

# Acts 16:1–15



1 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,  
2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.  
3 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.  
4 Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.  
5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.  
6 They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;  
7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;  
8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.  
9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."  
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.  
11 So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;  
12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.  
13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.  
14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.  
15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Another outrageous passage in this incredible narrative as the gospel miraculously makes its way to Europe. We're introduced to two incredibly key characters, Timothy and Luke and must confront some of the deepest and darkest corners of the motives of our hearts as Christians. This is a really personal passage for me in some difficult decisions I had to make earlier this year. So perk up, we're yet again standing before a incredible visage of truth aimed at maturing and stabilizing our faith.



Salvation belongs to the Lord but it's presentation belongs to us. Whatever the price or pivot, we must make way for the gospel to be spoken.

## Timothy and self sacrifice



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2 and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.  
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5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

Paul had lost Barnabas and John Mark but the Lord provided Silas and now Timothy. The forces were dividing and conquering. Timothy was likely converted on Paul's first visit to Lystra, you know, the city where he was nearly stoned to death. Now Paul pulls him alongside into ministry but not before circumcising him. Wait what? Didn't we just get through an outrageously intense struggle over circumcision where Paul was aggressively against it? What in the world is going on here then?

Timothy was from a mixed family. His mother was a Jew but his father was a Greek. By birth then he was a Jew but because of his Greek father's apparent influence he hadn't been circumcised and therefore was a Jew in violation of Jewish law. And therein lies the problem and chasm of difference between this issue and the prior fiery debate. This was not a question of righteousness under the cross but of appearance and access to unbelievers.

Timothy would never have an audience with the Jews as an unclean Jew in active violation of the Old Testament laws. Paul, Silas, the church, God Almighty saw him no differently either way but his ministry would be throttled by the unreasonable expectations of unrighteous unbelievers. And so Paul had him circumcised. Timothy came under the authority and leadership of his mentor Paul and did what he likely wouldn't have done himself on his own in order to put no unnecessary barrier between him and access to unbelievers.

And so then un-throttled the fully circumcised team pressed forward in ministry delivering the decree that circumcision was unnecessary for salvation through the fully sufficient blood of Christ on cross for the forgiveness of sins.

Friends there's a critically important message in here for us in the day and age in which we live right now. In an America consumed with rights, individualism, autonomy and privilege we need to hear the heart of Paul for the lost.



1 Corinthians 9:19–27

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.  
20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;  
21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.  
22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.  
23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.  
24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.  
25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.  
26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;  
27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Earlier this year I was faced with a really difficult decision about getting a Covid-19 vaccine or not. I had and still do have far more fear of the vaccine than of covid but my work requests a lot of travel and as a remote employee I was going to be

greatly limited in my ability to travel without a vaccination.

There were and still are in places, tremendous restrictions on unvaccinated travelers. We'd been going through Acts and I'd come under pretty strong conviction on my need to be more evangelistic so there was the rub. Get a vaccine I had no interest in getting to unlock the opportunity for evangelism or not? These two passages were the deciding factor for me.

God can protect me from a vaccine just as much as he can protect me from a virus but as far as it depends on me and my own conviction and conscience I had to remove the barrier for myself so that I could continue to share the gospel with the people most frequently in my life.

Hear me carefully I'm not advocating for a universally right or wrong position on anything related to vaccines or any other politically charged topic but I am absolutely saying don't you ever raise your rights or personal opinions or even convictions above the actual mandate of God on you to share the gospel.

Do not throttle yourself. Do not for the sake of convenience sacrifice your platform and opportunity to share the gospel with unbelievers. The world is lost and insane, of course they will mandate and enforce and require idiotic, unlawful and unnecessary things. Do not sin, but do not for your own selfishness, sacrifice the eternal life of the lost around you.

## Macedonia and personal pivots



6 They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;

7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

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12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

The next obvious step would be to move further north into Asia however the Lord very specially and directly moved them towards Europe. From moving within mixed Jew, Gentile and Samaritan cities the Lord is keen to move Paul, Silas and Timothy straight into the heart of the Gentile nations. Namely Europe. Starting with Macedonia.

It would seem in between Macedonia and Asia, in Troas, "they" becomes "we". They find Luke, the author of the book of Acts and from here on he will accompany the growing group on their travels. They land in Macedonia and quickly move further inland to a main city Philippi where they setup shop for some days.

This all was a surprise for Paul and likely not a little disappointing. He was a Jew, he loved his people, and God was calling him further away and into dominantly Gentile cities and towns. This was a pivot yet not entirely unexpected. Paul was God's chosen instrument for delivering the gospel to the Gentiles and yet wherever Paul could he seems to prefer his own covenant people. He remains faithful, diligent and earnest, in stark contrast to someone like Jonah.

We may have our preferences but always remember God loves all people and his gospel of the good news of salvation is for every human on planet earth. Be ready for him to move you into unexpected areas of influence. Spare no cost, neither linger no lament, make way for the audible presentation of the gospel wherever and however you find yourself.

## Lydia and faithful fruit



13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

The vision may have been for a Man of Macedonia as an initial representative of Europe but it was a woman who was the first European believer. And observe the similarities and repeated pattern of her salvation. Hearing, sovereign choice, responding. A baptism of the Holy Spirit then signified by a baptism with water.

She is baptized with the Spirit and then baptized in water along with her household and the first European church is formed. Incredible! The gospel came to North America in the mouths of European believers and the first of those is Lydia converted by a riverside by the preaching of Paul as the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

It's a powerful pattern and one we would do well to internalize lest we deviate from it either dumbing it down or dressing it up. It was a powerful, pure and simple presentation and one Paul was willing to die to preserve and sacrifice everything to present. May we go and do likewise.

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## Closing Questions

- What do you hold more sacred and untouchable than your access to unbelievers?
- Where are you unwilling to go to be with unbelievers?
- Who are you dismissing as worthy or worth while of hearing the gospel?
- How will you improve and grow in these areas of weakness and danger?