

(Through the Bible) Acts 16

by Chuck Smith

Paul's ministry is directed by the Holy Spirit, and he must be adaptable and obedient to God's call in order to be effective in his ministry.

Duration: 50:45

Scripture: Acts 16:1-3, Acts 16:5-12, Acts 16:16-18, Galatians 3:1

Topics: "Persevering Faith", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Paul and Silas being thrown into prison for preaching the word of God. Despite their difficult circumstances, they choose to praise and pray to God. Suddenly, there is a great earthquake that shakes the prison and opens all the doors. The prison keeper, fearing the consequences, is about to kill himself but is stopped by Paul. The speaker also highlights the importance of staying true to the teachings of the Bible and not relying on man-made programs or gimmicks in the church.

Transcript

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to the 16th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. We remember at the end of our study last week, there arose a contention between Paul and Barnabas, who had been close companions on the first missionary venture of the church. But because Barnabas was insisting on taking his nephew, John Mark, who deserted Paul and Barnabas on the first trip, Barnabas was wanting to take him on the second trip, and Paul was objecting because of his defection on the first trip.

They had a dispute over this contention so great that Barnabas took Mark and headed off for Cyprus, and so Paul took Silas and they headed for Asia Minor. So, in chapter 16, then he, Paul and Silas, came to Derbe and Lystra. Derbe was one of the few places where Paul had a very peaceful, uneventful kind of a ministry.

It didn't end with a riot or with Paul getting jailed or stoned or anything. He was able to lead town fairly peacefully, which was unusual for his ministry. But then they came to Lystra, where Paul was stoned and thought to be dead and drug out of town, thinking that he was dead.

And behold, there was a certain disciple there named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, who was a believer, and his father was a Greek. Now, this second coming of Paul to Lystra was probably some five years after his first visit when he was stoned. Coming back to that place where he had

planted a church five years later, it was no doubt extremely encouraging to Paul to see that there was a church continuing in that area.

They were going on in the Lord. Jesus said to His disciples, you have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should be My disciples and that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain. And a very important part to any ministry is the remaining fruit.

It's not really how many people you can get excited and make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Five years later, how many people are still going on with the Lord? That's what really counts. And coming to Lystra, they found this certain disciple, Timothy, who probably had accepted the Lord five years earlier under Paul's ministry there in his first journey.

But now, of course, in the five years he's grown up, he's matured, and here he is, a faithful disciple. His mother a Jewess, his father a Greek. And he received good reports about Timothy from the brethren that were there in Lystra and Iconium.

He came highly recommended. And Paul wanted Timothy to join them. Now, earlier Paul had had Mark on the journey.

It was handy to have these young men with a lot of energy and enthusiasm going along. And also, I believe there was that desire to disciple Timothy. I think that discipleship is a very important part of the ministry.

When God has blessed and used a person in the ministry, I think that they, if they are wise, will always be looking towards the next generation. I have a very keen interest in young people. In young people who have those God-given abilities, anointings upon their lives.

I like to invest time with them, because they are going to be carrying on when we're carried off. And I'm concerned that the work of God go on. And so, Paul no doubt had asked Timothy to go thinking of the fact that he wasn't going to be there forever, and the training of these young men to carry on the work once they are gone.

So, Timothy became a companion of Paul. In six of Paul's epistles, as he opens the epistle, he includes Timothy in the greetings. Paul writes two epistles to Timothy.

Paul speaks of the help that Timothy was to him. He asked that they would send Timothy to him speedily, bringing some of the documents and all that he was desiring. And so there came a very close relationship between Paul and Timothy, who Paul called, my own son in the faith.

So, Timothy was one of Paul's converts, but then he was also tutored by the Apostle Paul. So, Paul would have him to go forth with them, and they took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep that were ordained of the apostles and the elders which were at Jerusalem.

Now, what were these decrees from the apostles in Jerusalem? That you as a Gentile don't need to be circumcised to be saved. And so it is interesting that Paul had circumcised, or had Timothy circumcised, when they are then going right out and telling the Gentiles you don't have to be circumcised in order to be saved. This was the decision of the church in Jerusalem.

Then why is it that we have a paradox? Why would then Paul see that Timothy was circumcised? I am certain that it was just that beautiful adaptability of Paul, not wanting to create a greater havoc than already existed among the Jews, who knew that Timothy's father was a Greek. And so rather than just having a hassle with him, it was go ahead and do it. What difference does it make? You know, it doesn't matter.

Go ahead. And for the sake of these contentious brethren, go ahead and be circumcised. It was as Paul wrote later, I have learned to become all things to all men that I might gain them more.

To the Jew I became as a Jew. To those that are free from the law, I became as one who is free from the law. All things to all men.

And I think that this is just a part of Paul's philosophy. And I think that it is a good philosophy. As he wrote to the Romans, live peaceably with all men as much as lieth in you.

As far as is possible on your part, live at peace with all men. And if some issue comes up and it, you know, is no big deal to you, go along with it. Instead of, you know, making a issue and creating a big scene over it, just be cool and flow with it, you know.

And this was Paul's philosophy, just to get along as best as possible. Now, when it came to a thing of conscience or faith, then you stand your ground. Now, when the church in Jerusalem was trying to throw the law upon the Gentiles, Paul stood his ground.

When Peter there in the church of Antioch, who was eating with the Gentiles until certain brothers came down from Jerusalem, and then Peter separated himself and wouldn't eat with the Gentiles. And it caused a division there in Antioch. Paul said, I withstood him to the face because he was at fault, creating this division by his separating himself from the Gentiles as though there were in Christ some division between Jew and Gentile.

So on a matter of principle, a matter of conviction, stand your ground. But where, you know, there's no big deal, flow with it, go for it, you know. And just to keep peace among the brethren.

I think that that was no doubt Paul's philosophy behind the circumcision of Timothy. When they are carrying the very message from the church in Jerusalem, you don't have to be circumcised if you're a Gentile and keep the law in order to be saved. So just because they knew that he was a, his father was a Greek, Paul had him take the right of circumcision just to keep peace.

So they went through the cities delivering the decrees from the church in Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith and they increased in number daily. The early church was a powerful church.

It was a successful church. And as we will soon see, it was a church that was under the direct governing power of the Holy Spirit. He was guiding the activities of the early church.

And I believe that that was the reason for success. It was a tragic day when in the church, man decided to substitute the work of the Holy Spirit with his own work. Paul wrote to the Galatians later, Oh foolish Galatians who have bewitched you that you would so soon turn from the truth.

Having begun in the spirit, will you now be made perfect in the flesh? And I'm sure if Paul were writing to the general church today, the old church, he would write an epistle to the church of Jesus Christ of the 20th century. Oh foolish people who have bewitched you that you should turn from the truth. Having begun the church, having begun in the spirit, do you think that you can perfect it, complete it in the flesh? And yet when we look at the church today and we see all of the man-made programs, all of the fleshly hype, I'm hyped to death when I turn on television or when I listen to the radio or some, thank you brother, whoever you were, put me on the mailing list of some of these high-powered evangelists who have more gimmicks than I can believe to get me to send them an offering.

I can't, you just can't believe. Well, I don't want to get into that. Now these churches without the programs, the pressures, and without all of these modern conveniences and assists that we have today, were increasing daily just as the result of the word of God being taught and the fellowship of the body growing.

There was, their numbers increased daily. Now when they had gone throughout Perga and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. And after they were come to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them.

And so they passed by Mysia and came down to Troas. Now Paul is trying to move north into Asia, but every attempt he makes is being blocked by the Spirit. Now it is interesting that it tells us that the Spirit forbid them to go and preach the word in Asia.

The Spirit would not allow them to go to Bithynia. How is it that the Spirit forbid them? By what process? It is interesting they do not tell us by what process. Was there a word of prophecy that came? Surely Paul would have had to have been assured that the prophecy was from the Lord because he was a strong-willed person.

How did the Spirit forbid them? We really don't know. Many believe that the Spirit forbid them through Paul's sickness. That Paul was just too sick to travel.

Now you remember when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, you remember how that when I was with you, notice they were passing through Galatia here, how I ministered to you out of great weakness, physical infirmity, and you showed such great love and concern for me because of my physical infirmities. I think that that does give us a very strong hint of the method of the Lord in stopping Paul. It is interesting, as I said, he was a very stubborn kind of a person.

I mean, he was one that was hard to stop. When he wanted to do something, he was going to do it no matter what. When he was determined to go back to Jerusalem, there was no stopping him.

His friends, when the prophecy came and said, you know, you're going to be in prison when you get to Jerusalem, and his friends began to weep and say, oh, Paul, don't go. They're going to throw you in jail. He said, hey, what do you mean by these tears? You're trying to dissuade me.

Don't you realize that I'm not afraid of being thrown in jail? I'm ready to die for Jesus in Jerusalem. So you just don't stop those fellows with a tap on the shoulder and say, I don't think you ought to go there. Paul's an unstoppable kind of a fellow.

And this is a good characteristic in one sense. Surely he would not have been able to endure all of the hardships of his missionary ventures had he not had this strong, powerful spirit. Yet our strong points can also sometimes be our weak points.

And if this strong point is not totally yielded to God, then it can become a weak point in my life. And it means that when God wants to direct me, he has to get pretty tough. And it is possible that Paul was so determined to go to Asia that God had to put him on his back and make him so sick he couldn't get out of bed.

And after several days in bed, not able hardly to roll over, he said, well, the spirit forbid us to go to Asia. And so then we attempted to go to Bithynia, but the spirit would not allow us. And so we went on to Troy.

So there at Troyes, Paul had a vision. And there appeared to Paul in the night, a man of Macedonia. And he prayed to him saying, come over into Macedonia and help us.

So Paul in a night vision saw this man from Macedonia crying for help. And after he had seen the vision immediately, we endeavored to go to Macedonia. Now notice here we have a plural pronoun.

We, you remember that Luke is the author of the book of Acts. This is the first time the personal pronoun is used. So it is no doubt here at Troyes where Luke met Paul.

And it is very possible that the reason why Luke met Paul is because Luke was a physician and Paul was so sick. He was about to die. That's one possibility.

There are others who believe that Luke was the man that Paul saw in his vision crying, come over to Macedonia and help us. Whatever the case may be. Now Luke turns to the personal plural pronouns because at this point Luke became a companion with Paul.

Notice it in the rest of the verse. And after he had seen the vision immediately, we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them. So the we and the us as Luke joins Paul's party at this point.

God directing Paul's ministry by a vision is one of the ways by which God can direct people into their various ministries. I do know of a man, Dr. Edwards, who was the president of a bank in San Jose, who committed his life to Jesus Christ and who really felt called of God to serve the Lord. And thus he began to take courses and study, though he was a bank president, to leave the bank, to retire from the banking business and to go full time into the ministry.

And as he was preparing himself and waiting upon God, he received one night a vision of this old gray haired man standing behind a plow with a field that was only partly plowed. And this old man called to him and said, come to Panama and help me harvest the souls that are here. And so he took that as a call of God, studied the Spanish language and then went down to Panama to carry the gospel to the Panamanians.

He established a very successful work in Panama City. And one evening he received a call from one of the doctors at the hospital there in Panama. And he said, we have an old man who doesn't seem to have any friends or family and he's dying.

And we thought it might be well if there were a minister here to just talk to him. He seems to be delirious. And so Dr. Edwards went to the hospital and when the nurse led him to the room, to his amazement, the old man was the man he saw in his vision.

And he became very curious about this old man. And so he began to inquire and they found out that he was a Cumberland Presbyterian missionary. They really didn't know much of what was accomplished through his work there.

But Dr. Edwards was so amazed that here is the very same man he saw in his vision in San Jose when he felt the call of God to go to Panama. And he felt really that he was completing the harvest that this man had begun, who had established just a few mission stations out in the bush of Panama. So God is not limited by his means.

I have never had a vision, nor was I directed by an angel or vision or whatever to go into the ministry. God's call upon my heart was different. I just felt a strong urge to go into the ministry.

God just placed a deep desire in my heart to commit my life to him. And so I always thought it would have been exciting had the Lord sent some angel along or had given me some vision. And there had been some dramatic experience of which I could testify to you tonight of how God came to me in the night hours.

And suddenly the room began to glow with a strange incandescence, you know, and all of this. And I heard this voice say, Chuck, you know, I want you, you know. But nothing like that happened to me.

It was interesting when I was in Bible college, I met several young people who did testify of these kind of experiences. And I was always extremely fascinated by their testimonies. However, just as a point of interest, all of those fellows who had these remarkable testimonies, I don't know of any of them who are still in the ministry today.

I think that emotions are great. To have a strong emotional experience in your relationship with God is wonderful. I have had some pretty powerful emotional experiences in my worship of God.

But yet it is more important even than a powerful emotional experience is to found my life upon the word and my faith upon the word. Our faith has to be established in fact. God's word is the fact upon which my faith is established.

And that way my faith never wavers because God's word never changes. Now, if I am founding my faith in some experience that I have had, then I'm in dangerous water because I may get another contrary experience or the experience can fade. Emotions can wane.

But the word of God remains and thus my faith must be established in God's word. And my ministry must be established according to the word of God, not according to some exciting, remarkable, you know, fiery letters in the sky that I saw at one time when I was watching a sunset. So Paul was directed by this vision.

He sought immediately to answer it. Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came in a straight course to Symmetracea and the next day to Neapolis. The winds were with them and they headed straight across from Troas to Neapolis, which was the port city of Philippi.

It took them only two days. They had good winds. They were carrying them the direction they wanted to go.

Later, Paul made the same crossing. It took five days. But God is guiding him now to Macedonia.

He endeavors to obey the call of God. The winds are with him and he comes right across to Macedonia. Sometimes as we're serving the Lord, the winds are with us.

Things go smooth. We're cooking right along. Other times, hey, it's a heavy push all the way.

You know, it seems like you're rolling all the way. The wind is against you. But it doesn't mean that I'm out of the will of God because it is difficult now.

And I cannot really just say, well, God, which direction you want me to go, you know, and try to determine which way is the wind blowing and then head that direction. Now, from Neapolis, they went to Philippi, which, of course, was a Roman colony. Philippi was an important city in history.

This is where Brutus was defeated by that consort of Cleopatra, Mark Anthony, in that critical battle there at Philippi. And so they were in that city abiding certain days. So they're now in a whole new environment.

People are, they're into Greece, they're into Europe. It's different from the Asian culture. And they're just there for several days doing, reading nothing.

But on the Sabbath day, we went out of the city by a riverside where prayer was want to be made. And we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither. Now, the fact that there was no synagogue in Philippi indicates that there were not 10 adult Jewish males in the town.

Whenever in any city there were 10 adult Jewish males, they would have a synagogue. In the towns where they had less than that number of adult Jewish males, not enough to have a synagogue, then they usually would meet by a river for prayer and they would go through the Sabbath prayers by a river. And so Paul found out where they were meeting and he went down and evidently there weren't any Jewish men believers, just women that were there.

And so Paul sat down and he spoke to the women which had gathered there by the river to pray. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, who was from Thyatira, she was actually from Asia, which worshiped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized and her household, she begged us saying, if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide.

And she constrained us. Now, notice, she was a seller of purple and I might say she no doubt was a very successful businesswoman. Notice the way she puts the pressure on Paul and the party.

Now, if you have counted me worthy, then come and stay at my house. Well, you know, if you don't stay, then you're saying, no, woman, you're not worthy, you know. And so she puts it in such a way.

She no doubt was a very good salesperson. She was surely able to put the pressure on Paul and the party. If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, then come and stay at my house.

And she constrained us. And so it came to pass as we went to prayer, a certain damsel who was possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her master's much gain by her sooth saying. And the same followed Paul and us and cried saying, these men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

And she did this for many days. But Paul, being grieved, turn and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

And when her masters saw that the hope of their prophets were gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace under the rulers. And they brought them to the magistrate saying, these men are Jews and they are exceedingly troubling our city. And they are teaching customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe being Romans.

And the multitude rose up together against them and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded that they be beaten. And when they had laid many strikes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. So, opposition arises in this time from a little different reason.

There was this girl possessed by a spirit by which she could tell fortunes. There were men who controlled her. They made a lot of money off of her fortune-telling ability.

In those days, people had a strange respect for the insane. They believed that the gods had taken their minds from them and replaced them many times with the minds of the gods. And so, the people had sort of a strange reverence towards the insane.

This young lady, possessed by this spirit, able to tell fortunes, able to divine things, was declaring the truth about Paul and his company. She said, these men are servants of the Most High God and they show unto us the way of salvation. Now, she's really advertising for them.

What she is saying is true. But Paul doesn't want Satan running his advertising campaign. Again, I think that there is a danger of the church seeking to emulate the world in its advertising campaigns, doing it the way of the world, following the worldly patterns.

It is indicative of the church today in many quarters to hire professionals to come in for church growth programs. And there are professionals who will come in and they get a percentage. For as many members as they can add to the church, they get so much for each member they can add to your church.

There are those professional fundraisers who will come into the church and they will raise the church budget for you by going around contacting all of the people and putting the pressure on them for their pledges to give this, you know, so much to the church this year. And then you set it all up on a computer program. And if you don't get your pledge in this month, you start getting letters, you know, we missed your pledge.

The church is depending upon your promise to give so much. And our whole spending is, you know, predicated upon that. And you have missed and, you know, and you start getting all this kind of.

And it's really following the worldly patterns. Paul wanted nothing to do with advertisement from this quarter. So he commanded the spirit to come out of her.

He was grieved over this experience. It was a hard thing. And so when those men who were profiting off of her abilities saw that she was healed, they were upset.

Isn't that terrible that men would be so mercenary? That they would be upset because this young girl was set free? From this tragic experience that she had? Being possessed by an evil spirit. At any rate, Paul's in jail, thrown into the dungeon, the inner prison. His feet are fast in the stocks.

And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God. And the prisoners were listening to them. I imagine that they weren't too happy with them singing at midnight.

And they probably wondered, what kind of nuts have they thrown in here? But yet, what a witness to these men. They had been beaten. They had laid many stripes upon them.

Doesn't say anything about them washing their backs, washing the blood and all off. But just thrown into this filth infested dungeon, tied to the stocks. And rather than just, you know, here you are.

You're, oh my, so far from home. You're in a different culture. You're in a different territory.

You don't know what your future is. It's midnight and usually that's the darkest hour of the day, you know. And here they are praising the Lord, singing together, praises unto God and praying.

And suddenly, there was a great earthquake. So that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately, all of the doors were opened.

And everyone's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, when he awoke out of his sleep. When he saw the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and was going to kill himself.

Because if the prisoners escaped, he was held responsible for them. And would have been put to death. And he had supposed that all of the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul cried with a loud voice saying, do thyself no harm. We are all here. And so he called for a light and he sprang in and came trembling.

And he fell down before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved? You know, I believe that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to be put in jail just to reach this man. And when you get to heaven and you say, don't you think that that's fair, Paul? That God allowed you to get beat like that and thrown in prison just so that jailor could get saved.

You think God's fair doing that to you? I think as Paul will point out, there he is over there and there's his family. Not only was he saved, but his whole family said, hey, you bet. I'd gladly do it.

In order that I might have him as my eternal brother here in God's kingdom. And I really believe that God was just reaching this Philippian jailer. And that was the reason why he allowed Paul to be in prison.

What must I do to be saved? Paul said, join the church, pay your tithes, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. You mean that's all? That's all. Believing in Jesus Christ.

God has made it so simple. There's no excuse for anyone not being saved. Paul added, and thy house.

Now, there are some people who take this as a promise of the scripture, claiming their salvation's family because Paul added, and thy house. I do not believe that this is solid enough scriptural base to establish a doctrine. I believe that Paul could have been speaking here a word of prophecy.

There are indications that even Paul's own house was not saved. I do believe that we are to pray and to believe God for the salvation of our families. And I strongly encourage each of you to continue to pray for those, your loved ones, your kin who are not yet saved and to believe and trust God for their salvation.

But I do not believe that you can use this as a scriptural base to claim their salvation as some do. Because it said, and they spake unto him the word of the Lord and to all that were in his house. So they witnessed not only to him, but to his family.

And he took them the same hour of the night. And he, that is the jailer took them and he washed their stripes and he was baptized. He and all of his.

So his whole family was baptized. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them and rejoiced believing in God with all of his house. So there was salvation of all of his house, but they all believed and all were baptized.

Now, when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants saying, let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this to Paul. He said, the magistrates have sent to let you go, therefore depart and go in peace.

And here is Paul's stubbornness coming out now. Oh, I, I, I really, um, more than excuse Paul. I say, all right, go for it.

Paul is, he's doing what I would have no doubt done under the same circumstances. Paul said unto them, they have beaten us openly, uncondemned being Romans and they have cast us into prison. And now do they think they're going to just let us go privately? No way.

Let them come down themselves and fetch us out. So the sergeants told these words to the magistrates, to the judges, and they feared when they heard that they were Roman citizens, the actions that they were, that were taken against Paul were thoroughly unlawful to take against a Roman citizen. Now this was a Roman colony.

They prided themselves in being a Roman colony following Roman justice. But my, if word gets back to Rome that they have beaten and thrown in prison a Roman citizen without any charges against them, they could be immediately dismissed from their positions of authority. So they were really afraid and Paul had them where he wanted them, let them stew.

And so they came and begged them and brought them out and desired that they would depart out of the city. Hey, fellas, do you mind just leaving town? And so they went out of the prison and entered into the house of Lydia. And when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them and departed.

Now a good, strong church was established in Philippi. And later, as Paul is in prison in Rome, he writes to the church in Philippi and having dealt here with the beginning of the church in Philippi as extra credit this week, read the epistle to the Philippians. And these are the people that grew out of this work that Paul established in Philippi.

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