

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR BIG MISSION

A Devotional Theology of Mission part 7

Acts 16:9-15

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Last week we learned that

Mission Is Going to Be Messy.

Two amazing men — godly men — men who loved and respected each other; who invested 3 years of their lives traveling great distances, faced radical opposition and risked their lives for the sake of Jesus — had a massive disagreement!

Acts 15:39 NIV — *They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.*

Mission is going to be messy because even the best of God’s men and women are still at best merely human.

Mission involves stinky messes! We need to know that the mission of God involves working with men and women men who might be blind to their pride; who have even their best passions tainted by sin; who have strong feelings and strong convictions — many of which are wrong.

Grace Is Greater Than Our Mission Messes

Our limitations and imperfections do not stop His work! Jesus and His grace is greater than our flaws and failures. He is able to **salvage** our messes *and* actually **multiply** His work.

Mission Demands More Than Good Intentions — Mission demands God’s Direction!

The Holy Spirit is *Lord of the harvest*. He is the one who sending laborers into the harvest. He is the one intimately involved in directing the actions and decisions of the laborers when it comes to the where, when and how of the mission of God. This is easily lost on the 21st century Christian living in a world shaped by the

powerful culture of technology, information and marketing. The Book of Acts is what it is because the 1st Century believers were governed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul was moving towards areas with large populations to reach as many as possible with the Gospel. Mission must have great motive/intention — but it **MUST** be directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was not leading Paul and his team to those places and the people in them *at THAT time(Acts 16:6)*. That's why the Holy Spirit denied and declined.

The Holy Spirit's denials are as much a part of His direction as His denials. His direction is not always by way of giving “green lights.”

If He doesn't approve of all we aspire to in His Kingdom, we **need to surrender** our designs **to His direction** and **believe** it for the best.

QUOTE: Bobby Richardson — *God, Your will! Nothing more! Nothing less! Nothing else!*

We must allow the Holy Spirit to be intimately involved in our decisions. That requires humility — humility that acknowledges our finite ability and capacity and His infinite power and wisdom! It also requires humility that will admit that our best laid and well-intended human plans are sometimes wrong and need to be changed by the Holy Spirit.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts 16 where we see what the Lord of the Harvest was directing Paul towards.

Acts 16:9-15 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. ¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, “If you have

judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

1. Mission Involves Immediate, Determined, Obedience

Acts 16:9-10 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.**

When Paul launched out on his second missionary journey, he **thought** he knew exactly where he and his team were supposed to go. By the time they came to a standstill in Troas Paul went to bed **with NO clue** as to where they were supposed to go. And he wasn't going to lead his team anywhere until the Lord made it clear. WAIT was the defining word. WAITING on the Lord is an act of faith and an act of obedience. *“Lord, I'm convinced that you have a place, a people and a time for my place in Your mission. I'm so convinced, that I will WAIT for you to direct me.”*

DON'T MISS THIS — Paul doesn't get to go where **he** wants to go. But he is *more than willing to go* where God wants him to go. Paul and those with him were ready to go wherever God directed.

immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia — The only thing Paul ever wanted to know was the will of God. Now that he knows the mind of God in the matter Paul **immediately** turned his thoughts **away from** his own plans and turned his thoughts, his energy and resources towards Macedonia. No looking back; no wondering might have been, could have been, should have been! By the way — we deal with life in those terms — God doesn't! There isn't any might have, could have, should have. He IS and He DOES.

Though they couldn't *immediately* go into Macedonia; they immediately began working towards their departure. They began to get things ready for this new ministry expedition **without delay**.

HERE'S THE DEAL — If we can't immediately get to our goal or destination for ministry, we can immediately get busy with making preparations. In God's eyes, those immediate preparations are just as important as the actual work that He has called us to. those immediate preparations **ARE** part of the mission! Faith

is not merely believing / trusting that God is calling you to a place or a task. Faith moves you to think, act and prepare for it.

PERSONAL — **PERSONAL** — Before I knew I was called to “full time ministry” I had my bachelor’s degree and credentials to teach and coach on the high school level. I assumed I was going to live for Jesus as a teacher and a coach — and was blown away by the opportunity to do it.

But there came a moment when I knew that God had called me away from teaching and coaching to be in full time ministry as a pastor-teacher. There was a big gap of time from when I was convinced God had called me to “full time ministry” — until the day I stepped into it. But from the moment the call of God on my life was clear every decision was filtered through that calling and was made as it related to that calling. I only did substitute teaching so I could have Fridays off to attend a musician’s fellowship to be trained in ministry. I only took jobs that permitted me flexibility for ministry. Everything was done to prepare me for the place I have today in the Mission of God.

QUOTE — *To know the will of God is the **greatest knowledge!** To do the will of God is the **greatest achievement!***

2. Mission Aims for Influence

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

Roman colonies were planted so there would be strong pro-Roman cities in these strategic areas. The emperor would order Roman citizens, especially retired military people, to live in places like Philippi. Nowhere was there greater pride in Roman citizenship than in these outposts of Rome. Those living in Roman colonies dressed like those living in Rome; they spoke the same language as those living in Rome. We have a saying, “Home away from home.” A Roman colony was like *Rome away from Rome*. Philippi was a miniature of Rome itself.

The Holy Spirit brought the Gospel face to face with the very places that were intended to influence the world with Roman culture and Roman power.

The Holy Spirit directed mission to bring the Gospel to the very place that was intended by the ruling empire of the world to **influence** the world with Roman culture and Roman power. I believe His heart is still the same.

I believe that speaks **not only** to specific geographical centers of influence within fallen culture; I believe it also speaks about the that person (or persons) who is (are) influential in your world. Who is the “Philippi” in your world that the Holy Spirit wants you to influence to Jesus — who will then influence others? It might be your unbelieving spouse. It might be the child in your family who is the influencer among his / her siblings. Who is that person (or persons) who most embody the values of fallen culture — are most representative of the values of fallen culture — are most influential in advancing the values of fallen culture among your peers, in your neighborhood, in your class room, in the workplace, in the market place?

The Mission of God AIMS for influence even among your Christian peers.

3. Mission Involves Living with Our Eyes Open

¹² **We remained in this city some days.**

FIRST — They knew God had called them to Philippi. They knew the Lord had opened a door for them to be there — but they didn’t know ANYONE in Philippi. The same might be true when God moves you to a new city or town — a new job — a new school.

SECOND — Luke has already told us that Paul had a strategy when he came to a city. He made it his practice to begin his ministry in a city by going into the local synagogue. But as they got to know their way around the city they discovered that there was no synagogue in Philippi. That meant that there were not even 10 Jewish men in the colony! They didn’t know *where* God wanted them to minister and they didn’t know *when* and *how* He wanted them to do it. So, they spent *some days* just observing, praying and engaging men and women — and over the course of those days felt they knew where to fish for souls

CHRISTIAN — Mission must be undertaken under by the enabling and directing of the Holy Spirit. But our eyes should be open and alert to opportunities. We need to engage even those we don’t know to get a sense of how, when and where God wants to use us.

*** Lord — Help us to live with our eyes open!**

¹³ **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.**

This was the time, the place and the people the Holy Spirit was directing Paul to when He denied them and declined them.

4. Mission Involves the One

¹⁴ **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.**

In the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit gives to us broad accounts of evangelism and conversions in cities and entire regions — and these impress upon our hearts the breadth of the work of God in saving — the desire of God to redeem and reconcile many to Himself through the preaching of the Gospel. But the Holy Spirit also gives to us the accounts of individuals that met Jesus. In **Acts 8** we're told how God transported Philip to the Gaza Road where he met an Ethiopian Eunuch alone in his chariot who was reading a portion of the prophet Isaiah and wondering what it meant.

The Holy Spirit is very deliberate, divinely intentional in this. He inspired Luke to take the time to single out this one woman because He wants us to know that the value of this one soul is *so great*; the conversion of this one person is *so important*; that this one person is so dear to God's heart, that He sent His Son to die for *her*.

We are given Lydia's name because God does not *so love the world* in an impersonal way. *Lydia* was dear to God. God wanted *Lydia* —uniquely and individually — to be redeemed and reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. *Lydia* had her name recorded in the Bible **because** God loved *her* and God opened *her* heart.

God made note of this woman's name to let us know that He went to great lengths to direct and move Paul (and his team) to *this* specific and unique individual named Lydia because Lydia was known to God, God knew *Lydia's* story.

May the Lord help us to look at INDIVIDUALS, and when we do may we think to ourselves: *God knows THAT person's name. God knows THAT person's story. God loves THAT person and has sent me to love THAT person for Him and to Him.*

I want with all of my heart for everyone reading this to know this —
You are known to God! God knows ***your*** story!

DON'T MISS THIS — Those worship scenes around the throne of God in the Book of Revelation consist of countless unique individuals — individually loved by God; each individual worshipping Jesus on the throne because God deliberately directed and moved men and women on mission to bring the Gospel to them so they might hear the record of all God did to redeem and reconcile countless numbers of unique individuals! **That** is the mission we get to be a part of! **That** is worth getting out of bed in the morning!

5. Mission Targets Hearts

¹⁴..... **The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul**

It was the heart of Lydia that God worked on. That is where the change is *needed* and that is where the change is *made*.

QUOTE: Matthew Henry — *When the heart is opened to Christ, the ear is opened to his word...*

6. Mission Targets what Only God Can Reach

Did Paul go to great lengths in his efforts to bring the message of Gospel to Lydia? Yes. But not one of those efforts could open her heart.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 ⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

We can find the best medium for communicating the timeless message of the Gospel: Digital media, Art, Film, Written word, Spoken word, Music. But it is the heart that needs to be opened — not just eyes and ears. We cannot open the human heart to the message of the Gospel. That is the work of God. To attempt to open hearts by way of human invention — emotional manipulation — is like someone trying to open a rosebud.

7. Mission = The Gospel Moving from One Heart — to a Home — to a Church in a City — to a Continent.

¹⁵ **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.**

WOW!! What an insignificant — humble way — to open up a continent for the Gospel! It was so simple; so informal. Anything but elaborate. There was just a group of women gathered for prayer — and that was Paul’s opportunity to simply *talk* about (that’s the language) Jesus. God opened the heart of ONE woman — who in turn opened her home to the mission of God.

Our Monday Night series on Biblical Community attaches so beautifully to this place in our devotional theology of Mission!

Philippi — the place that was a miniature of Rome filled with citizens of Rome — is where the very first church in Europe was planted. The very city that was intended to be a model of life under the rule of Caesar

is the home of the first community of believing men and women who would be a colony of heaven!

Philippians 3:20 NLT But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

That community of believing men and women in that city were like a colony of heaven! Though far from heaven, they were under the rule of heaven’s King. They were obedient to the laws of heaven and lived as humble ambassadors of their King. In the city intended to show off what life is like under the rule of Caesar — these new believers put the Kingdom of God on display.

THAT is living in the mission of God.