

**Looking Ahead Through The Rearview Mirror  
The Philippians Deacons Board**

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**Note: There are slides attached that go with the sermon.**

One day as I was visiting a lovely lady in the hospital in Moose Jaw, she told me that she was dying of cancer, and then she added something that I will never forget. She said she had told her husband that she didn't want him to be alone and that she had a sister who was single missionary in Africa who was about to retire. And so after her death she wanted him to marry her sister. So being an obedient husband, following her death, he traveled to Africa and asked her sister to marry him. However, despite the fact that she was in her early 60's, because she was working under the African leadership she felt she needed to ask the permission of her African pastor. After hearing of her request the pastor said, *"let's pray"*. He began, *"I thank you God that with you all things are possible. Thank you for the miracle of finding this lady a husband..."* (Thanks for the compliment). As we have been walking through the life of Paul the subtext has been with God all things are possible.

Setting: Last week we saw that after returning from their 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey Paul and Barnabas reported to the church in Antioch all that had happened. In Acts 15 we find that because so many Gentiles were finding faith, a huge controversy began to brew around if all the male Gentiles who became followers of Jesus needed to be circumcised or not. We will discuss that issue in 2 weeks. Upon arriving back in Antioch it wasn't long until Paul started to get itchy feet again. He was like the missionary David Livingston who said while in Africa *"I must open a way to the interior or perish"* because he had a dream in which he heard Africans crying *'come over here and help us'*. Or like Hudson Taylor, a pioneer missionary to China said *"I feel though I cannot live if something is not done for China"*. For Paul the call was to take the story of the Resurrected Jesus to Asia and beyond. That task was impossible, but with God all things are possible. Let's look at Paul's second missionary journey that covered over 4500 km's

## **The Second Missionary Journey**

Acts 16

The journey began with controversy (Acts 15:37-41). The gentle hearted Barnabas wanted to give John Mark the young man who bailed and went home early on the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey a second chance. Paul said 'No', a heated argument ensued and these

2 friends parted company here. So Barnabas took John Mark and went by ship to Cyprus and Paul chose Silas and headed overland north to Tarsus and then north to Derbe and Lystra.

## Lystra

Slide #1 Do you remember what happened the last time Paul was in Lystra? He was stoned, dragged out of the city and left in the ditch for dead. Can you imagine the feelings that must have arisen in Paul as he neared this place where he had almost died? I wonder if he questioned if any good could come out of this town. Acts 16:1-3 Remember last week we said that when you are going through those times when you feel like *'you have been beat up and left on the side of the road for dead'* that probably someone is watching to see if Jesus makes a difference in how you react. I wonder if Timothy was there in that small group who stood around Paul as he lay in that ditch and watched as he got up and stumbled his way back into the city. I wonder if it made such an impact on Timothy's life that he gave himself to become a follower of Jesus, and Paul's testimony at that hard time was crucial to him feeling a call to follow Paul as part of his ministry team. (Timothy became like a 'son to Paul' and became a powerful pastor in his own right). Never miss that God has the ability to use even those tough times in our lives to make a profound difference in the lives of others.

#2 Paul had been traveling with a plan, it would seem that he wanted to turn south and head into Asia (toward Ephesus- the New York of Middle East) with the gospel of Jesus, (Acts 16:6) but the Spirit of God stopped them. So they headed north but again (Acts 16:7) and again through a word of prophecy or doors slamming shut, they were stopped from heading into the Black Sea country. I wonder if Paul (who always had a plan was getting frustrated), then had a dream one night (Acts 16:9-10) and knew where God wanted him to go with the good news of Jesus. So off he goes toward the harbour at Troas.#3

Stop: We will be taking a Sunday sermon to look at how God directed Paul through his life, but as you look at this passage did you notice that while Paul (using the best of his ability) attempted to go where he felt God wanted to him to go, yet he was very open to listen when God said "NO" or when God wanted to redirect him. When it comes to finding God's

answers concerning direction for our lives and His will for our lives. Don't miss that as we are actively walking in what we know is what God wants us to do, if we are open, through the closing doors; the inner nudging of the Holy Spirit; or dreams, God can fine tune our lives and give specific direction. The key is staying open, getting quiet enough to listen to his direction.

## **Troas**

Acts 16:11-12

#4,5,6 (Ruins of the Sea port at Troas, #7 the city of Troy isn't that far away). Here is the Trogon horse at the ruins of old Troy, and here is the Trogon horse used in the movie Troy which is on the beach in down town Troy. #8. But it was on the beach in Troas #9,10 that Paul set sail to travel to the country of Macedonia. It must have been an exciting day. Let me show you where his journey will take him #11. A 4000 km journey by foot and ship.

## **Philippi**

Acts 16:12-40

# 12 They landed in Neapolis (had an ice cream), #13 then it was on to Philippi. It was here that they had an encounter with a Seeker, a Stalker and a Soldier. We will come back to this in a moment, and camp here for a while.

## **Thessalonica**

Acts 16:40-17:9

#14 Taking a busy paved road from Philippi, Paul and his group traveled 145 km to the capital city of Thessalonica. And although it was a Greek town, there was a sizable Jewish population. They spoke for 3 Sabbaths in the Synagogue introducing them to Jesus. And there seemed to be a movement of God happening especially among the 'god fearers'. So the synagogue officials paid a mob to hunt Paul down, but instead they grabbed a brand new Christian named Jason and took him before the town counsel and accused him of causing people to follow Jesus not the Roman Caesar (interesting accusation for Jews who

didn't want to follow Caesar to make). The result was that Paul and company had to get out of town in the middle of the night. (You will find that because of what happened in Thessalonica Paul was worried for the new believers in that town, that is why he wrote I Thessalonians a few months later. (I Thessalonians 2:1-12)

### **Berea**

Acts 17:10-15

#15 So it was off to Berea, 19 km away. Listen to what happened here Acts 17:10-12. But it wasn't long until hard line Jews from Thessalonica showed up. And while Timothy and Silas stayed behind Paul, the target of their anger had some tough Christian body guards escort him out of town to the city of Athens.

### **Athens**

Acts 17:16-34

#16 Paul was finally in the center of the Greek culture and civilization. However, Paul is all alone (with Timothy and Silas still in Thessalonica), it would seem that he was pretty lonely by himself. He spent a while checking out the city and what they believed. Then he went to the market and enjoyed the challenge of pitting his university mind against the philosophers in the city. The result was that they invited him to make a public presentation (Acts 17:20) at the place where great debates happened on the white stone Areopagus (known as Mars Hill). What a golden opportunity to place Jesus in the middle of this rich and intellectual society that had changed the world. So he begins with a bit of preaching genius (Acts 17:22-23). He takes an Idol he found as he toured the city and uses it as a spring board to teach about Jesus. He then in Acts: 27-29 Message: *He(God) doesn't play hide-and-peek with us. He's not remote; he's near. We live and move in him, can't get away from him! One of your poets said it well: 'We're the God-created.' Well, if we are the God-created, it doesn't make a lot of sense to think we could hire a sculptor to chisel a god out of stone for us, does it?* But when he mentioned that Jesus rose from the dead ... most stopped listening, because as intellectual people they didn't find that possible. So it was off to Corinth.

## **Corinth**

Acts 18:1-17

#19 Here is where he met Aquila and Priscilla who had been saved in Rome, and then during a Jewish deportation ended up in Corinth. Corinth was the LA of their time, a city where all sexual sins and perversions were accepted and flaunted. They were tent makers and Paul joined their business and preached to those who would listen in the city. Initially he was very discouraged that so few were becoming followers of Jesus. But one night (Acts 18:9,10), he had a dream from God that encouraged his soul, so he stayed another 1 ½ years preaching the gospel. A solid church was planted here, one which needed constant letters to keep it out of trouble, but a good church. Off through Cenchræe #20 to Ephesus

## **Ephesus**

Acts 18:18-21

#21 From there it was off to Ephesus the New York of their time, the #2 city in the world.

#22-28 He was there 3 weeks, leaving Aquila and Priscilla to church plant there, and then it was off to Caesarea and finally back to Antioch.

## **They did this Because?**

Let's turn back to Acts 16. After the dream in which Paul sees a Macedonian man calling him, he walked to the coast, took a ship at Troas and within a month he is walking the streets of Philippi. It is described as a Roman city. It was a city that was settled by Roman army veterans. You see, if you served in the army long enough, survived long enough, your pension was to be given land or an army/government position in a town like Philippi. Philippi may have been on foreign soil but it was as Roman as it gets. Acts:12 It seems that they arrived mid week, and for a few days walked around the city, excited, waiting to see how God will make inroads into this new continent of Europe. It happens on the first Sabbath, here we meet:

i) **A Seeker:** Normally, the first thing that Paul did was go to the synagogue, but there must not have been one in town. So they went to the river side, it says '*expecting*' that there might be a prayer meeting there. They were right, and the leader was a lady named Lydia. She is described as a 'Seller of purple'. She probably was a very well off business woman who bought, sold, exported dyed cloth with a purple stain taken from a certain kind of shell fish (the dye was worth \$700 a pound). So she was wealthy, but her heart was seeking for something more than she could buy or own. As Paul began to speak, her heart was strangely warmed, so before she knew all the answers, and with no fan fare or blinding light, she quietly grasped that what he spoke was true, and she was baptized. Please don't miss this. The first convert in Europe was a woman, and that she was baptized. Being Baptized was a religious ritual which originally, only men were allowed to take part in. Her salvation meant that gentiles, women, everyone who became a believer could be fully part of Jesus' church. Gal. 3:28 '*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*'. What Paul saw that day was that this high society lady, who was financially well off and religiously active with a searching heart could be radically changed by a quiet/gentle encounter with Jesus. Paul must have gone away from that river rejoicing with how God had made a difference in the great lady's life.

ii) **A Stalker:** The next person we meet is the antithesis of Lydia. This lady was a street person, down on her luck, her mind at times was confused because she was demon possessed. She was being pimped by men who used her to make money for them through her only asset as they saw it, which was to see into the occult world to tell fortunes. We met her in Acts 16:16, there is this strange picture of this crazy lady stalking Paul and Silas yelling out the strangest thing, '*These men are servants of the most high God who are telling you the way to be saved*'. Isn't it interesting that you never have to convince a demon that Jesus is real? What I find interesting is that despite the fact that she was demon possessed, a part of her, down deep within her, craved freedom, so she hung around these men yelling, carrying on and I believe, hoping for freedom.

**Stop:** Halloween Night is coming up: please don't miss the fact that demons are real. That if you play in the area of occult, while the demons may give you some power (this lady must have been able to foretell some future events for her services were in much demand), there will always be a cost to pay. It is simply a hook to keep you bound. Ill: A man in my office a few years ago didn't want to get free; Ill: A lady in Edmonton, a demon destroyed that woman's life with a sneer, mocked us for she had never gotten free. But thank God that I have also seen that reality of this

passage lived out in people's lives. Where we told the demons to go to Hell and they did. For here with 14 words *'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her'*, and this lady became free. Free of years of bondage, and her life started fresh, clean, whole, free again. Why did Dr. Luke tell us this story? Because he wanted us to realize that if we have been allowing the devil to have a hand into our lives we can get completely free and begin again. As this lady walked away, free, whole, beginning her life again, I am sure Paul must have turned to Silas and said *'here we are on a new continent among a different people and the power of Jesus has just freed this person who so many would have said had no hope . Look at her, look at what the resurrection power can do in people's lives'*.

iii) **The Soldier:** Following the exorcism there was fall out, for the people who 'owned' this women lost their revenue and went after Paul and Silas. They were taken to the magistrate (Acts 16:19,20) – charged with 'advocating customs unlawful to Romans (it was illegal then to talk about any 'God' but Roman god's), so they were beaten with rods (2nd of 3 such beatings we read about in II Corinthians 11 last week). This is when we meet the jailer, an ex-soldier, tough, callous and often sadistic. Typical of his kind he interpreted his orders as cruelly as possible (Acts 16:24). He was instructed to guard them carefully. Instead he i) put them in the darkest and poorest ventilated part of the prison, ii) adding discomfort to their wounds he placed them in stocks that spread ones legs at an angle that caused constant leg cramps and then went off to his comfortable bed and left them to suffer. Paul and Silas reacted by having a sing song, Paul was the bass, Silas the tenor and they sang *'Blest be the tie that Binds', Stand up stand up for Jesus and The Folsom Prison Blues'*. And the singing was so bad that God caused an earthquake and the door of the prison was flung open. The jailer came running back in, realizing in Roman law if your prisoners escaped the jailer took the place and that he would probably die a painful death. He took out his sword laid it against his chest, ready to commit suicide. Then Paul stepped in and said (Acts 16:28), and the jailer grabbed a light, ran inside the jail and upon realizing that no-one was gone asked Paul a simple question (Acts 16:30) "how can I have what you have?" And they replied (Acts 16:31). Then look what happened 16:33,34. This hardened combat soldier whose heart seemed unreachable was changed. Why? Because they were willing to open the door of salvation to the very man who had closed the door of the prison on them. And the man and his family were completely changed. They were up all night as the jailer cared for their wounds, gave them a meal and held a baptismal service for his whole family.

Can you imagine being invited to a Deacon's meeting a while later in the new Philippians' House Church which met at Lydia's house? As you looked around the room probably the chair of the board was Lydia, a woman who had been religious and appeared to have it all, but had found new purpose and joy at the river when Jesus entered her life. Across the table sat a little lady whose face shone with the glory of God and they told you she had been demon possessed, disenfranchised without hope at one time, but with a word her life had been profoundly changed. And then there was the man who seemed to always look for those who needed care, who needed a friend and you found out he was a former Roman mercenary turned head jailer, turned gentle follower of Jesus. I'm sure in every case people would have said "there is no hope of these people becoming followers of Jesus". But Paul with a twinkle in his eye would say, whenever I feel like giving up that my aunt, that man at work, my wayward son/daughter/brother can't be changed by Jesus, I rehearse each of their stories and I am encouraged to pray, to go, to tell, to trust, for nothing is impossible with Jesus.

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