paul then exorcised the demon, liberating the woman from the abuse of her masters.

The girl's masters were not happy and brought Paul and Silas into the marketplace (*agora*) before the magistrates with two charges: [1] They were disturbing the city; and [2] They were promoting a foreign religious cult not recognized by Rome. They also stressed that they were Jews. The magistrates then ordered them beaten with the rods of the Roman *fasces*; they were then placed in prison and fastened to wooden stocks that were tight and painful. [Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. There was no due process for them and they were beaten with rods; Roman citizens were not to be so beaten.] [16:19-24]

- A Roman Jailer: As Paul and Silas were singing hymns and praising God, God sent an earthquake, thereby opening the prison doors and freeing the prisoners from their stocks. When the jailer awakened, he was terrified, for the Roman penalty for escaped prisoners was death. Paul stopped him from taking his life by proclaiming their presence. The earthquake had presented the jailer with irrefutable evidence that God was at work with Paul's group, exclaiming "what must I do to be saved?" He believed, and, filled with gratitude, washed their wounds from the earlier beating. His household was also baptized. He then took them home and fed them. Those who were enemies are now brought together as members of the family of God! [16:25-34]

The reaction of the Philippian magistrates to all this was fascinating. They decided to let Paul and Silas go and sent the police to inform Paul and Silas that they were free to go. Shrewdly, Paul then informed them that he and Silas were Roman citizens. Paul therefore refused to go free, given that as a Roman citizen he had been beaten without a formal charge being proved against him and without a formal hearing. He wished to make his innocence a matter of public record to those in charge and to be publically escorted out of prison, an act showing his innocence. Paul's public release constituted an added element of protection for the local church community; the magistrates would be more careful in the future. The magistrates came to the prison, appealed to them (or appeased them) and asked them to leave the city. They make a final visit to Lydia (and the house church there) and left Philippi.

The three people who came to faith at Philippi were diverse ethnically, socially, psychologically, and culturally. The Gospel is for all people in all social and economic categories. Furthermore, with Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer, we see the profound change that the Gospel brings—not only to the individual person but also to the culture around them. If the way in which people lead their lives is changed by the Gospel, the culture around them changes as well. Personal transformation eventually produces cultural transformation.

Thessalonica, 17:1-9

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. There, Paul preached to the Jews and Gentiles and did so with a syllogism: Scripture said that the Messiah would suffer and be raised. Jesus experienced this. Therefore, Jesus is the promised Messiah. The idea of the Messiah was clear to the Jews. But to the Greco-Roman mind, Messiah involved a claim of kingship in a political sense. Hence, the mixed and often hostile reception of the Gospel at Thessalonica. This mixed reaction at Thessalonica was the way the world responds to the Gospel: The Jews rejected the idea that Jesus was the Messiah; the Greco-Roman world saw Jesus as directly challenging Caesar.

As you read 17:1-9, note the six key terms of vv. 2-4. Evangelism is about an exchange in which we set forth the Gospel, both affirming and defending it. This entails neither imposition nor manipulation but a straightforward setting forth of what God has done in Jesus. We are to be faithful in doing so; the results are up to God.

- A clear lesson from this passage is that cultural transformation results from individual transformation by the Gospel. How does this premise affect your view of the importance of the Gospel for the transformation of American culture? Will such transformation come via politics? Via the next candidate for president? How does this premise affect your view of being the salt and light of Jesus?
- Ponder the statement in 16:15 of Lydia, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." What does this say about God's role in personal evangelism? Paul was faithful in his proclamation, but success in terms of converts was

a result of the Lord's work as well. [The tension between divine sovereignty and responsible human freedom]

- In this passage we see people coming to Christ, but we also see deep opposition to the Gospel. Should we expect anything different today?
- As Paul presents the Gospel in Thessalonica, note the 6 key terms in 17:3-4. These are terms of affirmation, witness and defense of the Gospel. The message was about Jesus and His words and works. Ponder these terms as you think and apply them to your personal witness about Jesus.

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