

The Second Mission Trip. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke

Paul's companions are not mentioned at first in this chapter, he clearly is the leader. While revisiting Lystra he brings young Timothy into the traveling company, then later Luke, a Gentile, joins them in Troas (note "we" v.10). Timothy was the offspring of a mixed marriage condemned by the Jews. His mother was a Jewess but his father was a Gentile. This mixed heritage did not exclude him from being saved by the grace of God. It did serve to highlight the decree that had emerged from the recent conference at Jerusalem regarding Gentiles who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In fact Paul and Silas were carrying this good news with them as they retraced Paul's first trip. They were well aware circumcision was not necessary in order to be saved and participate in the assembly. "Half breed" Timothy did not have to become a Jew to be saved. Nevertheless Paul took him and circumcised him. This seeming contradiction in principle has confused and troubled many and given scoffers "ammunition" for criticism. However this action rather demonstrates the liberty of a believer to do what is wise and appropriate to prevent unnecessary offenses that might hinder his testimony for Christ. Paul circumcised him on account of the Jews in that area who knew of Timothy's parentage (offensive to them). Paul speaks to this issue. in his letter to the Corinthians.

1Corinthians 9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Are we willing to forgo our privileges and suffer pain for the sake of Christ? Timothy willingly suffered humiliation and pain to this end. Circumcision itself has not become something intrinsically evil in this age of grace, but requiring it of another for religious reasons, or of one's self for one's own religious conscience, is now unscriptural outside of 1Corinthians 9.

Timothy had a godly mother and grandmother who had taught him the scriptures from his childhood. His father was apparently not in the picture. Paul now became a father to him as we see in his letters to Timothy. Timothy had probably witnessed the stoning of Paul and his reviving in Lystra, Acts 14:8, a few years before and had been saved under Paul and Barnabas' ministry. He was ready to go with Paul despite, or because of, this traumatic experience. (Contrast Mark who had earlier turned back even before that stoning.)

Paul retraced his steps through Phrygia and Galatia then looked for new untouched regions to bring the Gospel. He looked westward then northward but the Holy Spirit did not allow him. He was daily dependant enough on the Spirit's leading to recognize when He was not leading in those directions, though clearly neither were wrong nor unwise moves to all appearances to his own discernment. We should always seek to walk in God's light and within His ways. When we ask for wisdom then we can make tentative plans accordingly when specific choices and decisions confront us. He may allow us to go ahead in the way we see as scriptural and wise. Or, seeing beyond our limited foresight and having purposes that transcend our limited thoughts, He may stop us in order to redirect us. If stymied we may become frustrated and be tempted to our own will. Or we can wait with a simple heart open to His leading. It will come by His own chosen means in His own good time. This time God conveyed His will to Paul, not through a whisper from the Holy Spirit, nor an applicable verse from scripture, nor a human messenger such as Ananias in Damascus, nor an appearance of an angel such as to Peter, nor of the Lord Himself as later to Paul in Corinth. But God spoke to Paul that time through a vision. A vision of a man from a foreign country not even in Paul's considerations until then, Macedonia in southeastern Europe. A man asking for help. What a thrill it must have been for Paul who was always looking to go beyond where other men had preached, Romans 15:17-21.

He acted immediately and went there as quickly and directly as possible. He went to Philippi, a major city and the Roman colonial capitol of that region. There he sought some that might have some leaning toward God.

This city was so pagan it lacked a local synagogue but they located a secluded prayer group of women by a riverside. They approached and sat down. Note the humility and the gentle approach of these gifted evangelists. No lording it over these simple souls. In speaking with them one was particularly touched by Paul's words and was baptized and her household. She then invited the men to abide in her home. Note how God delights to work salvation through our normal relationships, family, relatives, household servants, neighbors, fellow students, coworkers, local merchants, etc. Lydia's household was saved by hearing the same gospel she had received.

Later the jailer was saved through God's miraculous intervention—an earthquake. Though in vastly different circumstances, his family and household were saved by hearing the same gospel as Lydia and her household. (The use of Acts 16:31 by some to support the practice of so-called household baptism is clearly not justified in the light of Lydia's household receiving Christ. Verses 32-34 clearly state the gospel was presented to the jailer's family and household and they believed.) But note the prompt

baptism, only delayed by the newly saved ones’ tender care for their prisoners’ wounds. So the prisoners became house guests of the jailer. Just as they had before been Lydia’s house guests as free men. In any case, an open welcoming home and a meal together are a wonderful expression of fellowship—and also of gratitude in this case. What grace!

Luke’ gospel reports many such incidents where the Lord is a dinner guest. Though never with the Lord while He walked here Luke learned the blessing of being a welcome house guest while traveling with Paul. Yet many times Paul and his companions experienced much less pleasant circumstances, as noted in his epistles as well as Luke’s narrative in the Acts.

That next morning the city officials apparently thought better of their hasty and illegal treatment of Paul and Silas and sent officers to the jailor to authorize their release. But Paul took an action that might seem counter to the lowly walk of a believer in a hostile world. He confronts the unjust actions of the authorities in this Roman colony. They had punished him without a trial and more severely than permitted upon a Roman citizen. But Paul was not getting back at his tormentors or simply defending his own pride. He cleared his name with the Roman government so he could leave Philippi a Roman citizen in good standing with the Empire. This was important if he was to avoid continuing governmental interference as he continued his travels.

Note that it wasn’t Jews in this city that fomented the persecution, it was the pagans. But even this was only triggered by a serious financial loss to men whose business thrived on the superstitious, idolatrous worship of a false god. Their god was covetousness, greed. Their callous self enrichment at the expense of a poor demon possessed girl is remarkably cynical and inhumane. These “religious” dupes of Satan had no semblance of any legitimate ties to God as had the Jews. (We wonder if the girl once released from the power of Satan became a believer in the One she had repeatedly announced as the way of salvation. Why not?) But how wily the devil was in associating the Christ Paul preached with her supernatural, demonic powers. He still attempts that. The gospel needs none of that!

So they traveled on down the coast to Thessalonica,

clear of any and all charges by Rome. Meanwhile the newborn saints in Philippi were left in good hands in the midst of their terribly pagan hometown. The Holy Spirit in them could and would unite them, defend them and guide them into all truth regarding their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Assembly of which their local assembly was part. Paul would write to them years later to thank them for their faithful prayers and ministry they sent him while in he was in another prison—in Rome,

Philippians 4:14-19 *Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. 15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. 16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. 17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. 18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

And in that letter he would minister Christ to them in a special way to promote their unity and zeal for Him.

Philippians 2:1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

This was especially timely for them for in that same letter he had to rebuke two sisters publically by name, for their differences were threatening the unity of the whole assembly there.

Philippians 4:2,3 *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Both “big things” and “little things” will threaten the life and testimony of a local assembly. Take care to mind both.

By Ronald Canner, November 4, 2009