

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 4TH–5TH // BOOK OF ACTS

A DISCIPLE NAMED TIMOTHY (ACTS 16:1–5) MEETING TIMOTHY IN DERBE AND LYSTRA (VS. 1–3)

Timothy was most likely a convert from Paul's first missionary journey.

- Timothy had a good reputation in the city and was the product of a mixed marriage (Greek father, Jewish mother).
- Paul wants Timothy to join them in the mission trip, so the text tells us that he has Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews..."

But why would Paul want to force circumcision on anyone? Didn't we already establish that circumcision wasn't necessary for salvation?

- First of all, v. 1 tells us Timothy was already a Believer. His circumcision had absolutely NOTHING to do with his salvation.
- Paul wanted to remove any stigma, scandal, or stumbling block from the young man's status in the Jewish community.

Paul resisted circumcising Titus (who was pure Greek, Galatians 2:3, 5) when the gospel was at stake.

- Rabbinic law taught that a child born of a Jewish mother and a Greek father was considered Jewish.
- Paul knew that if Timothy wasn't circumcised, this would be a constant stumbling block and offense to Jewish people that would hinder the gospel.

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO THE GOSPEL

If we have the most important message on earth that can change the trajectory of someone's eternal destination, we should be willing to do whatever it takes to reach them.

- As long as we're not adopting a sinful custom, we should be willing to adapt culturally and remove any unnecessary hindrances to someone hearing the gospel.

MODERN STUMBLING BLOCKS?

Unbelievers often reject Christians long before they ever reject Christ.

- Common perceptions of Christians:
 - Judgmental rather than gracious
 - Hypocritical
 - More political than Christ-centered
 - Unloving towards those who disagree
 - Anti-intellectual or unwilling to engage questions

These things are barriers to hearing the gospel, not objections to the gospel itself.

- Our insider language, cultural traditions, political idolatry, and secondary issues that we've elevated to primary importance keep people from seeing Jesus all the time!
- The true offense of the gospel should be repentance, Jesus as the only way, the authority of Scripture, and the cost for following Christ.

What we see from Timothy is a willingness to sacrifice and do something that wasn't "required" to effectively serve and minister to the people whom God wanted to show His love towards.

- In so doing, we see the quality of Timothy's character. He truly had love for the Jewish people and wanted them to see the light of Christ, so he did what was unpleasant.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL (ACTS 16:6–10)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled north through Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6).

- The Holy Spirit prevented them from preaching in the Roman province of Asia (western Asia Minor, along the Aegean Sea).
- What seemed like a confusing closed door was actually God's providential redirection.
- God wasn't saying no to the gospel going to Asia. He was saying "not yet" and "not this way."

They traveled to Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia, but again the "Spirit of Jesus" would not allow them to go (v. 7).

- Why does God close doors and forbid us from doing what seem like really good things?
- It can be frustrating to encounter closed doors and hear God say, "no" or "not yet" or "not like this."
- But anytime God says "no," there's always a good reason.

After Paul, Silas, and Timothy had encountered another closed door, Paul has a vision from God of a man from Macedonia (v. 9).

- The man is pleading with Paul to come to Macedonia to help them.
- Immediately the team knew the directions God was giving them and maybe even understood now why God had closed doors earlier in their trip (v. 10).

These missionaries understood that it was better to go to Macedonia with God than to go anywhere else without Him.

- If they had pursued the good plans they made for themselves, it would have been in their own strength.
- They were willing to wait to receive God's plans and go where He was working.
- God sees more than we can see.

Sometimes when God says "no" to a good thing, we need to understand He has greater and more glorious plans for us than we may see in the moment.

- Even when we're disappointed or heartbroken over a missed opportunity, closed door, or something that doesn't work out, we have to keep in mind that God saying no might mean He has something better in store.

LYDIA (ACTS 16:11–15)

After sailing past Samothrace and Neapolis, the team arrived at the Macedonian city of Philippi.

- Philippi was a Roman colony (v. 12) and didn't have a Jewish synagogue.
- In cities where no Jewish synagogue existed, worshipers of God gathered under the sky and near water to worship and pray.
- On the Sabbath, the team made their way to this "place of prayer" and began to witness.

A "GOD-FEARING" WOMAN NAMED LYDIA (V. 14)

Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira who made her living selling fabrics and textiles dipped in purple dye.

- The text tells us that "the Lord opened her heart" to the truth of the gospel.
- God is the only one who can change a heart and make it receptive to truth. God opens the heart, not us.

WHAT WAS LYDIA AND HER HOUSEHOLD'S RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL?

They were baptized. The public profession of belonging to the faith and having received Christ given to us in Scripture is baptism.

- You would be hard pressed to find a Believer in the New Testament who was unbaptized.
- Baptism doesn't save us, but it is an outward profession that God asks of us as Believers

After Lydia and her entire household came to the faith and were baptized, she opened her home to the missionary team (v. 15).

- We have reason to believe she was probably very wealthy and successful as a businesswoman.
- But now that Jesus had control of her heart and life, her wealth and affluence were used to serve others and go towards the work of God.

IT ISN'T WRONG TO BE FINANCIALLY SUCCESSFUL OR EVEN WEALTHY.

Lydia is one of many wealthy characters in the Bible who used her resources to benefit the Kingdom of God and serve others.

- The Bible tells us that "the LOVE of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).
- You can love money and still be poor. Selfishness, stinginess, and greed are heart issues.

The first conversion in Macedonia, Lydia's, was strategically orchestrated by God.

- Lydia had great affluence and means to support the missionary effort, and great influence in the city of Philippi—so much so that some scholars believe she might have even helped establish the church in Thyatira mentioned in Revelation 2:18.
- How are we using our resources and influence for the work of the Kingdom?

IMPRISONMENT (ACTS 16:16–24)

PHILIPPI WAS A ROMAN COLONY STEEPED IN THE PAGAN WORSHIP OF APOLLO, GOD OF "PROPHECY."

There was a belief that a mythical python guarded the sanctuary and oracle of Apollo in Delphi.

- It was believed that this "pythian spirit" would possess certain individuals and enable them to communicate with the supernatural.
 - In Philippi, Paul encountered a slave girl with this "*pneuma Pythona*" who can predict the future.
- A slave girl who could somehow predict the future would have been an absolute gold mine for her masters.
- Her power was actually the result of demonic possession (v. 18).
 - Satan is a deceiver and disguises himself to lead people astray (2 Corinthians 11:4).
 - Just because something is "spiritual" it doesn't mean it's from God or it's good.

The occult, astrology, tarot cards, fortune telling, psychics, mysticism, new age teachings, false prophets, false miracles, ghosts/false views of the afterlife, exaltation of angels, and spirit mediums (necromancy) are deceiving practices from Satan to display his power and prevent people from following Christ.

- We're to take no part in these things but instead expose them for what they are (Ephesians 5:11)!

The evil spirit within this slave girl had great theology and knew Paul and the others.

- This evil spirit also sought to disrupt and disturb the teaching of the gospel (vs. 17–18).
- This greatly annoyed Paul, who turned to the girl and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!"
- When the spirit left, the slave girl's masters became angered at this loss of income.

Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities and accused of promoting illegal customs and disturbing the city (vs. 19–21).

- These charges seemed to be rooted in ethnic hatred ("they are Jews") and led to Paul and Silas being beaten with rods and thrown into the inner cell of a prison with no trial or defense (vs. 22–24). Not everybody celebrates when someone else is set free.

"So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matthew 6:31–33).

THE KINGDOM OVER PERSONAL COMFORT/PREFERENCES

- Timothy undergoes a painful, unnecessary for salvation procedure to remove cultural stumbling blocks to reach the Jewish community (v. 1–5).
- Are we willing to adapt and sacrifice for the sake of others hearing the gospel?
- Are we willing to lay down our own rights, cultural traditions, or personal preferences if they're creating unnecessary barriers for unbelievers?

THE KINGDOM OVER PERSONAL PLANS

- Paul and the missionary team have their plans prohibited by doors the Lord closes, but instead of forcing their own way, they go to Macedonia when God directs them to do so (vs. 6–10).
- How do we respond when God closes the door on our "good" plans and redirects us?
- When God says, "no," "not yet," or "not this way," do we trust that He sees and knows more?

THE KINGDOM OVER PERSONAL WEALTH AND SUCCESS

- Lydia was a highly successful, affluent businesswoman.
- The moment the Lord opened her heart, she immediately leveraged her wealth, home, and social influence to support the missionary team (vs. 11–15).
- Are my financial resources, social influence, and talents being used for God's Kingdom?

THE KINGDOM OVER PERSONAL SECURITY

- Paul freed a slave girl from demonic torment, choosing her freedom over his own immediate safety, and it cost him greatly (vs. 16–24).
- Do I see lost people as irredeemable monsters, or as slaves to darkness in need of liberation?
- Am I willing to stand up for truth and fight for people's freedom in Christ, even when it costs me?