

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 13, Acts 16

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: Who is Really In Charge of Spreading the Kingdom?

Chapter 16 Step 3: God Expands the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth

Section 1: Acts 16:1-5 Speak So People Can Listen

16 And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Ico'nium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles

and elders who were at Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

There was a piece missing in this team. They needed an agent, a front man who makes all arrangements and looks after the incidental things like lodgings and life's necessities. Mark did this for Paul and Barnabas, but he bailed and forced the Apostles to do this for themselves. This must have taken a lot of their time away from preaching and teaching. Paul wants things to run smoother this time. He enlists Timothy, a young man whose mother is a Jew and a believer and whose father is a Greek. This means he is not circumcised (he would follow his father). There is irony here. Paul is proclaiming the letter from Jerusalem declaring that Greek Christians do not have to be circumcised to become Christians. And yet, Paul circumcises Timothy. Why? It was not for his salvation, as the Judaisers were proclaiming. It was to make the gospel easier to hear for the Jews. Having an uncircumcised man proclaiming Jesus to them would have been repellent. They would not have been able to concentrate and hear the message. So, in order to have the message heard, Timothy made this painful (very painful) sacrifice.

This is a great example to us. We must be ready to make necessary changes in order to help the gospel to be heard. "To the Jews, I become like a Jew to win the Jews." (1 Corinthians 9:20). We are not here for our own pleasure or purposes. God has left us in the world for three purposes: 1) To grow up in Christ. We are not ready for heaven. God wants us to become like His Son through a worshipful life and constant death to self and infilling of the Spirit. 2) To function with other Christians, our God-given gifts building the body of Christ. We are to be continuously pointing our brothers and sisters in Christ back to our glorious Father. 3) To share the good news about Jesus—His life, death, and resurrection. We are to invite others, all others, to share in this new life we have found in Christ.

Anything that would hamper this, we must remove. If you were a salesman and you discovered that your bad breath was costing you sales, you would buy mints. If you are sharing the gospel and you discover that anything about you is getting in the way, change it. We do not live for ourselves any more. We live for Christ.

Section 2: Acts 16:16-10 The Spirit Directs

⁶And they went through the region of Phry'gia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come opposite My'sia, they attempted to go into Bithyn'ia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by My'sia, they went down to Tro'as. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedo'nia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedo'nia and help us." ¹⁰And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedo'nia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Parents do this. They will watch their toddler trying to do something on their own. They will stand back and let them try a couple of times. When it is clear they are not going to get it on their own, or that they are going to hurt themselves in the attempt, a loving parent will step in and give direction. God was doing this with Paul. He was sitting back waiting to see if Paul would end up in Macedonia on his own. When it was clear that was not going to happen, God gave more clear direction.

A striking part of these Scriptures is the Holy Spirit repeatedly saying "No" to the disciples. Paul and his band continuously sought the

leading of the Spirit and were open to the Spirit redirecting them. We also must seek the leading of the Spirit in all things and be ready for the Spirit to say, "No."

There was a young man who fell in love with a beautiful Christian girl—the girl who had led him to Christ. Together they grew in their faith and their love for each other. After 2 years, the man decided that he did not want to live without this beautiful girl. He decided to ask this girl to marry him. He commissioned a ring to be made. During the week while the ring was being made, the Spirit of God spoke clearly to the man. He said, "No." The man argued with the Spirit, but the answer was always the same. At the end of the week, the man gave in to the leading of the Spirit and broke up with the girl. In the moment, it was very hard for both of them and they did not understand why. They both went on to find wonderful spouses and continued strong in their faith and their trust in God's wisdom for their lives.

One of the most important skills for any Christian to learn is how to hear the Spirit of God. This ability is strengthened through continuous worship and prayer. We need to believe that God wants to speak to us through His Spirit and put ourselves in a position where we can hear His voice.

"Sometimes I think of myself as a stone before the carver; he is about to make a statue. Presenting myself in this way before God, I want Him to form His perfect image in my soul, and make me entirely like Himself! At other times, when I apply myself to prayer, I feel my whole spirit and soul lift itself right up, with no effort on my part, and it stays there suspended and firmly fixed in God as its center and place of rest."¹

¹ *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, pg. 53

Section 3: Acts 16:11-15 The Lord Opens Hearts

¹¹ Setting sail therefore from Tro'as, we made a direct voyage to Sam'othrace, and the following day to Ne-ap'olis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedo'nia, 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 Thyati'ra, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

There are several important things here:

1. It was the Sabbath. Paul and Silas were in the city several days, but they went out to share Jesus on the Sabbath. They were going to Jews, to those who knew something of God and were seeking to know Him better.
2. They went to a place of prayer. Paul and his group are seeking out people who want to connect with God personally, who want to know Him and relate to Him.

3. Lydia was a worshipper. Lydia was ready to know more about God. She already had a right perspective of her place relative to God's place.
4. The Lord opened her heart. Jesus gave her ears to hear. Before we share the gospel we need to ask Jesus to open hearts and make them able to hear. Jesus is the Lord of evangelism and it doesn't happen without Him.
5. Paul was speaking. Paul did not expect Lydia to come to Christ in a vacuum. She had to hear the word of salvation. She had to understand what God had done for her in Christ.
6. Lydia was baptized. She identified with Christ and died to her old life in order to be born anew.
7. Her household (oikos) was baptized with her. Lydia had great influence over her family. In Roman times the household was the same religion as the leader of the house. When Lydia accepted Jesus, they all did. When we receive the unspeakable gift of salvation and eternal life, we need to share this with all those in our oikos. We lose nothing in sharing and they gain everything.

Section 4: Acts 16:16-40 The Persecution Comes, as Expected

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I

charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; ²⁰ and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city.²¹ They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice." ²² The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and

Silas, ³⁰ and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore come out and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; ³⁹ so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.

What a dramatic experience. Walking in the Spirit, being God's warrior, is never dull.

This all starts over an unclean spirit. Christians ought to be the most aware that there are evil unseen things in this world. There are demons and spirits, principalities and powers, and Satan himself. It is not more enlightened to think that the world is only material and that the only realities are the things experienced by the senses. To ignore the unseen is to be a fool.

Evil spirits have powers. This one gave the power of divination, telling people's futures—fortune telling. The spirit speaking through this woman must have been very accurate, because it made this woman's masters a lot of money.

The spirit was taunting the missionaries. We can imagine the woman's tone—snotty, belittling, coarse. She was not encouraging people to listen to Paul, she was making fun of him. Paul commands the spirit, by the name of Jesus (not Paul's name) to come out of the woman. There is no name, or authority, greater than Jesus. The spirit has to obey. Paul, Silas, and Timothy end up being beaten and thrown into jail, their feet in stocks.

These men of God do not despair. They are not moaning like the other prisoners or making excuses or saying they were framed. They do what they would have done if they were free—they worship and pray. The focal point of their lives is not affected by circumstances. Nothing would keep them from worship and prayer. When things are great in our lives, we need to worship and pray continuously. When things are desperate in our lives we need to worship and pray continuously. This must be the constant in our life that is not affected by circumstances.

Consider Job. He lost everything that was dear to his heart, but he said of God, "Even though He slay me, I will still praise Him."

How did these shackles fall off and the jail cell doors open? They were not the result of the earthquake. Earthquakes do not open shackles. God was present. He was there to free all from the bondage they had to sin. We see many instances like this in the Scriptures. Daniel was saved from the lions, Shadrack, Mishak, and Aben-nego were saved from the fire. The physical limitations of this world are not limitations to God. He can break the laws of nature any time He chooses.

So why was Paul in prison? They were there that the jailer and his family would come to faith. This shows us that sometimes the most difficult things we suffer, even unjustly, is really not about us. God was reaching for the jailer. He needed a witness in the jail to share the gospel. When we suffer difficulties, we can either be squashed by them and moan and groan under their weight, or we can praise God and worship and pray knowing that everything that happens in our lives is part of His glorious plan. Now that is living a meaningful life.

What have we learned?

God is God. This is so easy to say, but so hard to live. We are to live moment by moment before God, allowing Him to be Lord of our lives. We need to follow the leading of the Spirit, even when He says no. We can expect God to use us to bring people into His Kingdom. We can also expect resistance when people who gain from the evil in the world see their empires crumbling. Gang lords, pornographers, drug pushers, pimps, alcohol vendors, casinos, and

politicians are not going to stand by idly and watch a revival take away their lucrative enterprises. They are going to fight back; they always have. But they are not in charge—God is. When they fight back, we pray and worship and trust that God is using everything that happens to us to further the purposes of His Kingdom.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 16:1-5

Timothy was eager to share in the ministry of the Gospel, so eager that he was willing to make painful sacrifices. The irony is that Paul was delivering the letter that Gentiles did not have to become Jews through circumcision to become Christians, but he circumcised Timothy so that the Jews would not be offended and not willing to listen to the gospel.

Section 2 Acts 16:6-10

God leads those who seek His direction. The Spirit was in charge of this enterprise. He said no when the missionaries were going the wrong way and provided a vision to get them back on track. Notice, they weren't completely sure all the time, but assumed they were being directed by God.

Section 3 Acts 16:11-15

The example of Lydia coming to Christ has many things to teach us about evangelism. We are to seek out those who are seeking God already. We are to pray for the Lord to open their hearts while we explain what God has done for them in Christ.

Section 4 Acts 16:16-40

We must expect opposition. Those with a vested interest in the lucrative opportunities for worldly gain in the satanic world system are not going to stand by passively and watch the Kingdom of God come and take over. They will fight to keep their gain.

Connecting to the Scripture

The Christian is the only one who really knows why he is here. People in the world come up with all kinds of ways to define their existence and give them meaning. Their lives are about pleasure, or accumulating wealth, or influence, or being successful. Some have as many friends as possible or try to save the environment. Some champion causes and make this the purpose of their lives.

The One who made everything knows what everything is for. What is God's purpose? His wants to be in continuous relationship with us. God wants face time with us. He wants us to live before Him, moment by moment, doing all for His pleasure.

When we do this, God will call us, direct us, and empower us. He will make our appointments. When He wants us to do something, He will get us in the right place at the right time. We don't have to worry about it. God will do it. We are never out of His will when we are walking in intimacy with Him.

Once we know what God wants us to do, we will start to do the work. If we go in the wrong direction, but are listening to the Spirit, He will shut some doors and open others. God will get us where He wants us.

Lastly, God will give us the resources we need to get the job done. He will provide the money, time, and facilities. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. If He is the boss, we have nothing to worry about. When more than natural resources are needed, He will provide these also. He will heal, perform miracles, and open shackles. We can always trust God to back up His act.

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Read Acts 16:1-5

1. What characteristics did Timothy have for ministry? What characteristics are important today?
2. If Paul is carrying a letter from the Jerusalem leaders saying that people do not have to be circumcised to be Christians, why is Timothy circumcised? What does this say about our communication of the gospel?

Section 2 Read Acts 16:6-10

1. What does this section tell you about the decision making process for believers?
2. Is there a time you were told what to do by the Spirit?
3. How do we develop the ability to hear from the Spirit?

Section 3 Read Acts 16:11-15

1. What can we learn about sharing our faith from the example of what happened to Lydia?

Section 4 Read Acts 16:16-40

1. Why wasn't Paul happy that this woman was bringing attention to them?
2. Why weren't the people happy that the woman was finally free from the spirit?
3. What power do Christians have over evil spirits?
4. What does what happened in the jail tell you about the ability for the world to hold Christians and their message?